June 3rd: Saint Charles Lwanga and Companions, martyrs

Gospel text (*Mt* 5,1-12a): When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying: «(...) Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven».

St. Charles Lwanga and companions, martyrs (XIXth century)

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Today we celebrate the memory of the martyrs of Uganda: St. Charles Lwanga and his followers, who were killed between 1885 and 1887 by King Mwanga cruelty and his loathing of the faith professed for Jesus and because they refused to accede to the king's sexual advances. Twenty-two Catholics died: the youngest one, St. Kizito, twelve-year-old. There were also a score of Anglicans. It was a very Ecumenical martyrdom. While they were imprisoned, St. Charles Lwanga urged them to be faithful, by fortifying them with their faith and love for Jesus. The first to die, Joseph Balikuddembe, said to his executioner: "Tell the King, that we die unfairly, but we forgive him; and tell him to repent too".

—The Pope has frequently insisted that the Church needs more testimonies rather than teachers. Insofar as we may give testimony of Jesus, we are "martyrs" too, not by spilling our blood but with our courage to risk our life for our faith in Him.