

Marie-Claire

The oldest of the visionaries was also the bossiest. Marie-Claire was elected student body president year after year because of her impressive self-confidence, and she made it her personal campaign to expose Alphonsine's behavior as a sham. No one was more shocked than Marie-Claire when, on March 1, she herself fainted in the garden. She woke up in pitch darkness, suffocating from the stench of human waste and decaying flesh. Running blindly, she found a door that led to light and fresh air. Her classmates found her semiconscious on the chapel floor, but Marie-Claire blamed it all on "Alphonsine's voodoo." The next day, however, she had a second vision, and this time Our Lady's sweetness won her. Word spread all through Rwanda that the most vocal skeptic was now a believer.

Watering the Flowers

Family bonds are strong in Africa, and mothers are particularly revered. In Rwanda, Our Lady spoke with a special maternal tenderness, usually saying "my child" in the sweetest voice. She appeared often in a field of flowers, asking the visionaries to "water the flowers," which they would literally do after the apparitions by sprinkling holy water upon the crowds. The more pilgrims came to Kibeho, the more flowers the schoolgirls saw in their visions.

Repent, Repent, Repent

"The world hastens to its ruin," Our Lady said. "It will fall into the abyss." She said that unbelief will come "unseen;" that is, people will lose their faith without realizing it. "Repent, Repent, Repent" she urged.

Rivers of Blood

20,000 people gathered in Kibeho for the Solemnity of Our Lady's Assumption on August 15, 1982. In true African style, the fields looked like a massive church picnic, with singing, dancing, and brightly-colored clothing. But on that day, when Alphonsine began singing for Our Lady, she appeared very sad. "I am too sad to hear my children sing" she said, and began to weep openly. "Mother," Alphonsine cried out, "I have never seen you cry before. I am terrified." Our Lady told her to repeat three times, "I opened the door but they refused to come in." Then Alphonsine saw a series of horrifying scenes: rivers of blood, people hacking each other to pieces, a vast valley of a million rotting, headless corpses. The trees were exploding in flames and the entire country was on fire. Twelve years later this vision became reality when up to one million died in the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, their headless corpses filling the rivers.

The Seven Sorrows Rosary

Marie-Claire was one of those hacked to death, but not before she promoted the daily rosary, and the Seven Sorrows Rosary. "If you don't take refuge in God," Mary had told her, "where will you go when the fire comes?" Kibeho itself was destroyed, with 25,000 pilgrims murdered. But the shrine has been rebuilt, and pilgrims again come to pray. The Church approved the apparitions in 2001.

Recommended reading

The Marian Fathers care for the Shrine at Kibeho (the "Cana Center"), and their website (www.kibeho-cana.org) contains some good documentation. Immaculee Ilibagiza, survivor of the Rwandan Genocide (*Left to Tell*) has written the very readable *Our Lady of Kibeho*.

Our Lady of Kibeho Historical Facts and Essential Messages of Our Lady in 1981-1983



Welcome to Our Lady's Shrine here in San Francisco. In this pamphlet, prepared by our pastor, Fr. Joseph Illo, you will learn the basic facts and message of this apparition. You are encouraged to spend some time in quiet prayer and perhaps go to confession. Please keep a reverent silence in the Church, especially when the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.

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What: Many appearances of Our Lady

Where: Kibeho, Rwanda

When: From Nov. 1981– Nov. 1989

To Whom: Alphonsine Mumureke (age 16), Anathalie Mukamazimpaka (age 17), and Marie Claire Mukangango (age 21)

Kibeho is a small village in southwestern Rwanda, a country that is 98% Christian. The nation had been suffering violence from power struggles between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups since the 18th Century. This led to a civil war in 1990, which erupted into the Rwandan Genocide in 1994. Over three months, the Hutu majority killed up to one million Tutsis, along with some Hutus and other ethnic groups. Twelve years before, Our Lady had begged the three young visionaries to urge the people to repentance: “The world is rebellious against God, it commits too many sins, it has neither love nor peace.... If you do not repent and do not convert your hearts, you will fall into the abyss.”

Three Schoolgirls

Alphonsine Mumureke was 16 years old in November 1981, having just entered Kibeho High School the month before. Every village girl in Rwanda is poor, but Alphonsine was poorer than most because she came from a broken home, almost unheard of in Rwanda at the time—her father had left her mother before Alphonsine was even born. **Anathalie** Mukamazimpaka was 17 years old and “the most pious girl in school.” Her large and loving family was devoutly Catholic: she belonged to the Legion of Mary and other youth groups, read the Bible every day, never missed a Mass, and prayed two rosaries a day.



Marie Claire Mukangango, 21 years old, was Catholic but not very religious. A born leader but brash, self-confident, and pugnacious, she was Alphonsine’s greatest tormentor until Our Lady began appearing to Marie-Claire herself.

November 28, 1981

It was a Saturday, and Alphonsine was serving in the school’s cafeteria, when she heard a sweet voice calling her from the hallway: “my child.” A luminously white cloud materialized in front of her, and from the cloud emerged a woman in a seamless white dress and veil. Her feet never touched the ground. “My child, I am the Mother of the Word” (*Nyina wa Jambbo*) she said. Alphonsine answered that she loved “God and his Mother, who has given us their Son, who has saved us.” Our Lady confirmed, “It is true. I have heard your prayers. I would like it if your companions had more faith, because some of them do not believe enough.” Alphonsine said “her skin shines like polished ivory, but not white like we see in pictures, not black nor white, but more beautiful than anyone or anything on the planet.” She usually held her hands in front of her heart, pointed upward, but sometimes opened her arms and hands to point to the earth. Her

head was tilted a bit, looking down, as if tenderly at her children, with a rosary around her hands. The Virgin Mother continued to appear to Alphonsine over several months, usually on Saturdays, in full view of her schoolmates. “When I see her, I don’t see anything else, and there’s just the beautiful lady and the shimmering light.” After the apparition, Alphonsine would fall to the ground unconscious, taking several hours to recover. The school directors and her classmates accused her of acting for attention, and Alphonsine endured many months of mockery and even persecution. Once Marie-Claire even held a burning candle under her arm, but Alphonsine did not feel it nor did it burn her.

Anathalie

The second visionary, Anathalie, had her first apparition in the chapel after dinner. Our Lady wore a white dress and blue mantle, floating above a field of brightly-colored flowers. “My child,” she said, “I am sad because no one will listen to me. You must pray because the world is in a horrible way; People have turned from God and the love of my son, Je-

sus.” Mary told Anathalie that she would have to suffer as God’s messenger. “No one goes to heaven without suffering, my child.”



Original icon written by Aleksandra, from Poland, courtesy of her page on etsy.com