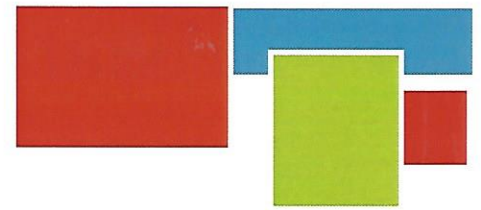
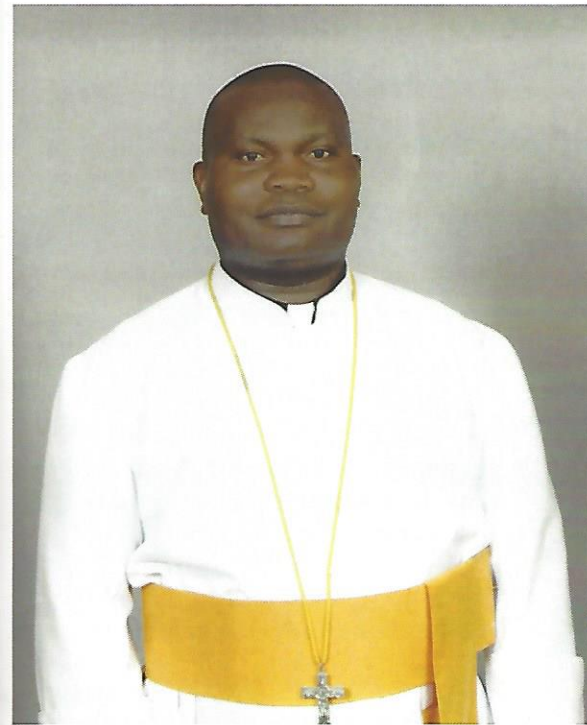


Swahili Mass

AND WHY IT IS NEEDED



By Rev. Deogratias Ssamba, A.J.
Associate Pastor, Christ the King, Good Shephard,
Immaculate Heart of Mary, St. Augustine, and
St. Martin de Porres Parishes



Swahili is the most widely spoken language of Eastern Africa and many world institutions have responded to its diaspora. It is one of the languages that is featured on world radio stations such as, the BBC, Radio Cairo (Egypt), and the Voice of America (U.S.A). The Swahili language is also making its presence known in the art world – in songs like: jambo bwana, Kenya yetu, hakuna matata, Nakupenda pia, Nakutaka Mpezi we. There are also several Swahili words adopted into English, for example “simba” (lion), and “Rafiki” (friend).

At the time of colonization, in the late 1800s-1960s, the colonists (Europeans) brought with them missionaries from their own countries. They built churches, hospitals and schools hoping to eradicate poverty, ignorance and disease. At that time Christianity spread, but not as rapidly as it is now. There were times when the new church was perceived as not active and the African spirit was suffocated and misunderstood by the missionaries and colonists. The newcomers condemned the culture and beliefs of the people as evil and tried to uproot/replace them with Christianity thus creating a dichotomy, confusion

and rebellion in Africa. Slave trade, which most missionaries did not condemn, made it worse. Many Africans wondered what type of God they worshipped and most of them resented Christianity and returned to their traditional way of worship.

Vatican II (1962-65) brought changes in our liturgy. The Church began recognizing the value of different cultures and languages and encouraged enculturation of Christianity, i.e. the building of Christianity upon the good values already found in a society. People world-wide can now worship in their own languages and continue to appreciate their culture. Countries like Kenya and Tanzania pray their mass in Kiswahili, in Uganda the mass is celebrated in Luganda, and Catholics in the Congo have been allowed to have their own format of liturgy and vestments.

Also, after Vatican II, traditional instruments such as drums were introduced into the liturgy. This was a welcome change for the people and brought a lot of excitement and active participation - and conversion to Christianity. The Catholic Church was no longer foreign/alien to the people.

When people pray in their language they feel comfortable and at home. I do believe we have a lot of people from Swahili-speaking countries here in Louisville, and I hope they will be as excited as I am to have a mass in Swahili. Maybe you would agree: most of us express ourselves best when we pray in our native languages.

