

When your faith has no place to go

This year, Uganda Martyrs Day has been postponed following health concerns linked to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which continues to pose a regional risk. The decision, though necessary for public safety, has left an emotional silence across communities that traditionally prepare for weeks of pilgrimage to Namugongo. For many, it is not just an event that has been postponed, but a journey of devotion interrupted mid-step.

Pilgrims usually set off from across Uganda and beyond, some travelling for weeks on foot, others joining caravans of prayer and song along the way. They sleep on church verandas, in school compounds, and by roadside shelters, sustained by faith and collective endurance.

This year, many of them have found themselves facing an unexpected instruction; to stop.

It is not difficult to imagine the weight of that moment. After days or weeks of walking, carrying both physical exhaustion and spiritual expectation, being told not to proceed to Namugongo can feel like a rupture in meaning itself. The instinctive question arises; what now?

There is a deeper lesson hidden within this interruption.



Faith, in its truest form, is not confined to arrival. It is shaped just as much by obedience, patience, and restraint as it is by movement and sacrifice. In this moment, pilgrims are called not to abandon their devotion, but to express it differently.

They must turn back or pause their journey where directed, not as a failure of faith, but as an act of responsibility and care for themselves and others. Disappointment is real, but

so is wisdom in accepting that some closures are meant to protect life.

Yet turning back does not mean faith comes to an end. It only changes its expression.

Pilgrims may return to their parishes, join local prayer gatherings, or spend the day in quiet reflection at home. Some will light candles in village churches. Others will sit in silence and prayer along the roads they once walked with purpose.

The physical destination may be out of reach this year, but devotion does not require a gate to be entered in order to be real.

The story of the Uganda Martyrs themselves offers a deeper mirror to this moment. The young men and women of Namugongo did not become martyrs because they reached a sacred destination. They became martyrs because they held onto their faith when every external force demanded

surrender. Their witness transformed a place of suffering into a place of remembrance.

In that sense, faith has always been less about geography and more about conviction.

This also speaks to our daily lives, far beyond pilgrimage. How often do we set out toward goals that become unreachable, promotions that do not come,

relationships that collapse, or dreams that are reshaped by circumstances beyond our control? In those moments, we are also pilgrims of a different kind, asked to redefine meaning when the road changes direction.

There is also something profoundly communal in this journey. Pilgrims rarely walk alone. They move in groups, singing, praying, and supporting one another through fatigue and uncertainty.

Even when the physical pilgrimage is interrupted, that spirit of solidarity does not disappear. It simply finds new ground in shared prayer and mutual care.

Some will feel the loss more deeply than others. Some will grieve the interruption of a sacred rhythm they have known for years. But within that grief lies another truth is strengthened when it learns restraint.

So, what does one do when faith has no physical place to go this year? One carries it inward. One lets it become prayer without procession, devotion without distance, belief without movement. Faith still travels, but this time, it travels through compassion, patience, and remembrance.

The gates of Namugongo will open again in time, and pilgrims will return to their familiar paths. But this year's silence will stand as a reminder that even when the road is closed, faith does not end, it simply learns another way to live.

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Another Perspective