BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

Life, prayer and novena

Feast day: November 15

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IN BRIEF

Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

Steward at the court of Buganda, protector of the pages, first of the Uganda Martyrs.

Feast day	November 15, June 3
Born	c. 1860, Mawokota, Kingdom of Buganda (Uganda)
Died	November 15, 1885, near the Nakivubo River, Kampala (Uganda)
Canonized	October 18, 1964, by Pope Paul VI
Era	19th century

In this booklet

Life

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Novena to Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe was the first of the Catholic martyrs of Uganda. Born around 1860 in the Kingdom of Buganda, he became steward and adviser to the king and was put in charge of the young pages of the court. Baptized in 1882, he protected these young people, taught them the faith and dared to rebuke King Mwanga for his crimes. Condemned to death, he was executed on November 15, 1885, at twenty-five. His feast day is November 15, and June 3 with Saint Charles Lwanga and his companions.

Who was Saint Joseph Mukasa?

Mukasa Balikuddembe was born around 1860 in the county of Mawokota, on the shores of Lake Victoria. According to custom, he was raised from the age of six away from his parents, in the home of a man who treated him as his son. Around fourteen, he was presented to King Mutesa I and became one of his pages. Intelligent and reliable, he won everyone's trust and eventually served in the king's private quarters.

When the Catholic missionaries, the White Fathers, arrived in Buganda in 1879, he had already met Muslims and Protestants. He enrolled in catechism in 1880 and was baptized on April 30, 1882, by Father Simeon Lourdel. He took the name Joseph.

Key dates

- **Around 1860**: Born in Mawokota, in Buganda.
- **Around 1874**: Becomes a page at the court of King Mutesa I.
- **1879**: Catholic missionaries arrive in Buganda.
- **April 30, 1882**: Baptized by Father Simeon Lourdel, taking the name Joseph.

- **1882-1885**: While the missionaries are away, he leads the community of Christian pages.
- **1884**: The young King Mwanga II succeeds Mutesa and makes Joseph his steward and adviser.
- **October 29, 1885**: Despite Joseph's pleas, the king has the Anglican bishop James Hannington killed.
- **November 15, 1885**: Condemned to death by the king, he is executed near the Nakivubo River.
- **June 6, 1920**: Beatified by Benedict XV with the Martyrs of Uganda.
- **October 18, 1964**: Canonized by Paul VI.

Guardian of the pages

In 1882, the missionaries had to leave Buganda for their safety. During their absence, which lasted until 1885, Joseph Mukasa became the pillar of the small Christian community. He taught the pages the faith, prayed with them and looked after their well-being. By his example and his words, he led many young people to Christ. After his death, it was Charles Lwanga, baptized on the very night before his martyrdom, who took over this role with the pages.

When Mutesa died in 1884, his sixteen-year-old son Mwanga II came to the throne. He kept Joseph as his steward, named him chief of the household and made him his adviser, allowing him to take him to task if he did wrong. Joseph used this freedom. He obtained a pardon for a young Anglican Christian sentenced to death, and he helped the king foil a plot against his life.

The courage of truth

But other advisers persuaded Mwanga that Christians threatened his power. The king also demanded that the pages submit to his sexual abuse; many refused and went into hiding. Joseph, in charge of the pages, opposed this

violence with all his strength. In January 1885, three young Anglicans were put to death: Joseph sharply rebuked the king for it. He also asked him to give up his amulets.

In October 1885, Mwanga decided to have the Anglican bishop James Hannington, who was arriving in the country, killed. Joseph begged him to spare him. In vain: the bishop was murdered on October 29. The next month, the king accused the Catholics of having tried to poison him. For a whole night, he vented his anger against Joseph: his reproaches over the bishop's death, and above all his resistance that kept the king from abusing the pages.

Martyrdom

On the morning of November 15, 1885, Joseph served Mass and received Communion from Father Lourdel. Soon afterward, the king sent for him and condemned him to death. He was taken to the Nakivubo River. Joseph forgave the king and his enemies. He was to be burned alive, but the executioner, moved by his words, beheaded him before giving his body to the fire. He was twenty-five. His death opened the persecution that, in 1886, would cost the lives of Charles Lwanga and many young Christians, Catholic and Anglican.

Veneration and iconography

Joseph Mukasa was beatified by Benedict XV on June 6, 1920, with the Martyrs of Uganda, then canonized by Paul VI in Rome on October 18, 1964. His feast day is November 15, the day of his martyrdom, and June 3 with his companions, the day of the great pilgrimage to Namugongo. In the Uganda Martyrs Basilica at Namugongo, one of the twenty-two pillars that support the building is dedicated to him, and a stained glass window depicts him. He is shown as a young man, among his fellow martyrs.

What can we learn from Saint Joseph Mukasa?

Joseph Mukasa held an enviable place beside the king. He put it at risk to protect young people from abuse of power and to tell the truth to the man who could have him killed. His faith was not only an inner conviction: it made him responsible for the most vulnerable. He died forgiving. You can pray to him for the protection of children and young people, for victims of abuse, for those who must speak out against an injustice, and for the Church in Africa.

To pray with him, see the prayer to Saint Joseph Mukasa and the novena to Saint Joseph Mukasa.

Where to pray to Saint Joseph Mukasa

- **Namugongo** (Uganda): the Uganda Martyrs Basilica, a major pilgrimage site, especially on June 3.
- **Kampala** (Uganda): Rubaga Cathedral, on the hill where the White Fathers had set up their mission.
- **Rome**: Saint Peter's Basilica, where he was canonized in 1964 with his companions.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Joseph Mukasa for the Protection of Children and Young People

Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe was steward and adviser to the king of Buganda, and in charge of the young pages of the court. A fervent Christian, he taught them the faith, protected them from the abuse of King Mwanga and dared to tell him the truth. He was executed on November 15, 1885, forgiving his executioners. This prayer is an original composition inspired by his life, and not an official liturgical text. It entrusts to his intercession children and young people, victims of abuse, and those who need the courage of truth.

Prayer to Saint Joseph Mukasa

Saint Joseph Mukasa,
you who served at a king's court,
you did not seek to keep your place,
but to protect the young people entrusted to you.
You taught them to know Christ,
you defended them against the violence of power,
and you told the truth to the one who could have you killed.

On the morning of your death, you received the Body of Christ,
and you went to your execution forgiving your enemies.

Protect children and young people from every kind of abuse.
Console the victims and help them find peace.
Give educators, parents and leaders
the vigilance and courage to be like you.
Teach us to speak the truth with love,
to forgive without hatred,
and to stay faithful to Christ whatever it costs.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

When to pray to Saint Joseph Mukasa

- On his feast day, November 15, and on June 3 with the Martyrs of Uganda.
- For the protection of children and young people, at school, in sports or in the Church.
- For victims of abuse and for those who accompany them.
- When you must report an injustice or speak frankly to a superior.
- For the Church in Africa and for young persecuted Christians.

A prayer for those who protect

If you are responsible for children or young people, you can say this short prayer each day:

> *Lord, I entrust to you those in my care.*
> *Make me a faithful, attentive and courageous guardian.*
> *Saint Joseph Mukasa, pray for us. Amen.*

To prepare for his feast, you can pray the novena to Saint Joseph Mukasa from November 7 to 15, and read the life of Saint Joseph Mukasa.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe, the first Catholic martyr of Uganda. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on his feast day, November 15, begin on November 7; you can also pray it from May 26 to June 3, the feast of the Martyrs of Uganda. It is especially suited to the protection of children and young people, and to obtaining the courage of truth and forgiveness.

How to pray this novena

Each day, begin with the Sign of the Cross and entrust your intention to God. Read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be. End with: "Saint Joseph Mukasa, pray for us." The suggested act helps you live the novena in a concrete way.

Day 1: A child entrusted

At six, Mukasa was entrusted to a man who raised him as his son. Later, he would in turn be the one to whom children were entrusted. What we receive, we are called to give.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for those who cared for me when I was a child. Bless them.

Today: Thank someone who raised, taught or guided you.

Day 2: Searching for God

Before becoming a Catholic, Mukasa had listened to Muslims and Protestants. He was searching for the truth. When he met Christ, he followed him with all his heart.

Prayer: Lord, bless all who are searching for the truth. Show yourself to them.

Today: Pray for someone around you who is searching for God.

Day 3: Baptism

On April 30, 1882, Mukasa was baptized and received the name Joseph, the name of the man who watched over the child Jesus. This name would become his mission: to watch over young people.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for my baptism. Help me to live according to the calling you have given me.

Today: Look up the meaning of your first name, or the life of the saint who bears it.

Day 4: Alone with the young

When the missionaries left the country, Joseph stayed. He taught the pages the faith, prayed with them and encouraged them. For three years, he carried the community without a priest.

Prayer: Lord, bless catechists and lay people who keep the faith alive where there is no priest.

Today: Pray for a catechist, or offer to help with religious education.

Day 5: An honest adviser

King Mwanga allowed Joseph to take him to task. Joseph did not flatter: he advised frankly, saved a condemned woman, foiled a plot. He served the king by telling him the truth.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage to speak the truth with respect, even to those who have power over me.

Today: Gently say a truth you have not dared to say.

Day 6: Defending the weakest

The king wanted to abuse the pages. Joseph, who was in charge of them, stood in the way. He knew he was risking his life. For him, protecting the young came before his career and his safety.

Prayer: Lord, protect children and young people from every kind of abuse. Give those in charge of them vigilance and courage.

Today: Pray for victims of abuse, and learn how to protect the children around you.

Day 7: Pleading for life

When the king wanted to have the Anglican bishop James Hannington killed, Joseph begged him to spare him. He defended the life of a Christian from another Church. He did not succeed, but he spoke up.

Prayer: Lord, make me a defender of every life. Unite divided Christians in charity.

Today: Pray for Christian unity, and for someone who is under threat.

Day 8: The last Communion

On the morning of his death, Joseph served Mass and received Communion. It was from Christ that he drew the strength to face that day. The Eucharist is the bread of the strong.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, present in the Eucharist, be my strength in difficult days.

Today: Go to Mass, or spend some time in adoration.

Day 9: Dying in forgiveness

Led to his execution, Joseph forgave the king and his enemies. The executioner, moved, spared him the stake. Joseph died at twenty-five, and his death opened the way for all the martyrs of Uganda.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to forgive as you did on the cross. Through the intercession of Saint Joseph Mukasa, grant me the grace I ask of you in this novena, if it is your will.

Today: Forgive, in your heart or in words, someone who has hurt you.

Living the novena with Saint Joseph Mukasa

Saint Joseph Mukasa is a saint for our time. He protected young people from the abuse of a man in power, and it cost him his life. During these nine days, pray for children and young people, for victims of abuse, for educators, youth leaders and parents. Ask also for yourself the courage to tell the truth and the grace to forgive. Finally, you can pray for the Church in Africa, so young and so alive, born from the blood of its martyrs.

Closing prayer

Saint Joseph Mukasa,
guardian of the young and first martyr of Uganda,
you preferred the truth to your place beside the king,
and you died forgiving.
Present to God the intention I have carried through these nine days.
Protect children and young people,
give me the courage of truth
and the peace of one who forgives.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

You can also pray the prayer to Saint Joseph Mukasa at any time, and read the life of Saint Joseph Mukasa.

Credits and sources

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