

This is the testimony of Berthilde, a survivor of the Rwandan genocide

During the genocide, whilst living in Gitarama with my sister, I was gang-raped on two separate occasions. Later I entered into a forced marriage with a Hutu relative to gain protection. My sister and I accompanied his family to the refugee camps in Zaire where, again, we were subject to repeated rapes. She became pregnant.

We were threatened by the other refugees and our tent was burned down. Some Christians moved us into lodging. The refugees were always raping us and beating us, saying that we were Tutsis. Some Seminarians preparing for the priesthood looked after us. They brought us food because we couldn't leave our beds. They also gave medicine to my sister who had caught syphilis.

At one point, I realised I was pregnant too. I didn't want the child. I didn't know what to do. I tried to bring about an abortion, but that didn't succeed.

I gave birth whilst still in Zaire and the child became one more burden that I didn't know how to bear. I didn't have any affection for him.

In 1996, my sister and I returned to Rwanda and have lived together ever since. We heard that the men who gang raped us had died of AIDS so we both were tested. Together we found that we are HIV positive. We support each other through the highs and lows.

Thoughts about how my children will manage in life prey on my mind constantly. My own three children, and the orphan I have taken in, as well as my invalid mother, are the sole charge of myself. I know that my mother can do little for the children, so I have not told her that I am living with HIV.

We are living in extreme poverty. Everyone in the house is dependent on me. The four children are all at primary school. They are still too young to look after themselves.

Another worry is finding a house. Then, at least, after my death my children will have a home. I worry about their future without any resources or anyone to help them. If I had some money I would start a small business, so that I could meet the needs of the family.

Today's Reading of the Testimonies marks the 15th Anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, in support of survivors like Berthilde.