



Br Benedict Fostacz, S.J.
(1908-1977. In Zambia 1966-1977)

23 January 1977

Benedict was born on 28 April 1908 in the small village of Laskowska in the south of Poland, near the Romanian border, in the province of Rzeszow and the district of Dynow. His father Stefan married Karolina Zenczak, a native of the village and her dowry was the small farm which they worked. Times were very difficult for these small farmers and when Benedict was only five months old quite a number of the villagers decided to migrate beyond Romania into Yugoslavia. As it was all part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire there were no great border formalities. Polish was the language spoken at home and later in his life Benedict would still use some of the old expressions long since out of use. Soon all had to learn Croatian which was not so difficult for those born after the move. Benedict's older sister joined the religious life in Zagreb.

His father was a blacksmith and a farmer, and trained his eldest son in all these skills. His early years left Benedict with a great variety of manual skills and a deep love of animals, especially horses. (When Benedict entered the Jesuits, his father was sad to see his eldest son leave for the religious life, and he himself regretted having to part with his beloved horses. Shortly after entering at the age of 20, his mother passed away.

He joined the Society in 1928 and a few years afterwards so did his brother Anthony who later became the Provincial of the Croatian Province in 1967. Benedict used to say that no one believed he would persevere in the religious life! He wished to be a missionary. The Croatian Jesuits were working with other Provinces in Calcutta, India and so in 1937 he was sent there. He stayed only a short time before he had to accompany a sick Father home, and the advent of the war prevented his return. He did various jobs in Croatia and at one stage he was the driver for the Papal Nuncio, Del Maestr, who was later the papal delegate in Zambia. He worked for many years in the Province's printing establishment and finally joined the building team in the novitiate.

He still wanted to be a missionary. Fr Fucek proposed to send him to Zambia as a test case. Having a Polish passport he would probably not experience the opposition of the Yugoslavian Government as others did. He arrived in Lusaka after a long delay in Rome in 1966. He was sent to Kabwe to take up plumbing and electrical work for the Education Secretary at the Angelina Tembo School. In 1967 he spent a few weeks in Mpanshya and he then was attached to the office of the Education Secretary in Lusaka. When the schools were handed over to the Government, he continued to work for the Archdiocese in the same job.

In spite of his 59 years, he was not only a very hard worker, but also an experienced and skilled artisan, for he could turn his hand to carpentry, plumbing, electricity, drainage, brick laying and mechanics – in fact anything that was needed to be done. Most of our houses, many convents and all the schools, even in the most outlying areas, have been improved by his competent work. He was above all a devoted companion and friend and a very serious religious.

In 1976 Benedict, who otherwise boasted of robust health and strength, started to show signs of strain and ill health. The doctor noticed his high blood pressure and a much enlarged prostate gland. For the next six months the situation was kept under control by medication. The doctor advised an operation while he was still physically fit. It was thought that it would be best done in Yugoslavia, although he was reluctant to go initially. However, he set out on 15th October 1976 and was welcomed by his fellow Jesuits in Zagreb. After the operation, kidney complications set in which caused several relapses. Despite some improvement he did not leave the hospital and died there 23 January 1977.

We who have known him so intimately and worked with him so long, know that he has merited what he so cheerfully hoped for – ‘the reward exceedingly great’ – and we know that he is still with us in a fuller way than before.