

23 January

Br JAMES PAUL

5 December 1926 – 23 January 2014



‘Quiet and unassuming’ are the words frequently used about James Paul whose family came from Malawi and had settled in Bulawayo where he grew up and trained as a mechanic. Sensing a religious vocation, he approached the Marianhills. They directed him to Bishop Chichester who welcomed him and suggested he try the new community of Peter Claver Brothers.

James often spoke of his early years of religious life without bitterness but there were moments when expressions of racialism, which had contaminated the Church, would have given a less patient man grounds for rancour.

For example. Chichester told him to call at Campion House for a cup of tea before setting out for the novitiate at Musami but the white sister who answered the door gave him tea in a jam tin and hustled him into a room where they kept the brooms. He could see members of the community having their tea and enjoying themselves in the dining room. ‘Weren’t you furious?’ Roland von Nidda, who lived with him at St Ignatius in his later years, asked him. ‘No, he replied that’s how things were in those days.’

Humiliations were to continue. When he got to Musami, there were no mattresses and they had to sleep on home-made alternatives made of sacks of grass. But the PCBs did not last and the brothers were invited to choose another congregation. James and three others opted for the Society and were among the first at the new novitiate in Lusaka. After vows, James worked at St Michael’s Mhondoro, Musami and St Ignatius. His duties were maintenance of the vehicles, pumps and machinery generally. He also cared for the orchard at St Ignatius and kept Paul Edwards supplied with grapefruit, even when he moved to St George’s. He also fed a multitude of wild cats!

He was at Musami during the war years and so was part of the parties when the guerrillas came to the community house, leant their AK 47s against the wall and were entertained with beer and brandy while dancing to Mapfumo records. It is not an image that sits easily with quiet Br James but he was there and stayed on when white Jesuits had to leave. He maintained good relations with the ZANLA guerrillas and ensured the mission continued its work even at the worst moments of the war. The photo shows him at the dedication of the shrine to the martyrs at Musami, in 1983, six years after they were killed. Some Ndebele security soldiers once challenged him when they discovered he spoke their language; ‘What are you doing here in Shona country?’ He answered he was doing his job, like them. He would be asked to do shopping by the guerrillas and once was stopped by police and asked why he was carrying so many jeans. He simply said they were for the farm workers.

All who knew him spoke of his prayer. If you could not find him, try the chapel. He would spend long periods there. He may have been quiet but he was observant and reflective. Once, while talking to Dieter Scholz, he said, ‘you have no idea what an attraction money has for us.’