



**Fr Felix Kalebwe S.J.**

**(1936-2002)**

**26 February 2002**

Fr Felix was born in Kalubaloshi village, Luapula Province on 4 May 1936. He was given the name 'Kalebwe' at birth after his maternal grandfather who had died before he was born. His mother was Anne Kalebwe. He had certain outlandish views to which some people found it hard to relate. One example was his radical gospel approach to his family: 'Leave all and follow Me'. He wanted to have a strictly Jesuit funeral when he died without waiting for family to come but they could be informed so that they pray for him. In fact his brother and many nieces and nephews were at the very large funeral in Matero when Fr Felix died unexpectedly.

He attended primary school at Kasaba, secondary school at Mpima Minor Seminary and went on to Canisius for his A-Levels. He joined the Jesuits in 1965 in Bombay, India and stayed on there to study philosophy but then moved to Ireland, to Milltown Park in Dublin, for his theology. He was ordained priest there in 1972. He moved again, this time to Rome and did a licentiate in moral theology at the Gregorian University.

In 1974 he returned to Zambia, and he assisted at St Ignatius parish. This was followed by lecturing in moral theology at Mpima Major Seminary in Kabwe. A variety of works followed: a year at St Louis in the USA studying formation for religious life; retreat work and Marriage Encounter in Kitwe; parish priest and superior of the community in Bwacha, Kabwe; pastoral work at Chelston parish ; St Francis parish and finally at Matero parish.

In November 2002, not feeling well, he had a medical examination and it was discovered that he had acute diabetes. He quickly went into a coma and died on 20th November 2002 at UTH in Lusaka.

Fr Felix was a man who followed his vocation to the end and suffered in following it. He would often pray, 'Let us pray for perseverance for our Jesuit vocations. We have reached to this day but we don't know what tomorrow may bring'. A Jesuit colleague of his said that Fr Felix was both poet and prophet – poet because of his use of the English simile which was humorous, inventive and startlingly provocative – prophet in the way he dealt with differences and the way he received people. Differences either in opinion, personality or national origins did not count with him. He would never use a person's nationality or tribe as the reason for negative actions or unfair judgments. His prophetic role stood out clearly in his gift of hospitality. He would make all visitors one hundred per cent welcome, whoever they might be. So whatever one might think about certain of his views and opinions, he gave us all a prophetic lesson in tolerance.

Some tributes to him after his death bring out the character of the man:

'I liked to discuss religious and social matters with him' – 'His frank talk was always an encouragement, especially to us, the young ones' – 'We will certainly miss his sense of humor' – 'A Jesuit funeral is a spiritual banquet' – 'At the funeral of a Jesuit colleague, he had the novices kneel down (in the mud) at the grave where he led them in reflection and prayer' – 'He came across to me as a very sincere Jesuit' – 'He was such a happy man who cheered the hearts of many with his nice humor and smiles' – 'I'm very glad that someone once spoke to me about "my friend Kalebwe" because that's exactly how I saw him, as a friend' – 'I pray that the Lord will help me to appreciate Felix's value of not being judgmental and his ability to listen to other people's stories'.