



Fr Andrew Pirog, S.J.
(1908-2003. In Zambia 1948-2003)

15 March 2003

Andrew Pirog was born on 18 April 1908 in the little town of Wietrzno about 150 km east of Cracow of John and Aniela (née Braja) Pirog. It was a family poor in earthly things but rich in the faith. From his early years he wanted to become a priest and managed, in spite of the poor conditions of the family, to pass all his exams for entry into the Society of Jesus. In 1925 at the age of 17, he entered the novitiate in Stara Wies, not far from his home. After the juniorate in Pinsk, he did philosophy in Cracow and theology in Lublin and was ordained on 24 June 1937. One of those ordained with him was Adam Kowlowiecki. His first assignment was to be the curate in a little border town of Cieszyn. When the German army invaded Poland in 1939 the area was incorporated into Germany. His parish priest, Fr Francis Kaluza refused permission for the Hitler Youth to use the parish hall and soon both of them were arrested. Kaluza met a martyr's death in January 1941 in Dachau. Fr Pirog was released and banished to Cracow. By the end of 1944 he was arrested again and spent the last months of the war in the Gross Rosen camp working in the stone quarries. His first ministry after his release was to care for those who had been incarcerated and enslaved.

In 1948 at the age of 40, he arrived in Lusaka and spent the first six years in Katondwe. He first mastered ChiNyanja and then began his ministry in the primary schools of the Katondwe Valley. He also served at Kapoche, 30 km south where there was a two-storey house erected by the first missionary, Fr Moskopp who died 1923. It had fallen into disrepair and he set to renovate it, as well as the Church, often with his own hands.

He was transferred to St Mary's Kabwe with its schools and out-stations because of his ill-health. He suffered from ulcers all his life and used his own medicine based on sulphur. He set about mastering a new language chi-Bemba. He stayed there five years.

In 1959 he was transferred to St Francis de Sales close to Lusaka city centre. He spent the next 32 years there except for a short time in 1971 to replace Fr Hirjak in Mpanshya and for three years (1972-1975) when he worked in Chelston. With St Francis as his base he served the outstations of Chilanga, Shimabala, Kafue, Mandevu, Chinika and eventually Kizito Parish. Finally he set up and developed Kazimva Parish, about 7 km beyond the Petrol Depot of Lusaka.

He was a practical man and over the years managed to erect some fine churches like the one at Chilanga, the large parish hall in Kizito Parish, the parish Church of Kazimva, as well as a primary school. Even in his short time at Chelston he started collecting funds for the construction of the Church.

During his five years in Kabwe in the early fifties, he began his writing apostolate in chiBemba, chiNyanja and English which he was still doing till he became blind in his 85th year. He produced catechisms, devotional pamphlets on the Sacred Heart, hymn books, and finally booklets on Our Lady and the Angels. Ever busy, though often unwell, he did not know how to rest and he only went on home leave once in 1971.

He demanded much of himself and also from his parishioners and yet they were entirely devoted to him. They loved him and respected him, and even long after his final

retirement to Chula House, they were coming to see him and talk with him and to ask for his blessing.

In 1991, though reluctant, he was transferred to the newly opened nursing unit of John Chula House where he was well looked after by Fr Klaus Cieszynski until he left in 2001. Within a few years his sight and hearing began to diminish but he still said Mass with the aid of a large print missal but from 2001 even this was beyond him. In 2002 he told me one day that the Lord 'asked' him whether he would prefer to die soon or to live further and suffer for the Church and for the world. His answer was clear and sure: 'Lord you know what is better for the Church and the world. Here I am'. It seems that the Good Lord needed his sacrifice. About three weeks before his death he told me, not as a complaint, but as a statement of fact – 'Having no sight is a very great trial'. He was blind for the last 7 or 8 years of his life. During sleepless nights too, he was praying for all who had asked him for prayers, as well as for our communities and the whole province – in fact the Church and the world. I think I am allowed now to reveal also, what I know from his intimate sharing with me, namely, that he preserved his total innocence and chastity from his early youth till the end. No doubt, it is a special grace of God, yet it required lots of heroic sacrifices from him. We can thank the Lord for having chosen to give us such a dedicated person and we should be happy to have such an example of total self-giving and of continuous prayer.