



Fr Raymond Kapito, S.J.
(1928-2006. In Zambia 1997-2002)

10 April 2006

Raymond Kapito was born on 7 July 1928 at Mudzi, Mutoko. He studied to be a diocesan priest at Chishawasha Seminary, where he was ordained on 28 October 1956. His first appointment was to All Souls Mission, Mutoko, but after a year there, he went to St Paul's Musami for three years.

He entered the Society on 23 April 1961, at Roehampton, London. After the noviceship he went to Heythrop for theological studies. On his return in 1967 he became the parish priest at Mabvuku. In 1975 his work at Silveira House changed to giving retreats. In 1980 he became the novice master at Waterfalls, an appointment that lasted four years. He was province consultor from 1979 to 1987. He started his stint as director of the pre-Seminary first at Rothwell Farm. There were also stays at St George's on retreat and supply work, but by the time the pre-Seminary took root at Mazowe, he had seen to the changes to Chitungwiza and Melsetter before fetching up at Mazowe. Within this time he had a sabbatical in Rome and the UK and at the end of his time as pre-seminary director another sabbatical in the States.

In 1997 he joined the novitiate in Lusaka, Zambia. When he returned to Zimbabwe in 2002 he went to Mabelreign as assistant pastor. The Bishops' Conference requested that Raymond be assigned instead to the Seminary at Bulawayo to take over as Spiritual Father. Raymond however was destined for Mazowe, the start of priestly formation. Everyone agreed that there was no one who was more knowledgeable or more experienced than Raymond for the pre-seminary program.

Fr Raymond's work and life took him into many areas of the Archdiocese, the country and even farther afield, but perhaps we would feel where he was particularly outstanding, was in the formation of religious and priests. We remember his four years as novice master at Waterfalls, where at the end, he ran out of novices. The fewness of entrants suggested that a novitiate in Zimbabwe was not viable at the time. Then fourteen years later he was at the novitiate in Lusaka and tributes given there show what a reputation he had in spirituality and in the formation of young religious. Throughout his life he was always being sought after to give workshops and retreats, days and weekends of recollection.

His retreats and workshops took him into parishes where he was directly involved in parish work both at the beginning of his ministry at Mabvuku and at the end of his life at Mabelreign. Many parishes were keen to avail of his services to be instructed in prayer, in the life of the sacraments, in family life and on different themes that were pertinent to the life of Catholics. He was prepared to learn, to keep up to date by his own prayer and reading and so be able to speak also to the youth in terms they would understand and listen to.

The area where he was more particularly outstanding was his twelve years as director of the pre-seminary when it started in Rothwell Farm in 1984. He supervised all the changes that were needed to accomplish the move from there to Chitungwiza, to Melsetter and finally to Mazowe.

The funeral vigil at Mabelreign showed there were many stories that could be told to illustrate the great respect and affection in which he was held – even the number of diocesan clergy and bishops present at the funeral brought this out.

On the lighter side, there was the length of Fr Raymond's sermons and talks. There were Sundays when he would still be preaching at the end of the first Mass while Fr Langlis Lewis was trying to get the next Mass started. He would have to ring the tower bell to get Raymond to stop. At Musami, Fr Augustine Whitside was at the back of the church hearing confessions and when he felt that Fr Raymond had preached long enough, he would step out and facing up to the altar towards Fr Raymond, he would stand with arms folded – the agreed sign that he should come to an end!

Our memories of Fr Raymond will certainly give us a smile and a laugh, but looking back over the years of his pastoral life, our memories take in how with his ways and words, he helped the people of God grow in the spiritual life and they were ever grateful for the guidance he gave.

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Raymond Kapito was born in the village of Mudzi in the Mutoko district of NE Zimbabwe. His grandmother once singlehandedly chased away a lion from the homestead with an axe and the same spirit seems to have possessed her *muzukuru* for he persevered in his determination to join the Society despite countless refusals and delays. He was told the seminary was the first priority for the local church so he studied there and was ordained in 1956. His first appointment was to his home mission of All Souls in Mutoko but he was soon moved to St Paul's Musami. He finally received the green light to enter the Society in 1961 and after vows he did further studies in theology in the UK returning home in 1967.

He became Parish Priest of Mabvuku, an urban parish in Harare, and lived at Silveira House. In 1975, still living at Silveira, he branched out into retreat work and in 1980 he became novice master in the new noviciate in Waterfalls in the southern suburbs. It was a time when the new province of Zimbabwe felt they should open their own noviciate. But just after independence was a lean time for vocations and only one of his novices is still with us, Paul Mayeresa. The noviciate in Harare folded and reverted to Lusaka.

Raymond was then given a new task as the director of the pre-seminary at Rothwell Farm, near Kutama. Later it moved to Chitungwiza, SE of Harare, then to Chimanimani, in the SE of Zimbabwe on the Mozambique border, and finally it settled in Mazowe. Raymond would give the Spiritual Exercises to around 30 pre-seminarians each year.

In 1997 he came to Xavier House, Lusaka, as *socius* to the novice master, until 2002. Stories that have filtered out from those days are about his diligence in making sure novices said the breviary correctly and he would interrupt them in full flow and correct variations and pronunciations. He would even take them to the football field where the reader stood on one side of the pitch and would have to make himself heard by Raymond and the novices on the other.

When he finished his time in Lusaka he returned to the pre-seminary where he had developed an expertise valued by the bishops. In fact it was in the formation of priests and religious that he shone. He was in much demand for retreats and workshops around the country.

At his funeral vigil in Mabelreign many stories were told showing the affection with which he was held by the many whose lives he touched. He was famous for the liveliness - and length - of his sermons. To the English taste they went on far too long and Raymond enjoyed telling the story of how Archbishop Markall once interrupted him in mid-sentence with one word, '*satis*' (enough). In Musami, Fr Whiteside would stand at the back of the church with his arms folded – an agreed signal for Raymond to stop!

Raymond did not find life in the Society easy, at least not in the early years. He had struggled to become a Jesuit but when he eventually succeeded he found it difficult to mix in. Locally born Jesuits, especially priests, were few in those days and it took a forceful person to 'claim his space' in a province dominated by somewhat aloof Englishmen. They were kind underneath but unintentionally off-putting on the surface. You had to probe to get through to the reserved English. It was not an easy thing to do and Raymond was not one to do it. So he remained rather shy and diffident throughout.

Perhaps he was a bit impractical and, like many who learn to drive late in life, he treated cars as objects to be subdued not befriended. He kept a tight grip of the wheel and seemed reluctant to move beyond third gear.

Raymond was sensitive, at times unsure of himself and a bit awkward socially. Having said this it is equally important to say he shone in his own field. He was an enthusiastic preacher and retreat giver and hammered his lessons home with stories and theatrical performances that few could match. He had a particular gift with the mothers in the church guilds, *zvita*, where he could enter into lively dialogues with them for long periods – so long as there was no one breathing down his neck and saying, '*satis*'.