



**Fr Joseph Groselj, S.J.**

**(1944-2013. In Zambia 1973-2013)**

**20 April 2013**

Fr Joseph Groselj was born in Buc, Slovenia on 20 September 1944. After his primary school, Joe worked in a factory. At the same time he attended evening classes to get his secondary education. Then he joined a diocesan seminary: he wanted to be a priest. However, he felt deep within that the Risen Lord wanted him to become a missionary, so he decided to join the Jesuits to be able to go on mission. He entered the Society in 1970.

In 1973 he came to Zambia, going first to Katondwe to learn chiNyanja and then to Mukasa Minor Seminary in Choma where he taught together with Frs Raymond Mpezele and Paul Lungu, both of whom became bishops.

He studied theology in Toronto, Canada for four years and was ordained in 1977. He remained in Canada for another year studying communications at Concordia University in Montreal. In 1980 he began his many years of pastoral work in Zambia. He worked in different parishes of the Archdiocese of Lusaka for 30 years: in Matero, Kizito, Lilanda and Chunga for 13 years; in Katondwe for 5 years; and at Nangoma for 11 years. He also served as Jesuit superior of the communities many of those years. He also did a brief stint in Kasungu, Malawi (end of 1999 to 2000), before taking up his work at Nangoma.

Apart from being a dedicated pastor, Joe was also a renovator and a builder. He renovated many of the community and parish buildings over those years, but he also built numerous churches for the outstations of his parishes. He was capable of making architectural plans himself; he supervised the building and used local artists to decorate the new church. Joe was a great builder not only of churches made of bricks but, above all, of living churches made of living bricks – that is people who make up the Christian communities.

Nangoma parish was handed over to an Archdiocesan priest on 14 April, a week before he died. When he handed over this parish, Nangoma had 35 outstations and practically each outstation had a lovely new church. Every church he built had a picture of the Risen Lord – Christ the Universal King in African style. Joe adored the Risen Lord: Jesus was number one in Joe's life. Joe treasured Jesus' words: 'I am the way and the truth and the life!' Everyone else was just Jesus' servant. Perhaps this is why he was sometimes criticised *alibe ulemu*. But Joe was free; he worshiped no one else but the Lord.

Joe wrote many insightful articles that appeared in *Druzina*, the Catholic Weekly, and in other magazines in Slovenia. He wrote a book, *Vredno je vztrajati* – 'It is *Worthwhile to Persevere: Stories from a Missionary's Life*,' which was also published in 2011 by the Catholic Weekly. In about 250 pages, he describes the difficulties and challenges he and his parishioners encountered. While never giving up, they faced their problems in a positive manner and always something good came out as a result. The book challenges the reader to be tough and fight a good fight and so overcome all difficulties.

Joe had decided to leave Nangoma and Zambia because he had realised that he was not strong enough anymore to drive on the bad roads full of potholes. He felt that he had exhausted himself. In the last chapter of his book, Joe describes his dilemma:

he loved being in Zambia, he loved the people yet he felt he was getting older and weaker. Should he return to Europe where he could still do some useful work? His last sentence in the book is: Let God decide!

Joe was scheduled to return to his home country, Slovenia for a future assignment at the end of April. But God had decided that his servant should end his earthly pilgrimage at Nangoma and wait here in Zambia for the day of the resurrection. Joe died of a heart attack on 20 April 2013.