

29 April

Paul Lungu 1947-98



Paul Lungu was born in Kabwe in 1947. “There was love in my family,” he later wrote, “My father (a barman) was a good provider and did not know how to refuse his children’s requests.” Fr Nowicki (aka Chimokoshi) spotted him as a small boy and, Paul tells us, “awakened my spiritual interests”. Paul went to Canisius for his secondary and entered the novitiate in July 1969. He later wrote,

I enjoyed my novitiate. I was the only *Zambian*. I related well with others and remember them to this day. But life was not too easy. Each day was packed with activities. After the construction of the novitiate there was a lot of debris to remove and grass to plant in the two quadrangles. The diet was frugal. On Sundays I went with the novice master to Chelstone where he would say the Mass and I preached. I was never bored. I simply loved the whole new world of a well-ordered and regular spiritual life in the Society. My first experiment was at UTH. We slept in the corridor as there was no other room. The whole experience was very useful to us. My second was at Katondwe. We did a census of the people and even went hunting. There is something precious that the novitiate life taught me: silence. The Co-ordinator made sure we kept it. I learned to value it and now I miss it and notice its absence. I do not remember ever visiting another novice’s room for a chat and no one came to mine.

After vows Paul studied philosophy at Kimwenza and then did his regency at Mukasa Minor Seminary in Choma. Theology followed in Rome and he was ordained in Kabwe on 5 August 1979. He worked at Ngungu parish in Kabwe for two years before returning to Rome for a course in spirituality and he also worked in a parish in Germany for a while. He came to the novitiate in 1986 as *socius* to Fr Peter Carroll who, in Paul’s words, “guided me gently like a ‘guru’ and later, in 1988, I became Master of Novices. Peter Carroll then became my *socius* for a while.” He continued,

I did not find being novice master easy. Each year we had to go through the process of learning to know each other and I had to try and mould them into the pattern of the Spiritual Exercises. Each one was different and I had to cope with nine different nationalities. How to mould them while respecting their personalities and particular gifts given by God! A great help to me were the professed permanent members of the novitiate. They tried to adjust to each new group of novices. Novitiate formation consists, not in the mental assimilation of theory, but in the radical, though slow, re-orientation in faith of the whole person

down into the affective core of consciousness. It is not like pinning a medal on a uniform but it is slow and progressive, like the growth of life. (Mark 4:26-29). This life and its growth is a total gift freely given. Moreover, that gift is given in the shape, time and mode the Spirit chooses. The Spirit breathes where it wills. Each vow day was a new enlightenment for me. I went through the pain of listening to the Spirit and following its lead in each individual.

At one time he wrote, "I will be at home wherever I am sent." But he did not anticipate the mission he received on 3rd December 1991. He was chosen to be the new bishop of Monze in succession to James Corboy. "I did desire to be a missionary," he wrote later, "but not in this capacity. That is why I wanted to join the Society of Jesus. But how can a Jesuit refuse to follow the will of the Vicar of Christ?"

So, in 1992, Paul became bishop of Monze. His priority was the care of his priests and to provide them with opportunities for on-going renewal. He was given the responsibility of seminary formation in the country. The government appointed him chair of the programme to respond to malnutrition and he was a member of the anti-corruption committee.

All this came to a sudden end when he was killed in a road accident in 1998. He was just 51. Messages poured on from all over the world. 10 000 people came to the funeral in Monze. The President and the bishops came and, above all, the Tonga people came. They wished to show their affection for the man who had won their hearts.

Paul Lungu was a man of energy and charm. Wherever he was one could hear his loud laughter. He reached out to people and throughout his ministry people responded and sought him out. He reached out across borders and cultures to Italians, Germans and Americans as well as Zambians and Zimbabweans. He was deeply imbued with the spirituality of Ignatius and he loved to share it with others in retreats and spiritual direction. Even as a bishop he would help directing the long retreat of Jesuit novices in Monze. His real effectiveness was in helping people relate to the gospel in their lives. His ease and openness with people came from his own inner freedom. The way he lived his religious life was an invitation and a challenge.

After his death, one message ran, "When the well ran dry for many sisters, brothers and fellow Jesuits, you were an oasis that many sought to drink from." Fr Kolvenbach wrote, "He considered the Spiritual Exercises the best gift that a son of St Ignatius could offer to people." And Fr Searson spoke of his desire to heal families by looking at the roots of problems in family history.