



Fr John Chula S.J.

(1932-1990)

4 May 1990

Fr John was born near Kasama, Zambia, on 25 December 1932 but at the age of four he was baptized at Kasisi Mission, outside Lusaka, in 1936. After school studies he went to Chishawasha Seminary near Harare, Zimbabwe in 1956 where he studied philosophy for three years. He expressed a desire to enter the Society of Jesus so in 1963 he entered the novitiate in India, at Vanayalaya near Bombay. After the novitiate, he did another year of philosophy gaining a licentiate. He studied theology and returned to Zambia in 1970 where he was ordained priest at Bwacha Stadium, Kabwe in May 1970. He was the first Zambian Jesuit priest.

His early assignments included pastoral work at Bwacha and Kasisi parishes and teaching at Canisius Secondary School.

In an article entitled 'The Blind Priest and a Golden Cross' Fr John wrote about himself: 'I realize that my first response to God was not an unqualified "yes"...it was a "yes" and a "no". I was selfish in my work as a priest and was preaching myself! I lacked patience (a serious fault in a priest but especially in a Zambian!), and did my work hurriedly in order to have more time to read and spend with my friends. My so-called friends were to be my downfall, as our meetings were occasions for drinking. I now see that I was running away from something – perhaps myself. Anyway I turned in on myself instead of outwards to my parishioners. My personal spiritual life was barren and this showed in my preaching.'

The Lord's second call came about most mysteriously, as indeed it always does! On 6 April 1981, I suddenly became blind, with all the panic and helplessness which accompany such a shock. One month in the local University Teaching Hospital proved fruitless. In Harare an eye specialist said that my eyes were alright but the optical nerves were partially damaged. I now had to face the fact that I would probably never see again, at least well enough to read or to drive a car and so on. With a strength that was not my own, I was able to pray: Lord, I'm blind but I'm a priest. Use me as you want. I accept my situation'.

Fr John went on to describe how he began giving retreats and hearing confessions in different parishes around Lusaka. He wrote: 'I am useful again. I now enjoy a deep peace and joy which was not there before. Indeed, I am often not aware that I am blind, until I walk into an object. I can negotiate the stairs, the garden walks, even say Mass alone in the event of nobody being free to join me. I do not use a stick, but maybe I am more of the stick in the hands of the Lord that Ignatius Loyola would have wanted us to be'.

Fr John continued his retreat work from Luwisha House until 1984 when he moved to Kasisi to help in the parish. In 1986 he moved back to Luwisha House to become the spiritual director for the young Jesuits in formation. Finally in 1988 he went to Matero Parish. At the time of his death, he was saying two Masses on Sundays, hearing confessions and preparing couples for marriage.

He took ill in May of 1990 and died on the 4th in UTH, Lusaka.