

May 31

## Fr XOLILE KETEYI

4 October 1952 – 31 May 1994



Bernard Xolile Keteyi and his twin sister Xoliswa, were born in Qumbu and he was educated at Mvemelwano Primary School and Mariazell, Marintal. He joined the seminary, then at Hammanskraal, for the diocese of Umtata but then entered the Society in 1976. He studied in London and Dublin and was ordained in his home parish, Qumbu. In 1985, he was parish priest of Orlando West, Soweto and soon became the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference representative for refugees. He became superior of scholastics in the South African Region and then did a Masters in theology in Berkeley. He came home to teach at John Vianney up to 1993 when he became rector of St Peter's which was moving to Garsfontein. He attended the African Synod of Bishops in Rome with the SA bishops.

All his short life he was giving retreats, conferences and talks about inculturation and crossing cultural boundaries. Fr Buti Tihagale OMI, who knew him well, saw him as 'a man of deep conviction and solid faith. He was a thinker but also concerned about the implementation of ideas. He was disturbed by the deafening silence of lay and religious leaders of the black Catholic community about African cultural forms and idioms. The pursuit of self-expression in the African idiom in the prayers and rituals of the Church was Keteyi's passion. He represented a radical departure from protest politics to the politics of self-realisation and accountability. He had a sharp mind, a good sense of humour and a compulsive sense of inner freedom.' Tihagale thought, 'The Irish did a good job on him. The only thing they failed to do was teach him how to dress.'

Robert Carty, onetime superior of the region, said 'he felt the massive oppressions deeply, sincerely and angrily but he did not cause unnecessary embarrassment. He simply asked, while at Murray House, that the curtains be drawn in the evening before the lights were put on.'

A Soweto priest was heard to say at his funeral 'one cannot grieve' and a parishioner said 'this is a joyful day'. Chris Chatteris in his homily recalled that it had been remarked, 'How can such a little man leave such a large hole?' There were 5000 at the funeral with five or six bishops, and 100 priests. Xolile had had some premonition of what was coming, 'Never mind about the sermon, he said, just get the hymns right'

May 31, 1994

## **BERNARD XOLILE KATEYI 1952-1994**



The South African Region of the Society of Jesus and all those who knew him beyond its borders received a huge shock on learning of the sudden death of Xolile Kateyi in Pietermaritzburg on 31 May 1994. He was 41 and had had a massive heart attack.

He was born in Qumbu in 1952 in the Eastern Cape and as a young man joined the seminary in Umtata. After philosophy he asked his bishop if he could apply to join the Jesuits and he entered the novitiate of the British Province in 1976, the first black South African to do so. He later studied in London, Dublin and California and was ordained in 1983. He became parish priest of St Martin de Porres, Orlando West (Soweto) in 1985 and was also the SA Bishops' Conference representative for refugees. He went on to teach theology at St John Vianney Seminary and moved from there to be rector of St Peter's Seminary. Throughout his eleven years as a priest he gave numerous retreats and conferences. He had a gift for being able to cross cultural boundaries and he played a leadership role in the struggle for a new South Africa which he lived to see emerging.

What follows is a tribute from Fr Buti Tihagale OMI:

We have lost a brother, a good friend, a good man, a good priest and a man of deep conviction and solid faith. Whenever we met we discussed politics and indulged in analysis of cultural domination and self-assertiveness as people. He was a positive thinker - always preoccupied with what contribution we should make as priests. ... He was disturbed by the deafening silence of both lay and religious leaders within the black Catholic community. ... He firmly believed that African cultural forms and expressions were radically linked to the dignity of the people and their sense of pride. The pursuit of self-expression in the African idiom in the prayers and rituals of the Church was Kateyi's passion. He strongly advocated that such concerns should neither be handled casually nor by

interested individuals alone, but by organised groups of committed Catholics. We must celebrate who we are. ...

Xolile Kateyi was easily the best among us. When in doubt, when the mind fails to make reasonable judgements because of inadequate evidence, when faith begins to fail us, when human frailty faces us squarely, when fatigue begins to take its toll, when the challenges of life become unbearable, when the foundations of our religious life begins to crack, ... we do not always look to the saints of the Church or our founders (Eugene de Mazenod or Ignatius of Loyola) but it is to persons like Xolile we turn. ... He was consumed by the zeal of his missionary work and was a source of strength and encouragement to his fellow priests. (End of Tihagale's tribute)

Nicholas King SJ recalls Xolile's remark, repeated several times over his last weeks, 'get the hymns right.' He seemed to be joking but those preparing his funeral remembered the words and realised that perhaps he knew he had not long to live. At any rate they made efforts to fulfil his wish. Nick writes, 'It was extraordinary ... the ceremony at the graveside was even longer than the Requiem Mass. A Soweto priest was heard to say, "For such a man one cannot grieve" and indeed joy marked the occasion. Mrs Mokoena of Orlando West Parish began her speech, "This is a joyful day!"

Chris Chatteris, Xolile's friend and Regional Superior, in his homily asked, 'How can such a little man leave such a large hole?' The people of Orlando West fed the five thousand who came to the funeral. Most of them seem not to have slept the night before, some keeping vigil by the body, and some doing the cooking. It was worth it, however, a day to remember, a celebration of life in the midst of death and a deeply prayerful occasion. We certainly 'got the hymns right' that day.

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