



Br Joseph Duda, S.J.
(1896-1972. In Zambia 1928-1972)

7 June 1972

Joseph Duda was born on 10 July 1896 in Karb, Upper Silesia, Poland. From the age of twelve he was thinking of becoming a priest but his family was too poor to send him to a secondary school. He became a lock-smith at an industrial school. During World War I he was conscripted into the German army and fought for four years on the Western Front where he was wounded. He used to recount how the soldiers were lined up to get a decoration for their efforts but the officer giving out the medals saw he was a Pole, so he demanded that he say "Bitte" ('Please') before receiving his decoration. He refused – and so did not get his medal! Later he fought in the uprising in Silesia and joined the underground resistance.

When he read that the Jesuits received young men as brothers in Poland, he left Silesia and joined the Society on 10 July 1923. For three years after his vows he worked in Cracow and Chyrow. When the Provincial, Fr Jankiewicz appealed for missionary volunteers, he stepped forward. He arrived in Zambia on 30 April 1928 with a group of Sisters and three other Jesuits (Josef Boron, Ladislav Zabdyr, Stanislaus Wawrzkiwicz).

Kasisi was his first mission. As an old man he could still point to two buildings that are still standing which he built at the time, the first solid dormitories for boys and for the girls. He was remembered for many years for having provided a copious water supply.

The following year he moved to Chikuni where he built many schools for Fr Zabdyr. For three years he was blacksmith, driver, carpenter, turner, bricklayer and sacristan. These were the most fruitful and productive years of his life. In 1932 he moved to Chingombe where he constructed the convent for the Sisters. Forty years later it is among the most solid buildings of the many structures on the mission. But here his strength began to fail. He contracted tropical dysentery called *chiufa* and cured by the traditional bark medicine inserted into the colon. However it was hookworm which doctors later thought he had carried undetected for ten years that left him feeling weak at times. Still he helped build the church at Katondwe in 1934 and the orphanage at Kasisi in 1936.

During World War 2 while he was at Katondwe he was often sick, so he was sent to Cape Town for medical attention from 1945 to 1947. He returned to Kasisi to help with the new church and to repair some of the old buildings. Then in 1957 when the mission was divided, he moved to Chikuni where he stayed until his death. The community was very kind to him there and his declining years were very happy. He used to give practical advice to the new comers and sometimes they would banter with him saying, 'Brother this advice of drinking plenty of water seems crazy. How can one possibly drink 8 gallons a day!' He would always rise to the bait: 'I said eight pints not eight gallons!' He was a man of many memories, some of which he never let go. He used to mention about a great photograph of himself in his shirt sleeves holding a large snake that he had killed. It was duly sent to the General, Fr Ledochowski in Rome. The comment that came back was remembered: "Why is brother not wearing religious attire!"

In 1968 he wrote to a fellow Jesuit in Poland: "It is forty years since we came with Father Zabdyr to Zambia. Father Zabdyr was buried in Kasisi in July. I hope I shall soon follow him. I desire it very much and I am ready. My weak heart will help towards it." Four years later Joseph was operated on in Lusaka hospital and while the operation was a success his heart finally failed him and he died on 7 June 1972.