



Fr Hilary Rudež, S.J.

(1922-2016. In Zambia/Malawi 1958-2016)

9 June 2016

Fr Radko Rudež, commonly known as Fr Hilary, was born in a village of Cerovlje in Istria, Italy, on 31 January 1922, as a second born child to Josip Rudež and Karla Česnik. His older brother Branko, who died in 2015, became a diocesan priest and his lifelong friend and benefactor. His younger brother Mario became a businessman; he also has passed away. Their father Josip, a train machinist, died when Radko was only 5 years old. Their mother struggled to raise the three sons. In order to secure the future of her sons she tried hard to put them through school. She found a place for Radko in an orphanage to assure his future, an experience he never forgot. After his secondary school education he entered the Major Seminary. He was ordained priest on 28 June in 1946, just one year after the end of the Second World War.

After his ordination he served as an assistant Parish Priest in different parishes in the western part of Slovenia. As a zealous priest he quickly came into conflict with the then communist Government. During this time his desire to become a missionary grew stronger. In order to fulfill this desire, he applied to the Jesuits in Zagreb and was accepted into the novitiate on 21 January 1949. He did some additional studies in philosophy and started his regency at the Minor Seminary in Šalata, Zagreb. Some critical comments he made while teaching a class earned him a three year prison sentence. Upon finishing his term in jail he was drafted into the Yugoslav army. He refused to join on the ground that he was an Italian citizen. He was then sent to Slovenia where he served two years as an acting Parish Priest in Vurberg. In 1957 he was expelled by the Government from Slovenia to Italy.

He took his expulsion as an opportunity to apply to go the foreign missions. He went to Rome and reported to Fr Anton Prešern, the Assistant for Slavic Provinces, who gladly considered his application. But first he sent him to Austria for his tertianship. Missioning to Zambia, then Northern Rhodesia, came as a fulfilment of his dreams. He arrived on the 25 February 1958.

He started his missionary work in the Luangwa Valley. There he planned to revive Kapoche Mission. In 1965 on his first home leave, he visited the Jesuit scholastics in Zagreb and made a presentation of his work in the missions. He explained that since his name 'Radko' was difficult to pronounce, he changed it to the more English-sounding, 'Hilary'. He also stopped in Rome and got a commitment from the Slavic Assistant to send more missionaries to Zambia. In subsequent years, Jesuits from Croatia and Slovenia were sent to the Zambia Mission.

It was the late Fr Lovro Tomažin who, when missioned to Katondwe, was the practical Jesuit who made Fr Hilary's dreams a reality. Fr Hilary saw the need; Fr Lovro agreed to it and built it by adding six churches to the existing two at Katondwe and Kapoche. After he was replaced in Kapoche, the station was closed which he always felt was a mistake.

Eventually he was moved from Katondwe and Kapoche, but his heart remained there. He used to express his feelings by singing: *Ku Katondwe, Ku Katondwe Kwali Wa Masana, Kwali Wa Masana... Wakashana Walakulisya*. Later a booklet of his songs of assorted contents was published. In it one can find his simplest song: 'Yesu Amatikonda, Yesu Amatikonda, Timkonde Ifenso' (Jesus loves us, Jesus loves us, let us love him in return). This song expressed the purpose of his life and work. He used to

play his small accordion, sing and teach people in their language: in chiNyanja, chiBemba, chiTonga, chiShona, chIla and even SiLozi. Children were crazy about him. Through them he would reach all homes, be they Catholic, Protestant or Muslim.

People in Katondwe loved him. They also loved him in Matero to where he was posted twice as pastoral worker and once as an assistant Parish Priest (1964-1965; 1967-1968; 1990-1997). He did his planning for the development of Matero: three new parishes, Kizito, Chunga and Lilanda. He planned the places and he initiated them, but it was left to others to build them. He himself built only three churches in the Moomba area with the help of businessman Mr Brunelli, his Italian friend.

In Mumbwa he also spent 6 years (1981-1987), serving this vast parish stretching from Nampundwe to Chunga in the Kafue National Park. He made a plan for the whole parish. However, he set his heart on Situmbeko, Mwembeshi and the Nampundwe-Shibuyunji area. All these places became new parishes. Fr Hilary had the vision, others carried it out.

In Chelston he was assistant parish priest from 1968 to 1971 and again from 1997 to 2003. The multipurpose hall served as a church. There was no house at the beginning of his stay there. He stayed with John of God Brothers in Chainama. He never stopped visiting people and never stopped planning. He used to say: "We need a bigger church in Chelston. Chainda and Kamanga have to become parishes." He was a prophet: During his second term in Chelston, Chainda became a parish and Kamanga later became a parish.

His last three years of active work were spent in Kasisi (2004-2007). He was becoming weaker; bouts of malaria began to have a more serious impact. He was retired to Chula House in 2007.

Hilary was a simple, prayerful man, a man of sacrifice. At Chula House he became a 'professional in prayer'. He broke his hip in 2012 and afterwards was confined to his bed or a wheelchair. But he never complained. He died peacefully in Chula House on 9 June 2016.