



**Br Jacob Longa, S.J.**  
(1856-1937. In Zambia 1913-1937)

**11 June 1937**

Jacob Longa was born on 21 October 1856 of a modest background in Maly (Slovakia). In his early years the family moved to Kezmarok in the north, under the high Tatras Mountains. His parents wanted him to become a blacksmith/mechanic and so he was apprenticed over a number of years. Once he had acquired sufficient skills he had a great desire to wander and see the world around him. He writes: 'In 1877 (at the age of 22) I set out as an apprentice blacksmith wandering through Kosice and Miskoved in Old Hungary'. Initially he headed for Debrecin but then suddenly he got the idea of going to Budapest. 'I wrote to my brother who was a diocesan priest for advice and he invited me to think about entering a monastery. He began thinking of the Trappists at Maria Laach in Bosnia. However his brother wrote telling him that he had a dream about Jacob and recommended he should think of the Jesuits. He had never even heard of them! He headed to Vienna and became a candidate and joined the Society in 1881. A whole new world opened up for him and his *Wanderlust* was transformed into a missionary vocation.

He volunteered to work among the cannibals in Northern Australia, near Darwin. It was a strange world for him - seeing the men heading off to hunt in preparation for a feast - to capture tribesmen! He noticed the absence of women and was told that the reason was that they were very tasty! - the men were careful obviously to protect their own womenfolk especially from young Europeans! At the end of 12 years the nearby Daly River flooded its banks and completely destroyed the whole Mission. It was decided in Rome to close the operation for the time being.

He spent a year back home in an area of Bosnia that had been recently relinquished by the Turks and the Church had to be re-founded. He requested to go to Mozambique under his fellow Slovak Fr Zimmermann in the Boroma Mission. By 1913 he was there and soon he was asked to man the steam boat that Fr Hiller had brought up the Zambezi - the *Salvador*. He was kept busy for ten years bringing up men and supplies to Boroma and other stations. At one stage he received a telegram from the Governor addressing him in a grandiose manner as '*Eccellentissimo e illustrissimo Commandante de Salvador*'. He often wondered was there ever a Jesuit brother with such an exalted title! However, with the Edict of Expulsion of 1910 he was sent back home. For the second time in his life he was obliged to leave his mission.

He fell ill but was convinced, that if he headed again for the missions, he would be alright. He wanted to be with some of his old companions beginning the new venture over the Luangwa River in Northern Rhodesia. His rector pointed out the folly of his choice saying he was really a sick man but Br Longa had a letter from the Assistant, Fr Ledochowski (later General) and replied 'Rome is a higher authority than you'.

In the early pioneering days of the Luangwa Mission they needed men who could put their hand to anything. 'In this mission (Chingombe) there were only five huts. I built 25 huts of bamboo cane and mud walls and a small chapel - while being the gardener and the housekeeper at the same time - all within a year'. Every now and then he appears in the reports when someone is needed as a companion. He was with Fr Czarlinski on his fatal journey from Katondwe to Kasisi when he passed away at Ku Sanje. He was fortunate to have the faithful Br Longa by his side (1921). The next year he accompanied Mgr Parry on his tour of the Mission from Kasisi to Chingombe.

Unfortunately on arrival at Katondwe Mgr Parry too was a sick man and misdiagnosed. He was treated for malaria but died a few days later of *chiufa*.

When he was transferred to Kasisi he set about renewing all the buildings, while looking after Fr Torrend who was quite unwell at the time. Later with Br Klopec he was involved in putting up the fine two-storey community house. He was sent to Mpima for three years and had to start from scratch, while at times living alone. He put up a school and 28 huts. He also burnt 150,000 bricks for the new residence at Broken Hill.

When he finally ended up in Kasisi again, he was an old man unable to do much. With his usual good humor he referred to himself as 'captain of the chickens'! He was a deeply religious man with the typical Slovak virtues of simplicity and goodwill. His care and love for the community and the people was obvious to all around him. Sometimes his brethren referred to him as the 'old beloved'. Despite his long years abroad he always maintained close contact with his people in Slovakia by letters and articles in mission publications. He passed away peacefully at Kasisi on 11 June 1937.