

June 24

Br STEPHEN CHIWANZA

1905 – 24 June 1978



One of three sons of Matsikabunyu and his wife Kodze in Mutoko, Stephen Chiwanza's early life was hard as his father died while he was still a boy and his mother was inherited and treated cruelly. They were at a Methodist mission and became Methodists but then Kodze too died. The boys grew up and married and Stephen had one child, Teresa, before his wife died. When she became sick, he took her to Musami hospital where she recovered. Stephen was impressed by Musami where he worked with Br Breiten and he was drawn to becoming a Catholic.

Fr Isidore Chikore is our source for Stephen's early life and he says the Jesuits gave land two miles from Musami, at Manhika, to start a farm to support the Seminary. Stephen worked there and gradually migrated to the Seminary itself where he continued to work in the gardens and farm. When the Peter Caver Brothers were formed as a congregation, Stephen joined them and worked with Br Boniface Gondo. They were both sent to Hama's to build up the mission with Fr Henry Swift.

In 1949, the two brothers moved to start Mount Mellary Mission almost from scratch, making the road and building the bridges. Stephen used to carry the children across the swollen rivers to and from school. Food was short and accommodation basic. Stephen started keeping bees and trapping animals for the pot. They did not eat with the Jesuits as Fr Tsuru did but had their own quarters. Chikore says Stephen had an influence on a number of people to take up their vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

In 1951 he was back at the seminary with Boniface and used to instruct his own brothers and their families in the faith. When the Peter Claver Brothers' congregation folded in the late 1960s, the brothers were offered the choice of joining the Jesuits. Stephen took this up though he was by then nearly 70. He had a one-year novitiate and in 1974 there was a terrific celebration for his vows (See photo of him and his daughter, Teresa). By this time farm work was too much and he gave it up in favour of book binding and repairs with Fr Trevor Paine at the Seminary. He had a stroke but recovered for a time but eventually succumbed. The seminarians danced for days (Ngondo, Christus vincit) to celebrate his life and the gift he was to them.