



Fr Ladislaus Lecznar, S.J.
(1905-1972. In Zambia 1948-1972)

9 July 1972

On Sunday 2 July at 6.30 p.m. Fr Lecznar returned home to Railway Parish house in Kabwe. After celebrating three Masses he had stopped by with his companions at St Mary's Parish for supper. He was a little worried since he thought someone was after him. A few times recently he was openly attacked in different ways and someone had entered his house several times to steal. Now there was nothing more of value that remained. The reports to the Police did not result in anything. As he came in the front door he went into the kitchen and was viciously attacked with a bread knife. He withdrew locking the door behind him and waited, for he thought the attacker would strike again. However he was bleeding profusely and a little later he went out into his car and drove to the teachers houses on the compound and blew the horn. The alarm was raised and he was speedily taken to Kabwe Hospital where fortunately the competent Czech surgeon was on duty. The doctor worked late into the night and there was good hope he would pull through. However after a week of apparent recovery, his heart gave out and he died. The people were deeply upset and a huge funeral of 6,000 gathered at the parish and walked all the way across town to St Mary's cemetery.

Ladislaus Lecznar was born on 20 September 1905 in Lancut, in south-eastern Poland and entered the Society of Jesus when he was barely sixteen years old. As a young Jesuit he asked to be sent to the newly established Vicariate of Broken Hill (Kabwe). It seems it was agreed since he was then sent to do his theology in Heythrop, so he could master English. Unfortunately poor health forced him to return to Poland at the end of his first year and he completed his theology in Lublin. He was ordained in June 1932 and was then sent to Wilna as a prefect of the boarding section in St Casimir Secondary School. In 1936 he was transferred to Kaliss as the minister of the novitiate.

At the start of the Second World War he followed a group of Polish soldiers evading the German occupation until they linked up with the Polish army, where he continued his work as a chaplain until the end of the war. He was in the first Division that liberated Belgium and Holland. Later in life he did not talk much about his various experiences.

After demobilization he again volunteered for the Lusaka Mission. He arrived in November 1948 and was soon assigned to Chingombe. He worked there for six years. In 1954 a new house was started at St Francis in Lusaka which until then had only been an outstation of Kasisi. He was given the job of setting it up and establishing a parish. He not only started a new parish but also added new outstations in Chinika and Mandevu which are now independent parishes themselves. The material conditions in the years following the war were very poor but he never complained for he had great trust in God's providence.

Three years later he was moved to Kabwe where he remained for many years working both as a pastor and superior of the local community. Although stationed at the Sacred Heart parish he visited small communities as far away as Chisamba and Kapiri Mposhi. In 1966 the tragic death occurred of a young American Jesuit, Fr John Murray who was killed in a car accident on the road out of Chingombe. Fr Lecznar, though no longer young, immediately volunteered to replace him and he spent the next two years there.

In 1968, with his success at St Francis behind him, he was asked to open a new house and parish at Railway in Kabwe. He did this with his usual enthusiasm and thoroughness and was still working there right up to his untimely death.

He was a generous man, initially volunteering for the missions when he was young, staying with his fellow soldiers when the going was tough, and later, when over 60, he offered himself for Chingombe. He was very dedicated to any job he was given and to the people he came to serve.

As a companion he was a friendly, quiet man, prayerful and maybe, because of the hardships he had to go through during the war, with a total trust in God's providence. In the last week of his life, while recuperating from the operation at Kabwe Hospital, his interest and conversation revolved, not around himself but around 'his people' – those he came to serve.