

11 July

Fr RUDOLF KENSY

3 April 1909 – 11 July 1981



‘Rudi’ had a passion to go to the Zambezi Mission but he had to wait until he was 52 to do so. Born in Leobschuetz, Upper Silesia, Germany, he remained close to his mother all his life and she died only four years before him. His sisters too were a constant support in his missionary life. He went to school in Breslau and was deeply impressed by the Jesuit preachers he heard there. Oscar Wermter tells us ‘the warm piety of his defiantly Catholic Upper Silesia stamped him for life. He entered the Society in 1930 and did his early studies at Valkenburg in Holland.

The 1930s saw the beginning of the German mission in Southern Rhodesia though German Jesuits had been coming as individuals for decades. Rudolf was assigned to this mission but was first sent to New York for his tertianship and to learn English. But the war broke out and he could neither proceed to Africa nor return to Germany.

He spent the war years teaching in Buffalo and in San Antonia with Mexican immigrants. In 1946 he was at last free to go to Africa but Fr General had decided that all German Jesuits should go to Germany to rebuild the provinces after the war. If they were to go to a mission land it would have to be Japan. Fr Kensy duly went to Japan but it did not work out. Oscar tells us ‘it soon became apparent that the refined culture of Japan was too much for Rudolf’s earthy kind of humour. He found everything overwhelmingly funny and his disarming sense for the scurrilous and comical did not go down well with the solemn ways of this ancient civilisation. The provincial realised this and had the good sense to allow him to leave.’

Rudolf returned to Germany where he taught for ten years at Canisius College. Among his students was Dieter Scholz. When the new German initiative in Southern Rhodesia was started in 1959, he volunteered and so, at last, arrived in Africa in 1961. It was a time of rapid expansion in Sinoia and frayed nerves

Starting in Sinoia and later Marymount, he moved to Makonde for five years where he founded St Rupert’s mission with Br Werner. He was fulfilling of his lifelong dream. But gradually it became too much for him and he went as assistant to Frs Freyer and later Schmidt in Chitsungo. In 1978 he returned to Germany because of ill health and died in Marburg after several painful operations.

