



**Br Andrew Perdik, S.J.**  
**(1918-2001. In Zambia 1948-2001)**

**13 July 2001**

Andrew Perdik was born on 9 June 1918 in the Slovakian village of Rakos from Pavol and Julie Koran Perdik. He had two sisters (one a religious) and a brother. After his primary school he did two years of business study and two years as an apprentice to a butcher. As Slovakia accommodated itself to Hitler's policies, the country did not suffer too much during the war. He was a butcher by trade and when he was drafted into the German army in 1939 he ended up being in charge of the officers' mess. He was released in 1941 and then he entered the novitiate at Ruzomberok. He was however then drafted into the Russian army from 1943-1945 as a cook.

When the war was over and the Russian army took over the country, the superiors realized that they would no longer be able to train scholastics. Scholastic Stephen Hirjak managed to get the necessary papers from the Russian authorities and they all left to continue their training in England at Heythrop College. Fr Paddy Moloney remembers a great avalanche of about 20 Jesuits from Eastern Europe all arriving one day in Heythrop. The Slav Assistant, Fr Preseren seized the opportunity to request volunteers to go to the Northern Rhodesia Mission and soon he had Hirjak, Perdik, Svec and Hancko. Br Perdik spent only a short time learning English before heading off to Lusaka in 1948 while the others settled down to their theological studies. Years later Br Perdik still spoke a mixture of Slovak, English and Polish!

From the beginning, he proved to be a very valuable addition to the Mission. He used his many talents, his initiative and his energy in many areas for the support of the community and for helping the local population. His first initiative in Chingombe was to acquire a new tractor, bring it to the escarpment and then dismantling it and have it carried over the hills to the Mission. It took two men to carry a front wheel, four for a rear wheel, eight for the gearbox etc. He made a great many friends amongst the Africans, who remembered him and came to visit him right up to his death. They called him 'Gwere', literally an antelope but in common parlance something like 'great guy'. Of his 54 years in Zambia, he spent 24 of them in Chingombe which is the most difficult of the mission stations; then 13 years in Katondwe, 14 years at Kasisi and the last three in Chula House.

The most permanent and possible the greatest service Br Perdik gave to the Mission, was his work in Chingombe. Shortly after he arrived the other brother, old Br Pacek passed away, so Br Perdik had to be the jack of all trades, taking care of everything. Fr Froch, the superior, relied on him for everything since there was no motor road to the nearest business centre of Broken Hill (Kabwe) which was 150 km away. Only by using footpaths through the Muchinga Mountains were carriers able to bring in the most necessary of goods. In 1951 on the request of the Apostolic Administrator, Fr Kozlowieki, he started the construction of the long-planned road through the hills. It was a tough job and Br Perdik and his 70 workers spent three months in the bush, working with pickaxe and shovel, living and sleeping in huts made of branches. The bush abounded in lions, hyenas, leopards, elephants and game of all kinds, so Br 'Gwere' Perdik provided them with meat. By 1952 the road was ready and the Administrator himself was the first to use it, with his four-wheel drive Landrover. The Colonial Administration claimed it was not feasible and would not contribute, so the Church had to pay for everything. Eventually the road was officially registered by the Government

with the name 'Perdik Pass' and still carries the sign on the road 'Perdik's Pass 4-wheel drive vehicles only'. In 1964, after Zambia's Independence, this achievement merited him a medal of honor from President Kaunda, which made it easy for him to obtain a Zambian citizenship of which he was very proud.

His 13 years stay at Katondwe, though not so glamorous, was in no way less important, as Br Peter Osterkiewicz was already very old and soon went to Lusaka to be cared for, so Br Perdik had to look after the cattle, the gardens and the transport of goods to and from Lusaka, 280 km away. Kasisi was his last post of responsibility. His health was already showing signs of decline but he was near good medical services. The herd of almost 300 cattle created an income for the Mission as well as providing meat at a cheaper price to Jesuits and some other communities in Lusaka. Br Perdik was always reliable, easy to deal with and willing to serve.

At his golden jubilee in 1991, the preacher enlarged on the vocation of a Jesuit brother, saying that the spirit of faith and dedication to the person of Jesus Christ was especially important. The more glamorous priestly vocation can sometimes supply for the need of a living faith by the self-satisfying feeling of success. The life of a brother, especially a hidden and less attractive life like that of Br Perdik, cannot be explained and lived except by the spirit of faith and dedication to Christ.

Eventually his legs gave out and he could no longer move around the farm and so reluctantly he came to Chula House where he soon settled in and still could be seen walking slowly with a stick while fingering his beads. He died peacefully on the night of the 13 July 2001.