



**Fr John Murray, S.J.**  
**(1922-1966. In Zambia 1965-1966)**  
**15 August 1966**

When Fr John (sometimes nicknamed Little John or Honest John) was learning chiBemba at the Language Centre at Ilondola he wrote in a letter, 'Unfortunately the people in the villages near here are fed up with priests practicing Bemba on them'. He was an interesting letter writer (newsletter, really) and wrote back to his friends and relatives in Oregon.

Fr John was born in Havre, MT on 1 November 1922. He entered the Society at Sheridan, Oregon, in 1941. For regency he taught at Bellarmine High School for three years and went on to theology at Alma College in California but came back to St Aloysius Church in Spokane for ordination in 1954. After tertianship, he taught at Seattle Prep School from 1958 to 1960. He then moved as pastor to St Joseph's Church at Hardin in Montana for five years. He always wanted to come on the missions and got his chance in 1965 when he came to Zambia, arriving on the 8 July.

The first step was to learn the language which was chiBemba. He was destined for Chingombe, a remote far-away station in the valley, about 130 miles from Kabwe. To within 15 miles of Chingombe the road enters the pass over the escarpment. From this point on, it becomes a steep and dangerous road that winds and climbs its way over the mountains. Brother Perdik, who lived at Chingombe at the time, had cut a pass through the mountains in spite of the Government's estimation that a road through the mountains to Chingombe was impossible.

Fr John moved to Chingombe. Going to or from Chingombe to Kabwe takes many hours because of the 'road' and this was the first time that Fr John was to drive up from the mission by landrover. With him were Fr Augustino Chileshe (a diocesan priest who had been working in the valley) and six school boys. To quote from an account: "The accident occurred as the landrover was climbing a steep grade. On the right, the driver's side of the road, there was a steep precipice and the downward slope of the mountain. On the left side of the road was the upward slope. As Fr John's passengers reconstructed the accident, it seems that the vehicle stalled near the top of the grade. It began to roll backward. Father applied the brakes but they did not hold. As the vehicle gathered speed, Father turned it into the rock bank on the left. The impact of the momentum was such that it bounced the car forward and across the road towards the precipice. At this point, Father shouted to the boys who were riding in the uncovered back end of the landrover, to jump out onto the road. Those few seconds, that he took to act for their safety were time enough for the landrover to reach the edge of the road, so that when Father opened the door and jumped out he fell over the precipice, the falling vehicle instantly landed on top of him and he was killed".

Fr Augustine and the six boys escaped with bruises. This was on 15 August, the feast of the Assumption 1966, the same day that Fr John had entered the Society in 1941, 25 years earlier.

In this remote area, the news spread rapidly in that mysterious way that bad news always travels. People began to arrive from nearby villages to pay their respects and pray, walking long distances to do so. The body was brought up to Kabwe where the funeral Mass was celebrated by Archbishop Adam and fellow priests and a large crowd of Sisters and people.

Fr John was a generous and humble servant of God and his last charitable act was

to ensure the safety of the passengers with him in the landrover.

Over the precipice near Perdik's Pass is a small monument which reads:

Fr John C Murray - killed tragically

15 - 8 - 1966