



Fr Lawrence Tomazin, S.J.
(1930-2009. In Zambia 1967-2009)

8 October 2009

Lawrence (Lovro) Tozamin was born in the small village of Vrhe in southern Slovenia on 27 October 1930. In his youth the country was completely Catholic and, even after 50 years of Communist influence, the little village of Vrhe still had 1924 Catholics out of a total population of 1927!

When Lawrence was eleven, disaster struck. First came the Second World War and the occupation. Then the Communist revolution and civil war and in 1945 the Communists took over the government. Many Christians fled the country, including the Tomazins. For the next three years he lived in a refugee camp where he received his secondary education. In 1948 the family emigrated to Argentina. There he had to work to help in the support of his family but while doing so, he finished his schooling. At one time he was a taxi driver in Buenos Aires. Such hardships did not diminish the faith of his family. His sister entered a Carmelite convent which may explain Lawrence's strong devotion to St Teresa. For some time he lived near Lujan, the national Marian shrine. He was so impressed by it that later, it seems, he tried to recreate it in Zambia!

He had planned for a long time to go to a seminary to be a priest, so he entered the diocesan seminary in 1957 and was ordained in 1963. However since he really wanted to work on the Missions, he decided to enter the Society in 1964 for that purpose.

After the novitiate he was sent to India where he learned English and finished his Jesuit education. The faith and practice of the Indian Catholics made a deep impression on him.

In 1967 he came to Zambia and after a course of chiNyanja, he was sent to Katondwe to assist Fr Plawecki. But after a year or so, Fr Plawecki died in a traffic accident in Lusaka and Lawrence was appointed parish priest and superior of Katondwe. He set to work with great enthusiasm and energy. He renovated and improved the mission house and church and built five other churches: Kapoche, Mwavi, Janeiro, Chiriwe and Feira (now Luangwa Boma). He rose early each day and raced around his parish at a great speed. They called him '*Kansongole*', a fast growing weed!

In 1974 he was transferred to Chelston, where he was to spend a full twenty years. For the first ten years he was the parish priest and during that period he built three more churches: Chelston, Kamanga and Chainda. The new name the people had for their fast driving priest was '*Zambia Airways*'! The congregations continued to grow steadily but he wanted to reach out to others as well. He wanted to make the Spiritual Exercises available to people, he wanted to organize pilgrimages and he wanted to spread devotion to Our Lady. He saw all these activities as means for deepening the faith of the people. With the approval of the Archbishop he began to work on two projects: the Marian Shrine and the Pastoral Centre. Though he completed neither of them, he laid the ground plan and had a solid infrastructure up and running by the time he left.

In 1994 Archbishop Mung'andu appointed others to take charge of the projects and Lawrence returned to parish work. First he was sent to Mumbwa, and after four years to Matero and five years later to Kasisi. At Kasisi he began a new center at Kanakantapa on which he was still working till the very day of his death. When he was

sick, he directed the work from his bed. Until his last day, he was laboring hard to spread devotion to Mary and to the Sacred Heart. He died on 8 October from cancer.

Looking back on his life, I see three characteristics that stand out. Over all, he deeply loved God, Jesus, Mary and his favorite saints. He lived with them, he talked to them, he even argued with them. He told me once, that when he wanted to build the Church of the Sacred Heart at Kwavi, he had no money. So he said, 'Jesus, I will build this church for you, but you provide the money'!

Secondly, he had a genuine concern for simple people. He learned the local language well. He was constantly teaching both adults and children himself. When there was no catechism to give to the catechumens, he composed one himself. When there was no simple prayer book, he wrote *Ambuye, Mutiphunzitse Kupemphera* (which at K100 was for a long time the cheapest book in Zambia). He held the Legion of Mary in high regard. He believed in holy pictures and distributed them at a very modest price.

Thirdly, he was tenacious. When he believed that something was right, he pursued it even against all odds, against all opposition and against all obstacles. Setbacks he perceived as sufferings sent to him by God himself. During his last sickness he asked many people to pray for a miraculous recovery and he firmly believed that the miracle would happen. This explains the activities of his last days, saying even two Masses on the Sunday, before he passed away on Thursday. However God decided otherwise. I firmly believe that God himself received him generously into everlasting life.