



Br Joseph Rovtar, S.J.
(1927-2019. In Zambia 1967-2010)

14 October 2019

Joseph Rovtar was born in Topole, Kaanj, Slovenia, on 22 March 1927 to Jacob and Rosalia (Megusar) Rovtar. After his primary schooling, he did two years secondary at Clasic in Ljubljana. He entered the novitiate in Zagreb in 1953. Later he did his tertianship in Maribor (1964-1965).

Initially he worked in St Lawrence parish in Ljubljana (1955-1962), then in Dravtli (1963-1964) and finally in Brezje (1964-1967) where he was involved in the printing press and in catechesis.

Fr John Mujdrlica says “The first time I met Joe was in 1965. I was in the group of scholastics on a two-week holiday in the Slovenian Alps. We stayed in an old parish house. Joe was responsible for food and house maintenance. He was very friendly and happy. Above all, he made us sing our traditional songs and admire the beautiful mountains. He would repeat again and again: ‘Slovenia is beautiful!’ I was surprised when I heard two years later, that Joe had left Slovenia to be a missionary in Zambia.”

When he was missioned to Zambia, he was sent to learn English in Malta, with Br Dilber and Fr Andelic. Because of his obvious secretarial skills, it was planned to send him to the UK to do an additional book-keeping course, but it never materialized. He arrived in Zambia in 1967 and was immediately assigned to assist Fr Lou Haven in the diocesan education office at Sacred Heart in Kabwe. While there he did a short course in bookkeeping. As the primary schools managed by the Church were being handed over to the Government, he was then sent to Mpima.

Mpima at that time had more than 250 people: about 120 minor and 80 major seminarians, as well as over 20 teachers and lecturers. There were over 30 workers under him. He had everything organized and worked hard, even at night and weekends. He was liked by all because of his kindness and good leadership. He remained there for 12 years.

In 1986, he was transferred to the Jesuit novitiate in Lusaka, where he worked for 24 years. He was responsible for food, buildings, the big garden, poultry, cars and finances. He taught the novices how to cook, clean the place, work in the garden and look after their bicycles.

“In 2011 he became quite ill due to back problems. The doctors in Lusaka tried to help him but failed. As a result the Provincial asked me (John Mujdrlica) to take Joe to Slovenia. “I was afraid it would be a most difficult journey. Even though he was in great pain, he behaved as if everything was alright. I thanked God for his courage and kindness.”

He went back to Dravtje where he had begun his ministry and finally to a retirement home. Fr Mujdrlica wrote: “...In 2019, when I was on leave, I found him in a home for retired religious run by a group of Sisters. When In Ljubljana, I would visit him every day. He like to talk about Zambia, He was very grateful to God for the time he worked as a missionary. He told me he offered his pain to God for the wellbeing of Zambia.”

His gentle and unobtrusive service during these 30 years at Mpima and the novitiate, endeared him to the seminarians and to the novices. At his funeral he received beautiful comments from our young men on ‘What’s up’: “Joe is a saint - a godly person – an excellent religious - and a great missionary.”