

Oct 29, 1985



SILVIO MOREIRA

1941- 1985 (extreme right of the picture)

JOÃO DE DEUS

GONÇALVES

KAMTEDZA

1930-1985 (second from right)

On 4 September 1985 the Jesuits in Mozambique learnt the hard truth that their companions, Frs Silvio Moreira and João de Deus Gonçalves Kamtedza, had been murdered five days earlier on the night of 29/30 October in Chapotera, where the Jesuits had moved when Lifidzi Mission in Angonia had been nationalised. The soldiers on the government side in the civil war that followed Independence (1974) were believed to be responsible. It seems they were bent on silencing the criticism by the Church of the terror tactics they were using towards civilians. By this time several Jesuits and nuns had been kidnapped by the guerrillas and handed over to Caritas in Zimbabwe. So when the two Jesuits went missing it was believed they suffered the same fate.

When the Jesuits returned to Mozambique in 1941 – they had been expelled four times and they returned four times - they made Angonia the main focus of their mission. By the time of the civil war the district was a flourishing centre for Christianity. Now there were disappearances and kidnappings and the Jesuits, who opted to stay with the people rather than retire to the safety of the cities, were sharing the ordeal of the people. When the priests did not return to their base on the 29 October the people became anxious but it took several days to find the bodies. They were beginning to decompose and were partly eaten by wild animals when they were found some 300 meters from the outstation. They had been bayoneted to death.

Fr João de Deus Gonçalves Kamtedza was born in Vila Mouzinho, Angonia, in 1930, eleven years earlier than Silvio. He studied in Boroma before going to Portugal to enter the Minor Seminary and joined the Jesuit novitiate, as Silvio was later to do, at Soutelo in 1951. He did his theology in Spain and was ordained in 1964 at Lifidzi. He went on to serve as a missionary to his own people for many years in Fonte Boa, Satemwa, and finally at Chapotera. Fr João was always joyful, talkative, compassionate and full of confidence. His friends in Portugal remembered his love for his home through his songs which he shared with them and through which he nourished missionary vocations. There were no limits to his apostolic involvement and he understood the people and they treated him with respect and love. It was hard to imagine Angonia without Fr João. He was constantly on the move encouraging people in faith and hope.

A letter written by him shortly before his death expresses his feelings: How can we continue? Are we to be dominated by desolation? What have we to say to bring peace to the people? We keep meeting discouragement in the pastoral meetings with the people. In the face of all this violence what can one say? There is terror and panic and houses are being burnt. How can I not suffer in the midst of this cruel reality?

These two Jesuits, one a Mozambican, one a Portuguese, were killed together as martyrs of Angonia. There were many other Christians who met similar fates and the Jesuits' deaths draw attention to them too. The suffering of that time was a sharing in the Passion of Jesus – the greatest of all manifestations of the love of the Father for his people.

30 October

8 March 1930 – 30 October 1985

Fr. João de Deus Gonçalves KAMTEDZA

Born at Vila Mouzinho, Tete, Mozambique, on 08 March 1930, he entered the Society of Jesus on 01 September 1951, at College of Caldas da Saúde. He continued his Novitiate in Soutelo, Braga, where he also did his Juniorate. He studied Philosophy in Braga and did his regency in Mozambique, at the Teacher Training School, in Boroma and at the mission, of Fonte Boa (1958 - 1961). He did his theology in San Cugat del Vallés, Barcelona and was ordained priest on August 15, 1964, in Lifidzi, Mozambique. After his tertianship in Salamanca (1965 - 1966), he returned to Mozambique. He took his final vows on 02 February 1968, in Lifidzi. He was superior of the missions of Fonte Boa, Satémwa and Chapotera. He was murdered on 30 October 1985, near the residence of Chapotera, to silence him as he was defending the rights and dignity of his Mozambican brothers. He is considered one of the martyrs of the 20th century. Fr. João was a joyful Jesuit with a radiant sympathy.

(Cf. APSI, Livro das entradas; Necrológio; JESUÍTAS..., n. 117, Novembro 1985)