



**Fr Joakim Mtima Chisemphere, S.J.**

**(1958-1997)**

**30 October 1997**

Joakim Mtima Chisemphere was born on 9 April 1958 at Mbidzi village in the Dedza District of Malawi. He was baptized at Kasina Parish when he was eleven. His secondary school was St Kizito Minor Seminary (1972-1977), where, with his brother, he started a youth club in which he taught catechism and singing.

After school he entered the Major Seminary at Kachebere (philosophy) for three years and then went to St Peter's Zomba (theology) for another three years. He took leave of absence for two years (1983-1985) and worked in a bank. On returning to the seminary he was ordained for the Dedza Diocese in 1986. His first assignment was at his old school of St Kizito's.

With a letter of freedom from his bishop, he entered the novitiate at Lusaka in 1989. After vows in 1991, he was appointed chaplain at Canisius Secondary School (1992-1993). He then spent some time studying theology at Hekima (Nairobi) and at Heythrop College (London). He was then appointed curate in Matero Parish, Lusaka (1996).

In 1997 he then spent some time in Zomba submitting a proposal for doctoral studies at the University of Malawi on the integral development of the social and political reality of Malawi from a Christian point of view. Having arranged his study program, he joined the Jesuit community at Lilongwe on 2 October. Fr Cremins wrote: "He was an interesting and lively addition to our community, always with some new ideas or a pastoral plan that not seldom provoked lively discussion. With his great gift for friendship he was renewing his contacts among the clergy and religious of the Diocese. His cordial relations with them were one of the things that gave such hope for a fruitful apostolate here'.

He headed for Lusaka to attend a Province Planning Commission meeting, stopping at Mchinji to visit his mother, to whom he was deeply attached. On 30 October 1997, just outside Lusaka, at Chinyungu near Chongwe, he ran into a contractor's truck on the side of the road shortly after dark. He was alone in the car and when brought to the University Teaching Hospital, the police tried to contact the authorities in Malawi because of his passport. It took several days before the news of his death came back, through Fr Geoghegan at Kachebere.

A great crowd attended the funeral Mass at Matero. Then the remains were taken to Likuni where a vast crowd of clergy, religious and laity were present. He was buried beside Fr John Carroll (New England Province) who passed away at Kachebere in April 1990.

He was only 39 years old when he died and yet in some ways he had completed a life's journey. He was an intelligent person with a gift for writing and a great desire to continue studying and developing his talents for the service of others. He was in the habit of writing essays about his own experience and the need for the social teaching of the Church in pastoral ministry. Even in the novitiate he composed a few pages on *The role I see for myself as an educated Jesuit in Malawi*. After his few years in Canisius he wrote 'As one of the first African chaplains in the school I have taken my principle of putting God first, people second, things last and myself least. My listening and

respecting people and seeing God in everything, are some of my secrets, and not forgetting prayer and transparency’.

He was becoming more involved in trying to see his ministry as an answer to the integral development of the people around him. His years in Nairobi and London were opportunities for him to build on his previous studies in the major seminary. One of the high points of his life was to attend the Jesuit Social Apostolate International Congress in Naples (Italy) in 1997. Meeting 150 Jesuits from all over the world ‘left an indelible mark on me’. They were just my elder brothers and I felt this in my heart and I was at home with them. I saw justice and love marry to produce peace’.

In his memory one of the communities in Arrupe College, Harare is called ‘Mtima’.