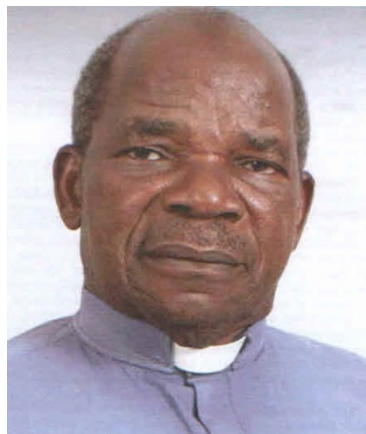


17 December

Fr IGNATIUS ZVARAVASHE

15 December 1943 –

17 December 2019



Ignatius Zvaravashe was born, he tells us, into a polygamist family in Chitsa, Gutu, and attended DRC Gonye Primary School, Catholic Mutero Mission and Gokomere Secondary. It was then that he developed his interest in literature. His family were against his and his sister's religious vocations and he struggled with this and with illness in the 1960s. He tells us he consulted traditional healers who helped him and developed his interest 'in *midzimu* (ancestral spirits) and *mashavi* (wondering spirits)'. Fr Raymond Kapito

was consulted and after interviewing him recommended him for the Society but that he should 'have a good holiday' first.

This writer has written about Zvaravashe elsewhere and here summarises what he then wrote. 'He was a sensitive person and his Shona novels were highly appreciated. But he found living among whites grated on his spirit and he would lash out at times. There was an article he wrote for AFER to which he gave the title, *Racism Still Lingers in The Church in Zimbabwe*, a title that was changed and sensationalised by the editor and it left a scar in his relationship with his own white brothers. Dominic Tomuseni helps us understand him better. He calls him *Mhazi*, the lion that refused to be caged. He was misunderstood even by as eminent a person as Fr Otene Matungulu, Assistant for Africa. So how much more was he an enigma to his white brothers, one of whom saw him as 'a loose cannon'. Zvarevashe often expressed a desire to teach a course at either Arrupe Jesuit University or Hekima University College, but neither was willing to offer him the opportunity. He was unsettled and seemed to see 'karabha' (colour bar) everywhere. Dominic concluded, 'Zvaravashe expressed a deep desire for the Church in Africa to be truly African. Because of this desire he suffered greatly. ... He was a man with 'far-seeing eyes', who saw that in Christianity there is more than the European garb in which it was dressed when it came to Africa. ... There is something in Christianity with which Africans in their own way and culture could engage. His writings are not the lamentations of a restrained man but the proclamations of a free man'.

Zvaravashe served in a variety of places: In 1975 he was in Mhondoro for regency. After ordination in 1979 he went to Chitsungo, Mount Darwin,

Guruve, Mabelreign, Braeside, Rothwell Farm, Lusaka (novitiate), Marymount, Chinhoyi and finally Braeside. At each place he stayed for four or five years except for Chinhoyi where he was for twelve. Over the years he published 17 books or pamphlets, mostly in Shona.

Towards the end he became ill again as he had been in his early days. This time it was cancer. Treatment in South Africa brought some relief but his health steadily grew worse. It was not long after he celebrated his fifty years as a Jesuit that he finally succumbed to the illness just two days after his 76th birthday.