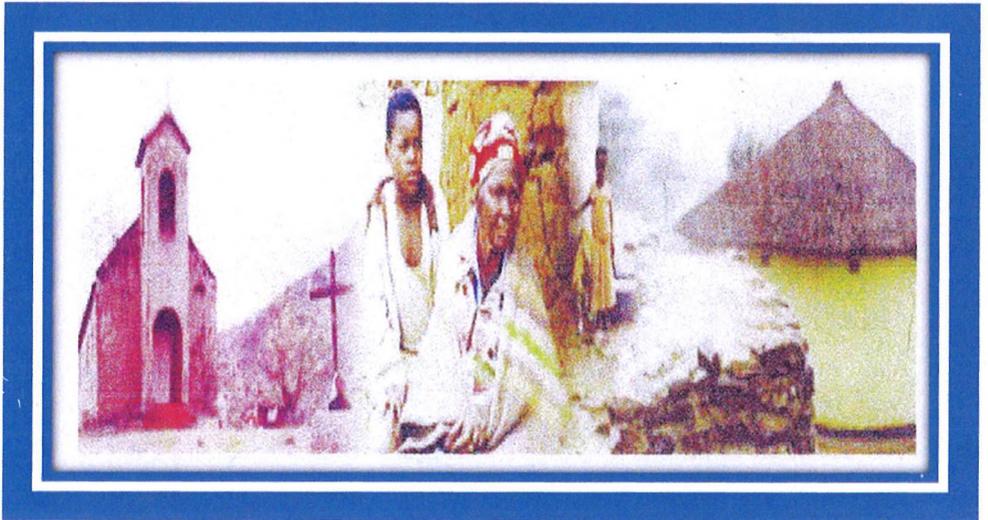


Stories from the  
Valley of 1000 Hills

BANTUBA hle



Stories John Poole OMI

Drawings Fr Jean-Baptiste Abadie MIC

Illustrations Helen Byrne

# BANTUBA hie INTRODUCTION

I invite you to follow me if you wish into the Valley of 1000 Hills and be as amazed as I was when at the age of 29. I went there never suspecting that I was to learn and learn and learn. It all started with the Zulu language which is a most unusual language as it is intertwined with a number of strange sounds that people now call “clicks” for want of a better name. Those with dentures better beware as to make the clicks requires quite a gymnastic of the tongue, mouth, and lips. .

Where in fact did these people come from? Well history tells us that they were part of the migration of the Bantu about 9<sup>th</sup> century down the East Coast of Africa and settled in what is now KwaZulu. They were a formidable nation united about 1818 under the King Shaka.

Of course as in all parts of the world wars were inevitable. The Zulus fought the British who had colonized the country. Won some battles and then finally lost out. Then as the History of South Africa entered the Apartheid in 1948, we find that the “Reserves” were to be transformed into “Homelands or Bantustans” of which there were 10, as you notice on the map below.

This was part of the plan of the Central Government to make all these Bantu people citizens of their respective ethnic Homeland. But speaking for the Zulu group I know that the Chief Minister in KwaZulu Chief Gatsha Buthelezi constantly refused the offer of independent status so that all the Zulu remained Citizens of the Republic of South Africa.

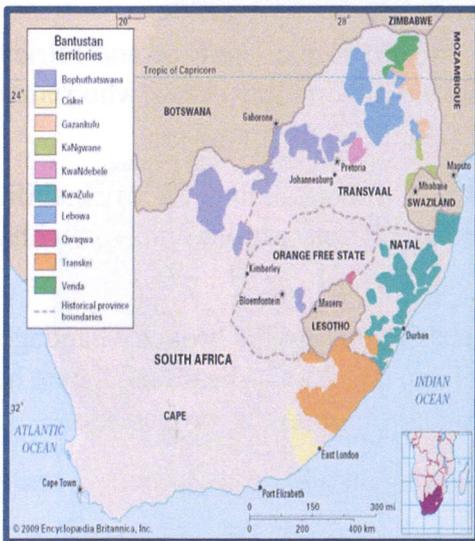
Coming as a Priest among these people I brought Christianity with me only to discover that most Zulu claimed their beliefs to be Christian. Nevertheless many Zulu retained their Traditional Pre-Christian belief system of Ancestor Worship in parallel with their Christianity. Here I learnt that they had no problem accepting the Catholic Thanksgiving ceremony the Eucharist or Sacrifice of the Mass, since they also from time to time offered a sacrifice to appease the Ancestor spirits and after their ceremony they each not only had their form of Communion eating part of the meat sacrificed but were all given

a small bracelet to put on their wrist made of the skin of the animal sacrificed so as to witness their solidarity with the Ancestors.

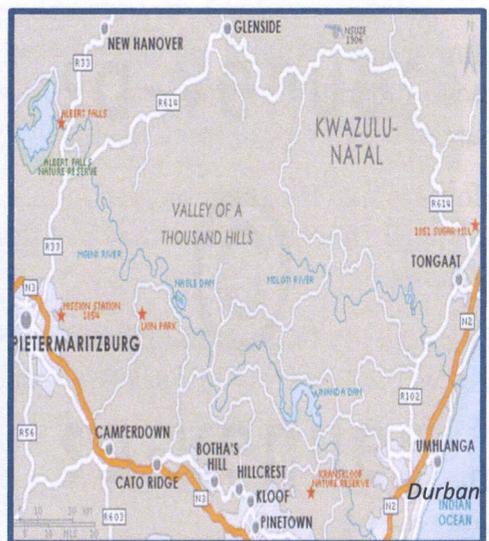
Living at Mbava in the Valley of 1000 Hills Reserve /Homeland I came to realize that in fact these homelands which consisted of 20% of the National Area of South Africa was supposed to be the home to 41 million people all black, and the other 10 million to inhabit the republic of South Africa 80% of the National Area.

Obviously this called for redress and it came about on the 27<sup>th</sup> April 1994 when the Homelands or Bantustans ceased to exist and were incorporated into the New 9 Provinces of a Democratic South Africa. With this background of History and facts here are two maps to help you find the exact spot where all these stories took place

A



B



A - The map of the Republic of South Africa showing the 10 Homelands or Bantustan territories. The Homeland that concerns us is the GREEN KwaZulu. As you see KwaZulu is made up of a number of parcels of land not one entire unit.

B - The Map of the Valley of 1000 Hills one of parcels of the above KwaZulu Homeland which is situated between Durban on the coast and

Pietermaritzburg 80 Km to the North West. It was in this area that I lived in the Mission of St Paul Mbava with its outstations and in and between which these stories were lived out in reality.

I hope it is possible to realise the immense learning process I underwent during those years 1965 – 1978 as I ministered in this Valley of 1000 Hills to the Zulu People. I came as a young man of 29 years with much zeal and a little knowledge of Philosophy and Theology. With all the good will in the world but quite unaware of the pitfalls that this enthusiasm can lead one to fall into.

In Lourdes 1994 I looked back and realised just how much learning was needed and how much I had been able to learn on the job. I became vividly conscious of the richness of the Zulu people's basic values and way of life and the utter delight I had in their language, customs, fairy stories, and Proverbs.

How much I wished I could turn back the clock and calendar and retrieve those situations and meet once more those people in the stories who remain nameless but whose faces are indelibly marked on my memory.

How I would love to apologise for my lack of understanding. For my inability to see the graced moment they had lived in their very actions and which I had completely missed.

I particularly think of the lady in the Sacristy holding the broken / bandaged Paschal candle How Jesus himself must have ached as he heard me berate her despite her valiant sensitive efforts to patch him up in this brokenness.

The same goes for all the other stories which you will discover one by one as you read on.

# Valley of 1000 Hills

25<sup>th</sup> June 2017



# The Valley of 1000 Hills

In the Valley of a Thousand Hills

There are Zulus who speak Zulu all the time It's a language with a click sound  
That explodes just like a cracker  
And it makes you jump quite high just like a mine

If you ever wish to visit them

You had better start to practice on the clicks

With a "qaqa" and a "leqa"

and a "qeda" and a "qoqa"

I request don't snap your fingers please no tricks.

If you're hungry and you want some food

Well just tell them you're "lambile" with a smile

Then be ready for some "phuthu"

and some "masi" will sure follow

And you "gwinya" all so quickly all the while.

You know Zulu people all drink beer,

But you will not have a glass for you know who. In community you'll drink your fill

And wipe the rim so carefully

then pass the bowl

to neighbor next to you.

When you visit in a Rondavel

Please be careful stay on side right at the door

Coz the ladies must go left, just as the gents will take the right and

So they both sit down in silence on the floor In the ev'ning in the Summer time

Ev'ry family lights a fire at their door

As you look across the valle, it's a fairy land of lights that draws the flying ants to gather by the score.

When you take a walk outside the house,

Please be sure you keep your eyes upon the ground

There are snakes called mambas green and black and boom slangs

that sure hang from trees and each of them's a deadly bite we found.

Let me offer you another tip

It's connected with your health so you can win If it's stuffy in the house you're in

and you need air say "Vula" "Vala"

magic words to let the fresh air in.

I am sure you've seen the Zulu bead They will always have a message to convey

In the colours and the patterns

they have weaved a loving message

That is meant to wish you well upon your way.

In the Valley of a Thousand Hills

You will notice that Politeness is a boon

"Siyabonga" is a "Thank you!",

"Ungadinwa nangomuso", "Sobonana,"

"Hamba Kahle",

"See you soon!"

# The Valley of 1000 Hills

Allegro

Words & Music John Poole OMI

Accomp. Jean-Paul Lécot MIC

Organ

In the Val - ley of a Thou - sand Hills  
 If you wish to ver - sand them,  
 You know hun - gry and you want some food  
 When you vi - sit in a ron - da mer time  
 In the ev - ning in the sum - mer the hour  
 When you take a walk out - side no - ther tip  
 Let me am the sure you've seen the a Thou - lu beads  
 In the Val - ley of a Thou - lu Hills

There are Zu - lus who speak Zu - lu all the time.  
 you had bet - ter start to prac - tise on the clicks.  
 well just tell them you're Lam - bi - le with a smile  
 but you will not have a glass for you a know who.  
 please be care - ful stay on side right at the door  
 ev - ry fam - ily lights fi - re at their door  
 please be sure you keep your eyes u - pon the ground  
 it's con - ned with your health so you can win  
 they will no - tice that po - lite - ness is a ve - yoon

It's a lan - guage with a click sound that ex - plodes just like a  
 With a qa - qa and a le - qa and some ma - da and a  
 Then be rea - dy for some phu - thu fill and si will sure  
 in com - mu - ni - ty you'll drink your as the gents will rim so  
 coz the la dies must the val - ley it's a bai ry land of  
 there are snakes called a mam - bas green and black and boom slangs that sure  
 if it's staf - fy in the house you're in and you need air say  
 in the co - lours and the pat - terns they have weaved a lo - ving  
 Si - ya bo - nga is a Thank you U nga din - wa na ngo -

crac - ker and it makes you jump quite high just like a mine.  
 go - qa. I re - quest dont sanp your fin - gers please no tricks!  
 fol - low and you gwin - ya all so quick - ly all the while.  
 care - ful - ly then pass the bowl to the neigh - bour next to you.  
 right and so you both sit down in si - lence on the floor.  
 lights that draws the fly - ing ants by the score.  
 hang from trees and each of them's a dead - ly bite we air found!  
 vu - la va - la ma - gic words to let the fresh air in.  
 mes - sage that is meant to wish you well u pon your way.  
 mu so So - bo na - na Hain - ba Ka - hile see you soon!



## PREFACE

BANTUBAHLE, the title of this series of short stories is a ZULU word meaning DUSK i.e. late, late afternoon when the shadows are long. Literally speaking BANTUBAHLE means BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE because at that time of the day one cannot see any details of the persons or things just a silhouette and so all are seen under the one description – BEAUTIFUL.

**Part of my LIFE JOURNEY is expressed in these 10 short stories that are true events.**

Having lived the morning and the midday of my life, I now have arrived at the moment of Dusk when through the maturing and purifying forces of life I am able to see all as Beautiful. All the rest fades into the background and the true nature of all people as sons and daughters of the Father becomes the focal point.

No matter where you are in your life's Journey, the Father in His Providence leads you forward to union with Himself. His one request to us is "Keep your eyes on Jesus!" Hebrews 12/2



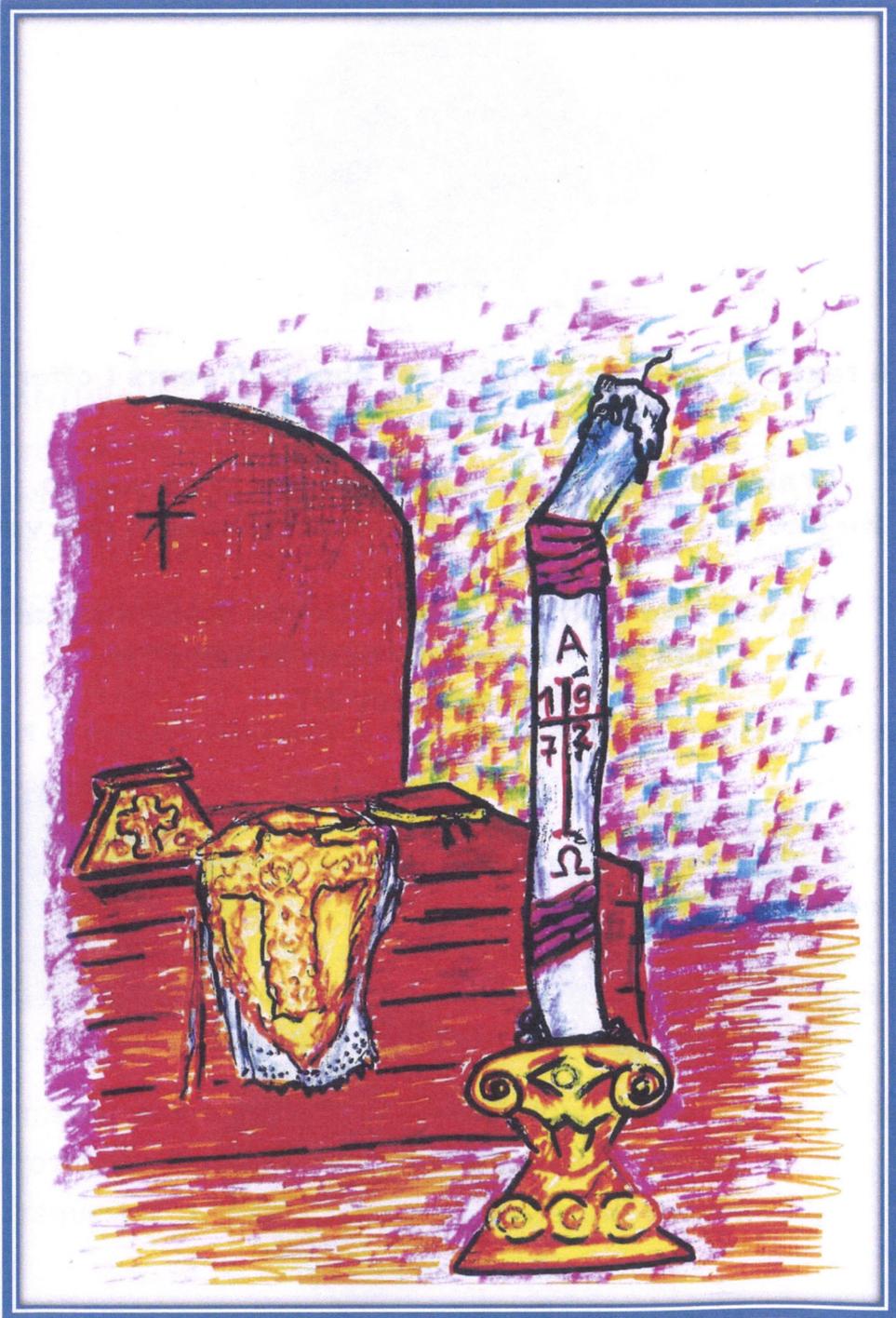
**A text that has inspired me for about 20 years I offer to you for your own journey.**

**“Yahweh your God has blessed you in all you do. He has watched over your journeying through this vast wilderness.**

**Yahweh your God has been with you these 40 years and you have never been in want”**

**Deuteronomy 2/7**





## **THE PASCHAL CANDLE**

Easter the central feast of the year is prepared for by 40 days of fasting and penance. It is long awaited each year and was awaited before the coming of Jesus for thousands of years. There are many allusions to this coming in the Old Testament; one being the 3 days of Jonah in the whale.

So it is, that each year, I looked forward to celebrating the feast of Easter with all the signs of the Resurrection. The sign that seemed most significant being the PASCHAL CANDLE. This candle is very special. It is prepared each year anew for the Vigil and Mass. A beautiful candle is chosen, one that is majestic in appearance, tall and sufficiently wide. It is a white candle. The current year is marked on it as well as the sign ALPHA & OMEGA referring to Jesus the Son of God. Then there is the sign of the cross with 5 grains of incense reminding us of the passion and death of Jesus for us in the work of our redemption.

How carefully each year those responsible for preparing for the ceremony would be in seeing that the Easter Candle was fitting for the celebration to help us celebrate Jesus who died and rose for us , Alleluia!

It must have been 1974. Lent was over and I set out to celebrate the Easter services with the people in the 5 churches that I served. These churches were scattered over about 40 KM. I began with the first service at 10h00 and then the second at 14h00 and the third at 18h00 and then I arrived for the fourth at 20h00. Do I hear a sigh of fatigue. Well you are quite right. I was tired. However, imagine yourself out in the country where there are only sand roads. No electricity or any services, water, sewerage etc. I arrive at the church in the pitch dark and stumble over a rough stony outcrop on which the church is built and enter the sacristy. The congregation is singing very joyfully the alleluia in preparation for the ceremony. I feel a tinge of annoyance at being pre-empted. I greet the sacristan and the altar servers and begin to prepare for the Mass. All seems to be prepared. I take a peak out on to the sanctuary and see flowers and candles and clean linen on the altar. My spirits lift a little. All is well !

Then once more in the sacristy, I turn to the sacristan who is standing in the shadows and ask her for the PASCHAL CANDLE. She turns around and

from behind her lifts up something. As she turns back to me and hands it to me the bottom drops out of my world. I can't believe my eyes ! "Is this the PASCHAL CANDLE ? " I ask in a voice loaded with disbelief and hope that it is not true. "Yes father" mumbles the sacristan. Yes, I do recognise it as the Paschal Candle used last year. Not reduced very much in height, but leaning over , much worse than the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The sacristan sees my unbelieving face and tries to help by explaining: "It fell!" ... "She says it FELL!" I could hear myself repeat. I could see by her face as she said it that she hoped she could fall and disappear from in front of me as I was obviously not encouraged by this piece of information. Let me try to explain my unsaid thoughts of that fleeting moment 20 years ago.

*How am I going to go out on the altar and hold up this broken candle and sing the alleluia and the Exultet with any kind of enthusiasm? Where is the beautifully, carefully prepared candle, all nicely decorated for the current year that is to inspire and lead the community because it shines out saying " Look at me I am the RISEN LORD" I am desolated , I am angry. I am tired . Lord I have celebrated three times already your ceremonies today and now this ! What are you doing to me. But I don't understand , and I get no answers.*

So as I stood in the sacristy with the Paschal Candle in my hands I turned to see it in the light of a candle behind me on the vesting table. It was then that I got the second shock. I was so absorbed by the broken/leaning candle, I did not notice the elastoplast bandage around the candle. Evidently, the sacristan had attempted to patch up the broken candle and brace it so it would stand up straight with an elastoplast bandage. An everyday remedy she used at home. But it did nothing for the candle. It just added to what to me at the time was an already grotesque sight. No bright, shiny, straight, white candle; beautifully decorated with the symbols of Christ and the current year. No! All I could see was this tatty, broken/bent candle pitifully bandaged and all to no effect, except to make me more dismayed. Yes, I was almost in tears. I was so tired and so disappointed. I could see that the sacristan was completely dismayed at my reactions to her brave efforts to prepare the Paschal Candle. She just shuffled off into the church with tears of hurt disappointment in her eyes. The Exultet and the Alleluia were sung. All the people lit their candles to renew their Baptismal Promises. The Mass

was celebrated. Then all went home renewed in the spirit of the Risen Lord, singing alleluias as they walked along in the dark.

But I went home confused in my spirit. I met something I could neither understand nor handle at the time. I was living on a level of faith where the event and me did not meet. It was a moment too profound. It required eyes that see what is hidden in the simple and often unexpected. It required a flexibility of spirit. I could not see the hand of God working in his creation that night. If things were not as I thought they should be I got angry.

Many years later recounting the story in a relaxed atmosphere and with a deeper faith and eyes that see the Lord even in little things, I was able to see the symbolism that had escaped me at the time. The maturing provided by time and a deeper faith provided new eyes for a deeper insight. The BROKEN PASCHAL CANDLE was truly appropriate that night. It symbolised the Risen Lord who bore in his risen body the marks of HIS PASSION. Also, the attempt of the sacristan to come to the aid of Jesus with the elastoplast bandage. What compassion she had shown in this simple gesture so often needed in the family setting.

Indeed, the Easter Vigil of 1974 had provided me with the experience of Jesus Risen, but still bearing the marks of his passion. The Pascal Candle, broken in two and leaning over and bandaged was surely a very vivid reminder of the passion of Jesus. How I regret my lack of insight at the time. What a magnificent Homily could have been preached that night around the BROKEN PASCHAL CANDLE. My own sense of order and what was right and proper had preoccupied me too much. I was not flexible enough to grasp the grace of the present moment. A grace offered ONLY for that moment. What an acute sense of the presence of God we are all invited to have. I have prayed over the past 20 years that all people may have the eyes of children to see the Lord in even the most insignificant daily events and the grace to live by faith. Jesus said one day : *Matthew 18/3 "I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children , you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"*.



## **THE BAPTISMAL ROBE**

It is amazing how clothes make a difference to us in body and spirit. I always remember an uncle of mine who periodically was obliged to « dress up » for some special occasion. He was a very ordinary man who dressed normally in casual clothing. He was a man very easy to get on with. He was full of interesting facts and stories and had a manner that was so attractive that one could spend hours with him and regret when it was time to go home. But when he was « dressed up » in his suit he was stiff and formal and could hardly breathe freely. Fortunately these formal times did not come too often nor did they last too long. He was soon liberated and able to return to his own free self, dressed in his comfortable working overalls. Another person I met some years ago dressed in very flashy reds and blacks wearing a wide belt with a rather outsize buckle on the front with the word PEACE standing out in gold letters. A third person is a young lady about 17 years who wears flowing dresses and a wide brimmed straw hat decorated with flowers. She seems to come from the 19<sup>th</sup> century but is totally at ease in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and very soon in the 21<sup>st</sup>. Each of these people and their dress, I realised, were expressing who they were, and lived out their lives in terms of their personality, clothed in this particular style. It obviously let them live at peace with themselves and feel very much at home. I really admired this ability to be content with life and live it as one chose, establishing symbols that were meaningful and finding them life giving.

With this as background you will see that when I reflected one day on the need for us as Christians to have SYMBOLS that are meaningful ; I decided to start right at the beginning of one's life and see what was appropriate there. Thus I began to reflect on the BAPTISMAL ROBE. Virtually the first garment worn by the new born child. This garment is usually a fairly long type of robe made of white material and often decorated with lace or some other fine material to offset the plain white garment. Baptismal Robes were usually part of a family tradition and were very carefully handed down from generation to generation within the same family. People would at baptisms recall who had been baptised over the years in this particular robe which could have seen many generations become sons and daughters of God in the rite of Baptism. Even in the very Rite of Baptism itself the prayer that accompanies the clothing in the baptismal robe speaks of trying to live the PURITY of life symbolised by this WHITE robe now that we have been washed clean in the baptismal waters.

So one day I proposed to our church team to introduce the people to the use of the Baptismal Robe, as up to that point I had not seen any one come with one. I suggested the lines of the robe be very simple and quite sober to avoid undue expense and difficulty of the seamstresses. However, I also suggested we ask that the robe be decorated with three circles each containing a symbol of the Three Persons of the Trinity; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This was agreed to as being a good idea and not beyond the competence of the average mother to make or at least to find someone who could do the more difficult parts.

A model was produced under supervision and then some iron-on transfers of the "triple circle / Trinity design" were manufactured and made available to the mothers-to-be. The original model I supervised was very, very neatly made. Hemmed sides carefully and exactly done all the way round the same width. The transfer having been ironed on, there were two methods of applying some colour: one was to embroider with green, gold and red embroidery cotton ; the other was the use of washable fabric paint also in green, red and gold. In the case of this first model, embroidery cotton was used. It was beautifully made. The stitches were neat and symmetrical. The circles were truly round. The symbols within the design very clearly visible ; an eye, a dove and a Chiro sign.

So from time to time baptisms came up and I was pleased to see how the families continued to produce beautiful robes. One new item had been added and that was the name of the child also appeared on the front of the Robe. For ever it would be clear who had been baptised in this robe.

Then one day a mother presented her child for baptism. We began the ceremony in great spirits of rejoicing. Finally we arrived at the ceremony of putting on the Baptismal Robe. I could feel myself suddenly tighten up inside and a feeling of great disappointment well up within me. I had a hard job keeping a pleasant spirit to the end of the ceremony, which, thank God was almost over.

What had happened ? The Baptismal Robe the mother had made was to my eyes terrible !!! The material seemed to be off-white to start with and badly creased. The edges were not finished off neatly but the stitching ran from a hem of 2cm to 5cm here and there. Then the triple circle that symbolised the Trinity !!! Well, the circles had possibly existed by virtue of the iron-on transfer, but that was as far as it went. The stitching of the circles was all over the place and reminded me of a person under the weather trying to prove at a party he is sober by walking down a

line, but weaving from side to side in gay abandon. As for the symbols themselves : the eye was just a blob ; the dove could have been an object with two things sticking out each side of the centre of the body ; the Chiro I must admit was the best. It was clearly discernible except for the fact that the upright of the Cross looked as bit like many's a tree trunk that has had to grow up blown now to the left and now to the right by the wind, but continues to try and grow upwards even though it would not warrant the title, VERTICAL.

I felt myself saying "What on earth does God think of this Baptismal Robe ?" At the time I thought he must have said "Terrible!!!" That was of course because I compared it to our PERFECT MODEL. It is only in later, more mature years that I have looked back at that moment of idealism and realise that the mother had in fact "done her best for her adorable child". It could not have been otherwise. If I had only looked a little closer at the mother and child and not so much in the ritual book used for the baptism, I would have seen how her eyes never left the child for a second ; how they sparkled with love and joy at his presence before her. I realise now she must have done her best, deciding to make the robe herself despite her limitations in sewing skills and even more so in artistic ones. It must have cost her a lot to make it and a lot of time as well. I imagine now that into every stitch, crooked or not, went her love. I could only see the crookedness of the lines at the time and the lack of similarity with the original model. I could not see her home made Baptismal Robe was made for this son of hers who was unique as the Baptismal Robe she had made for him. I had been so eloquently speaking of the UNIQUENESS OF EACH CHILD at the beginning of the ceremony. Amazing, I could see the uniqueness in one place and praise it and in another find it annoying and unacceptable.

I pray that I may have the eyes to see the hand of the Lord at work through and in the attempts of others as they respond to His grace in their lives. Lord may I be supportive of these attempts as little or imperfect as they may be. Jesus gave us an example of these eyes that see, the day He was in the temple : Mark 12/42 "*A widow came and put in two small coins. Jesus said 'This widow had put in more than all the others... she put in all she had to live on.!!!'*"



## **THE HOLY YEAR CROSS 1975**

Coming from Biblical origins and down to our own days there have been Years of Jubilee when there was to be great thanksgiving offered to God. People were to be forgiven their debts and land that had been alienated from its owners was to be returned to them. The Church had continued this celebration in the Holy Year celebration. At first it was every fifty years. The reason for 50 years is that the number 7 is the symbol of perfection and  $7 \times 7$  is even more perfect so the 50th year is the year of greatest perfection and so was to be a year of celebrating great pardon and much thanksgiving. The Holy Father however did not wait for 50 years but declared 1975 a Holy Year.

Well, at the mission in the valley where we lived we discussed how to celebrate the Holy Year. It was decided to carry a LIFE SIZE CROSS and the Instruments of the Passion of Jesus all the way from church to church through our valleys. There were 10 churches and the walk would take 6 months covering 160 Km. We thought this would be the best way to witness to the POWER OF THE CROSS OF JESUS which is the sign of God's love. A public statement by our own faith in the power of the CROSS OF JESUS by carrying the CROSS from church to church. So we started from the Main Church and carried the CROSS halfway to the first outstation and then handed the CROSS and instruments of the Passion over to the congregation of the church to which we were going who had come halfway to meet us. The Instruments of the Passion were carried in front of the CROSS. The procession started on a Saturday morning and arrived at the host church about 18h00. A walk of about 6 to 8 hours, singing hymns, praying the rosary and silent moments, interspersed with litanies, all to accompany the CROSS OF JESUS. On arrival at the host church, the CROSS would be erected in a place of honour before the altar and the Instruments of the Passion placed at its foot. We all then went outside for supper provided for everyone by the host community. It was a joyous festive meal with the meeting of friends and those who had not met for some time and then guests, i.e. anyone who cared to come and eat was welcome.

At 21h00 we gathered in the church and began an ALL-NIGHT-VIGIL of prayers, hymns, and witnessing by all people present, men women of any faith what-so-ever. It was amazing how all were united around the CROSS

and had something to pray about. The CROSS is evidently a universal experience. Then at 06h00 on the Sunday morning we began the Mass of the RESURRECTION OF JESUS. The CROSS would then remain on in that church for 14 days and the local community would have the opportunity of organising their own services according to their own times and ways. So they came each day to pray around the CROSS inviting their neighbours of any religion to join them.

On the 14th day again a Saturday we would all set out with the local community in carrying the CROSS to the next host church about 16km away and then repeat the same process for the other church until we returned to the Main church 6 months later and set up the CROSS in front of the church as a reminder to all of the Holy Year 1975.

Let us return to a particular Saturday about 6 weeks after the journey of the Holy Cross had begun. We all gathered at the church in the deep valley and began the long winding struggle up the steep side of the mountain. It is not easy to climb up a mountain and sing and pray at the same time. While carrying the huge CROSS the temperature was about 30°C and with a humidity of about 80%. We were all perspiring profusely. But since we carried the CROSS of Jesus we continued as if not noticing our discomfort. Then some few hours later we arrived up on a plateau and paused for a few minutes to get our breath back and mop our faces.

This is when it happened... and I never seem ready for its happening.

A woman dressed in traditional fashion in an "isidwaba" - a black skirt and colourful top came out of the crowd lining the side of the road carrying an "ukhamba" - a Zulu beer pot which holds about 3 litres of beer (home-made). She presented it to the men currently carrying the CROSS. I was some distance away at the time but could feel an instant resentment rise in my heart as I heard myself saying "Jesus had nothing to drink on the WAY. This drink is not in the spirit of the carrying of the CROSS" Then a few more women came out of the crowd and gave something to drink to all who wanted it. I looked on in disapproving silence. About 18h00 we arrived at our destination and the CROSS was erected in the church and the usual programme was followed. When we came to the Vigil Service I COULD NOT PRAY and

found myself constantly returning to the scene on the road with the beer. I was very troubled in my spirit and could not find out why. It had something to do with the beer, that I recognised, but they were wrong to accept it, so why was I troubled? Why had I lost my peace of mind ?Some years later reflecting back over that epic journey of 6 months the incident of the beer came to mind. It was then that I realised why I had lost my peace of soul those many years ago.

I had not been able to see the scene with the eyes of the women who brought the beer. They saw the CROSS being carried and those carrying it suffering from the heat and needing to drink to avoid dehydration. Their thoughts were for the men carrying the CROSS. Their thoughts were a very human reaction to a very human need. If they had been present on the first GOOD FRIDAY, it suddenly occurred to me, they would probably have done the very same thing to help Jesus. Then it also occurred to me who would have disapproved of this compassionate action and I became very sad.

It is amazing how I had the best intentions helping organise the HOLY YEAR and the carrying of the CROSS but could not recognise the GRACED ACTIONS of those who were not officially part of our ritual carrying of the CROSS. The text from St Luke reminds us of what happened to Jesus and invites us to make a choice of action in our own lives. LUKE 23/27, 35 "Some women mourned and lamented for Jesus ... the leaders jeered at him ... the soldiers mocked Him." "Lord" I prayed "help all of us to open our eyes and hearts to your presence in those actions all around us that are not familiar to us and we don't understand."





## **THE THATCHED RONDAVEL**

In our valley most people had thatched roofs i.e. grass roofs. Grass being the material most readily available for roofing. It grew all around us. You simply had to go out with your sickle and cut it, putting it in bundles and keeping it somewhere safe up high away from the white ants who seemed to think it was a form of caviar provided for their delight.

Like most valleys, ours also had a church. It was used for Mass and concerts and meetings etc. There were times when it was needed for a service and a meeting at the same time and date. This led to the decision to build a meeting room to provide an alternate place for meetings and concerts. A rondavel 10 meters in diameter would be built. It would of course have a thatched roof. It was agreed that the catechist and a few men and myself would build the structure and the women and children would cut and supply the grass for the roof. A professional thatcher would do the actual thatching as it was important to have a water tight roof.

The building began in the winter as it was the dry season and we could be sure of nice sunny days for the building. It was decided to use what is known as a "travelling mould". This is how it is used. The site is cleared for about 11 meters in diameter. Then a centre pole is concreted in the centre of the circle into the ground. This is the pivot for the travelling mould to turn on. A circle is marked out for the foundations. The concrete is laid. Then the travelling mould can begin to show its use. With the central vertical pole concreted into the ground another pole 5 meters long is hinged to it at right angles. At the end of this horizontal pole is a box. This box is the shape of a concrete block, made up of three planks, two sides and a front. The top, bottom and back are open. Once the mixture that forms the block has been poured into the box and well stomped the box is moved forward its own length keeping the same distance from the centre, thanks to the radial pole. The perfectly made block is left behind already in its place on the wall. So we went round and round and round many times, raising the box by the height of a block once a circle was completed. We were delighted each time we got to the windows or door as we could save quite a bit of our mixture by missing out those pieces of the wall. Soon the wall was about two and a

half meters high and perfectly straight. Then we put on the rafters. It was marvellous to see those white planks soaring up into the sky, each in its own place and held together by cross beams of a smaller size that would eventually provide the place on to which the bundles of grass could be attached with a very coarse string. The intervals between the cross planks was carefully measured and so quite symmetrical all round the building.

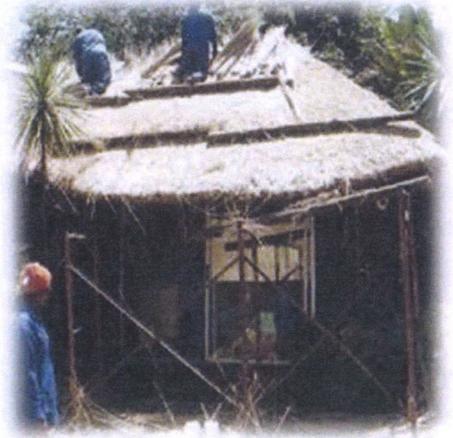
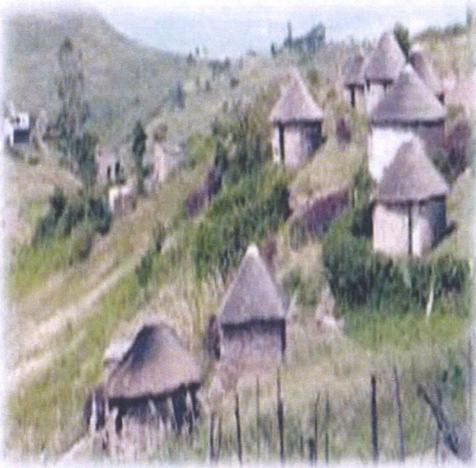
Well the walls were completed, the rafters on and all that remained was to have it thatched. The man who was to do this specialised work came, but there was no sign of the grass. The following Sunday I asked about the grass. It had not yet been cut. Somehow no one had organised the willing workers and so nothing had been done. I was quite annoyed at this but could do nothing but wait for the grass to be cut and delivered. The building had been done over the winter months to avoid the rain and also to have the roof thatched before it rained to make sure the rafters were kept dry. Unfortunately as time went by the rains came and soaked the rafters before the thatching could be done. The result was that all the rafters twisted and so instead of soaring skywards in a straight line they were warped and now looked like an orange squeezer but with twisted lines. Every single one of them. I could hardly believe my eyes I was very upset and complained a lot at the time. This was not how it was meant to be. It was only some years later thinking about those twisted rafters and my reaction to this happening that I realised just how rigid I had been. Things had to be done as I thought and my way. This would be correct. Every time I went into the rondavel for a meeting, after its completion, I would look up at the twisted rafters and sigh with disappointment. It seemed hard for me to appreciate that people had to overcome difficulties in their lives. That there were many calls on their time and energy. That the project at the church was only one among many of their responsibilities: looking after elderly sick parents, cooking for the family as well as children to be attended to. Cutting a few bundles of grass seemed to me a very simple affair that would not occupy much time: but it did and when the rafters warped in the rain I was desolate

The years passed and I have come to realise God works even with our weaknesses; leading us through our mistakes and imperfections to union

with Himself. So for me this maze of twisted rafters has come to symbolise the human condition of sin and weakness that God does not condemn or lose heart in front of, but invites us to a purification of ourselves. This opens up the way to union with Himself.

St Paul offers this advice to us:

**1 Corinthians 2/3** " Far from relying on any power of my own I came among you in great weakness ... and what I spoke ... was ... to demonstrate the convincing power of the Spirit, so that your faith should depend ... on the power of God"





## **CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS**

In South Africa Christmas is celebrated in Summer. The sun is very hot. The days are bright and very often spattered with showers of rain. Thunder storms blow up very quickly. So it happened one year that on Christmas Eve it began to rain. At first just a drizzle. However, the people who mostly walk to church, coming down the mountain paths are not usually put off by rain as it is very welcome for the crops.

But let us go back a little to Christmas preparations. In most homes there is much baking and buying of food that is special for the Christmas meals. Especially when all the family will be home from work places. Then there is the decorations of the homes. Bright paper streamers festoon most of the dining rooms. The white walls are given a new coat of whitewash and any cracks in the cement or mud are patched up. The roof is rethatched or a new piece of corrugated iron is added to waterproof the home a little better. Broken windows are mended. In general there is much activity around and in the homes.

The church too had needed some attending to as well. Especially some broken windows in the sanctuary directly in line with the altar. Work had been done in the church. The floor had been repainted bright red and the walls given a fresh coat of white paint. The benches were varnished but for some reason the windows had not been repaired.

So on Christmas Eve I arrived for the Midnight Mass. It was still drizzling a bit but the church was nearly full of people, adults, and children, all nicely dressed up warm. The usual Christmas Carols in Zulu were being sung with much energy and in beautiful harmony of 4 voices. I found myself in the sacristy humming them to myself as I busied myself with last minute details. Then with the Entrance Hymn, "O come all you faithful" - "Wozani makholwa" - I entered in procession with the altar servers, readers and someone carrying the Child Jesus to be put in the crib. The Mass began - "Nkosi sihawkele" - "Lord have mercy". I am sure there must have been about 30 candles dotted here and there all around the Sanctuary and on the altar and the side tables. There being no electricity this was essential. I had just begun

the Gospel when a huge thunderstorm broke over us. This was accompanied by a powerful wind which took the liberty of not only coming in the broken windows but also of blowing out all the candles. Every single one of them. It was suddenly pitch black. I stopped reading in the middle of the sentence "... this census - the first - took place while..." It took some minutes before the catechist managed to find the matches and start to light the candles again. Some candles meanwhile had fallen over and were broken as some people attempted to help. I just had to wait. When all the candles were relit I continued with the Gospel. But it was not more than 5 minutes later when it was again total darkness. I was beginning to get angry with this situation which I now realised could not really effectively be remedied. "It is Christmas" I said to myself "so keep cool".

At this point someone had a good idea. It was better to stop the wind coming in. So they fetched a black board that was nearby on the veranda and propped it up blocking the windows. This blackboard you need to know was 4 meters by 6 meters. A HUGE and awesome looking object. It did the trick. The candles that had been burning with their flames nearly parallel to the ground now gently flickered up to the ceiling shedding a very pleasant light. I continued on with the Mass into the Eucharistic Prayer. Then suddenly I heard a very loud bang just behind me and at the same time saw all the candles blown out once again by an enormous force of air like a jet stream. I stood in the dark fuming.

I was now very annoyed and asked the catechist in a stony voice to please light the candles immediately. This he did. But then as some light came back to the area around the altar I could see what had made the loud bang. The HUGE BLACKBOARD had been blown over and had come crashing down within a few centimetres of my back. I would certainly have had serious head and back injuries. I felt a cold shiver run down my spine. "Thank God it didn't hit me" I murmured. I was so shaken now that I could not restart the Eucharistic Prayer for a few minutes. So I just went and sat in my chair trying to look as composed as possible.

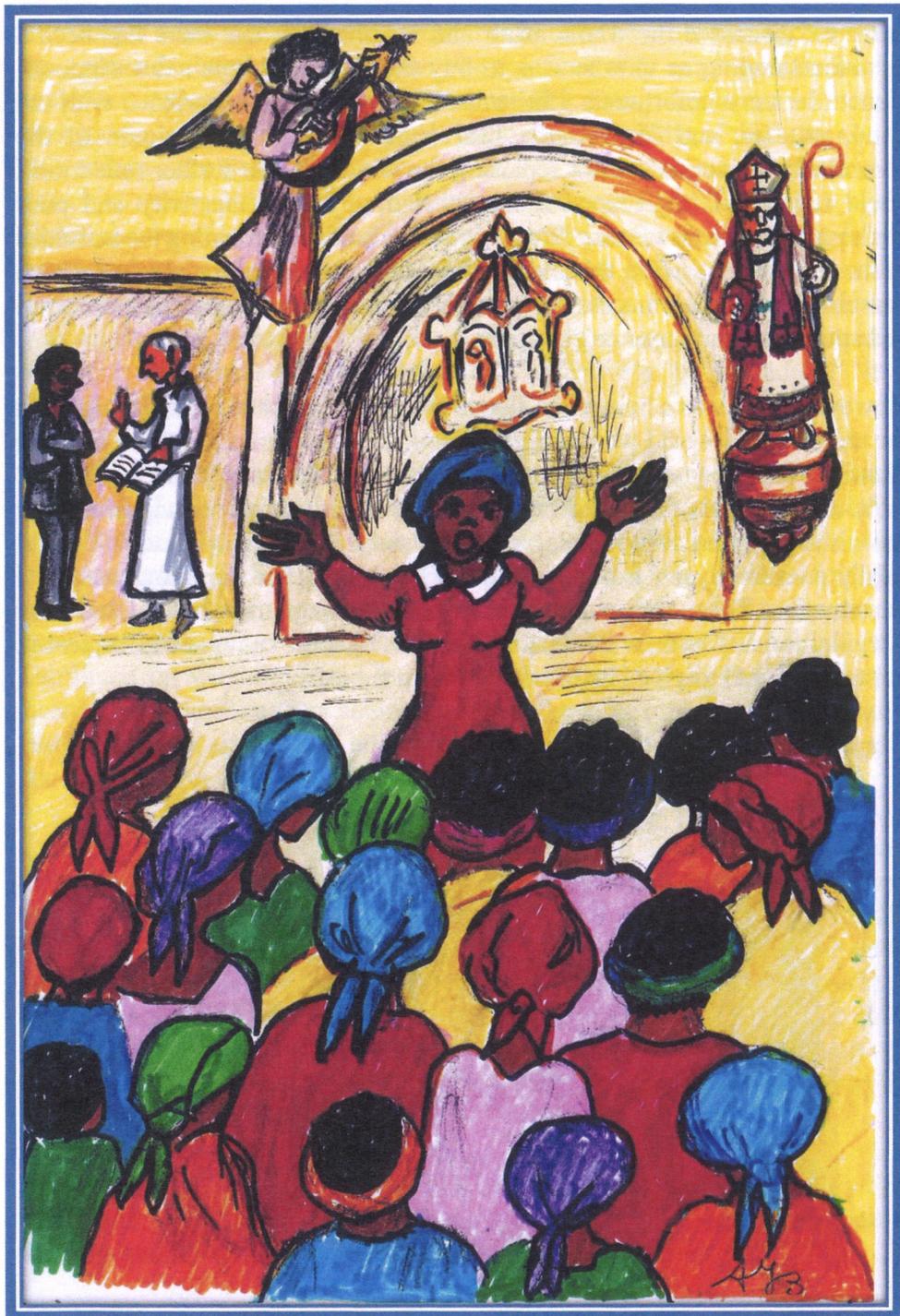
Meanwhile the blackboard was replaced against the windows but this time men were stationed to guard it throughout the Mass. I could continue in security and the candles burnt without any more interference.

Later we discussed the whole affair and it turned out that there had been a misunderstanding as to who was to buy the glass and repair the windows. Hence the very unfortunate Christmas Midnight Mass experience with the wind, candles, and blackboard. That night I had felt the victim of the community's inaction, of not repairing the windows. On further reflection I could see that I had reaped the harvest of my own inactivity and poor leadership. I came to see that I had mostly a role of co-ordinating the activities of the community and in this case had not drawn together the persons whose combined skills were necessary to avoid the misunderstanding that occurred and spoilt the Christmas celebration.

However, there was a humorous side to the events of that Christmas night. At the end of the Gospel I went to the crib to lead a Christmas Meditation as our Homily. As the congregation gently and with emotion sang "Busuku obuhle" "Silent night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild sleep in heavenly peace", I could hardly restrain myself from bursting out laughing at the humorous nature of the situation. The message that seems to come through the whole of this story is contained in Matthew 20/26-28 "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many"

## UKHISIGODUSI OGDUMLE





## THE PRAYER VIGIL

Over the centuries we find in history that people have prayed at night. Often we refer to these moments of prayer as PRAYER VIGILS. In the Christian Tradition we see that people have chosen deliberately to pray in the darkness of the night, a time that symbolises for us sin and evil. We find ourselves constantly enmeshed in this darkness in the day hours and need periodically to take time at night to pray in order to find the strength to overcome this evil.

The total darkness that surrounds us , the quiet of the night , the sense of mystery that pervades the whole gathering of people , all shrouded in shadows ,huddled together for support , creates a climate of total dependence on a few little candles or lamps , burning bravely to counter the darkness. Of course, as the night wears on the candles burn down until one by one they go out and new ones have to be lit. The lamps have to be refilled with oil. We are aware that this little light we have is very fragile and temporary. All the more reason to pray the whole night as we wait in the darkness for the coming of the **THE LIGHT, JESUS CHRIST THE RISEN LORD.** With the rising of the sun next morning we celebrate the promise of our own resurrection and eternal life in Jesus.

In one of the valleys our mission served we had such a PRAYER VIGIL one year. It was a very poor area, with a small church holding about 200 people when they were all squashed up one against the other. We had also invited all the people in the surrounding area to come and pray with us for all our needs and above all for a change of heart in our country: that there may be justice and freedom and respect for all : that love may rule our country : that people may accept ,like Jesus to bear their own cross.

We began about 20H30. It was a hot sticky summer's night. All the windows were wide open, with the result that all the moths in creation seemed to have come to join us. The church was really packed. People had come from all the churches in the area to worship with us, some dressed in the red or purple blouses of their particular church group. Some with stars on sashes. All very colourful. The Master of Ceremonies had asked the people to give him their names if they wished to lead a prayer or hymn or some other form of worship so that all may truly feel included in the PRAYER VIGIL.

we opened the PRAYER VIGIL with a word of welcome to all the people and their churches and invited all to participate in their own style in this night of prayer. A very rousing hymn united all the people, Protestant, Catholic, Apostolic, Zion, etc. "Hlanganani Zizwe Zonke, nize kuMsindisi wethu" " Gather all you nations, come to the Lord".

The community prayed and sang non-stop for a few hours. Then somewhere about Midnight , when I was in the sacristy getting a cup of tea to keep me awake, I heard a woman's voice start leading the assembly, not that she was the first woman to do so that evening, but her style was what drew my attention. Partly singing and partly saying she led the community with three little phrases. "Mayibongwe iNkosi !" = "Praise the Lord!" and "Hallelujah " and "Amen ". She chanted these over and over in a variety of combinations sometimes just a single line and then two or three Hallelujahs or Amens just it seems as the spirit led her and the ENTIRE community chanted back at full volume. This continued for the next 15 minutes non-stop. The community kept right up with her and the tempo and volume did not diminish one bit over that period of 15 minutes.

It was at this point that I intervened calling one of our Catechists and saying to him "Please go out there as soon as you can and lead the people giving them SOMETHING SOLID to pray about not just this series of 'Praise the Lords' and 'Hallelujahs' and 'Amens'. Give them solid doctrine about Jesus, say something they can really sing and pray about"

The catechist looked at me and seemed a little unsure as to what he would do to remedy the situation. I realise now that I had not made the best of sense to him .But he did go out and read a passage of St John's Gospel and commented on it for a few minutes. I have often looked back at that Prayer Vigil and realised how blind I had been to the prayer brought that night to the community by a woman who with very little formal education and unable to read and write had shared her hearts treasures with us in three beautiful expressions: **PRAISE THE LORD !!! HALLELUJAH !!! AMEN!!!**

Not only was this probably her personally crystallised form of worship and praise but amazingly enough it was also enthusiastically entered into by the WHOLE ASSEMBLY, every church group, catholic, protestant , Zion or

other joined her in worship with eyes shining brightly in faces lit up with happiness.

It was only a short time before her worship of Three Praises that someone had been leading a very serious meditation during which a number of people were asleep even snoring, fortunately pianissimo. But with her Three Praises everyone was very much awake, praying, chanting, swaying, and clapping hands to a rhythm that was infectious.

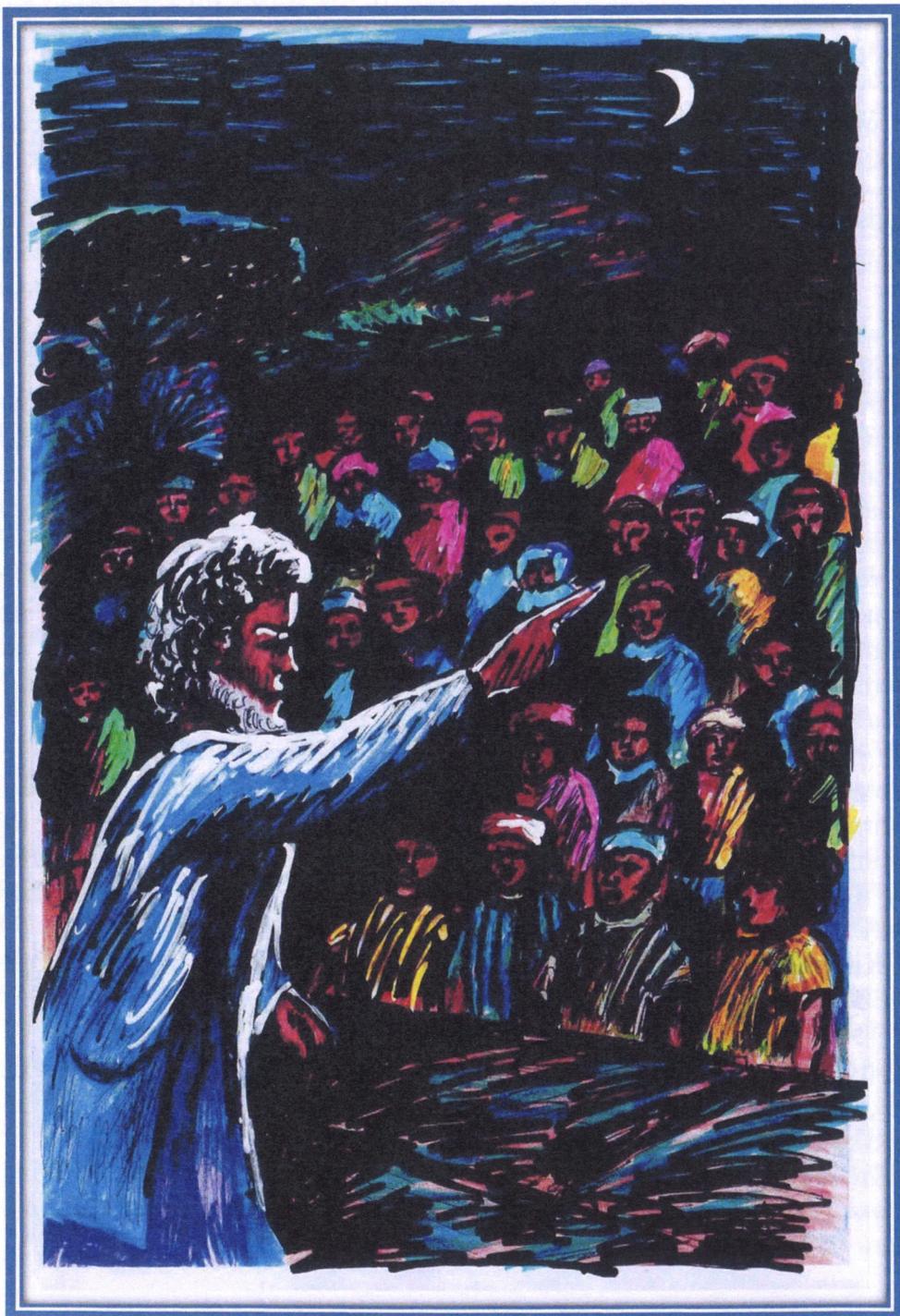
It was, I realised later, that it was at this critical moment that I stood up and called the Catechist to go and give them something SOLID to pray about. I did not at that time realise how easy it was to become a Pharisee. My own understanding of the truth and what was right being the only guiding principle I followed. If it was good doctrine it had to be the best and so should be done. I had yet to really understand the need all peoples have for some very simple message and a very simple way to pray. One that often involves repetition of a very short message and brings people into an ever deepening spiral of concentration on the simple message. One that brings about a unity and harmony of the people as a community worshipping. Also a unity and harmony of this community with the Lord on whom the worship is focused. I saw it happen that night but at the time did not understand it.

I realise I did not LISTEN enough to those around me. I had the sense of being the one coming with a solid doctrine, a message about Jesus, while this woman of the THREE PRAISES brought them not into touch with a doctrine, be it ever so solid, but an experience of responding in a highly enthusiastic way to the FRIENDSHIP offered to all of us by Jesus. Like Solomon in **1 Kings 3/9** we are in need of a LOVING LISTENING HEART in Hebrew LEB SHOMEA.

The Scripture passage that seems to speak to the situation I experienced that night is

**Luke 19/ 38-40**

*“The disciples praised God at the top of their voice. Hosanna to the Son of David! Some Pharisees in the crowd said to him, Master check your disciples. Jesus said if these keep silence the stones will cry out.”*



## **NTSHONGWENI PILGRIMAGE**

The Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Ntshongweni on the 31st May each year drew about 20,000 people from all over the Republic of South Africa. The site was a simple Mission Station out in the countryside. A simple platform was the base for the altar facing a slight sloping hill almost like a natural amphitheatre. Lights and loudspeakers were set up just for the pilgrimage and taken down and put away till the next year. A winding path had been cut in the grass field behind the altar for the candle light procession.

Each year a theme was chosen to give a unity to the pilgrimage and was the focal point of the Homily during the Midnight Mass by the Bishop. To prepare for this Homily it was agreed to stage a small play or sketch. A small group of people from my mission station helped me do it. Not one of them had any public speaking ability or acting experience, just a natural talent that I am sure gave charm to the event.

One particular year the theme was on Reconciliation and as one could expect the story of the Prodigal Son was the obvious choice as a play to illustrate the theme. It would be played out in 6 scenes with a minimum of dialogue to avoid much learning as we could use the Gospel text to go with a type of mime as it were. However there were certain points where the actors needed to speak for a better understanding of the scene. The various people chosen for the roles were chosen in view of looking the part. An old venerable man and his wife as the Father and Mother of the prodigal son. Then a young son very spry and an older son more serious in character. The man who played the role of the Father was certainly a venerable looking man with a beard and white hair. He was not a dominant man rather stocky with an air of solidity and peace. He was a man who had not much schooling. But as he only had ONE LINE to say I thought all would be well.

We began to rehearse the play and all went quite well. Then we came to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Scene where the boy leaves for a distant land with his inheritance. We had the father at the back of the stage where he had said his goodbyes to the boy and then the boy came to the edge of the stage and down the steps and up into the crowd and over the bank and disappeared into the darkness beyond.

I indicated to Mthembu - this was his real name - to come slowly to the edge of the stage overlooking the crowd and say his ONE LINE. **“I wonder if he will come back soon?”** Mthembu moved very solemnly across the stage to the front edge overlooking the crowd and then with his right arm raised and his finger pointing out into the air over the heads of the crowd said in a very solemn voice. **“Washona laphaya!” “He disappeared over there!”** “No No” I said, “That’s not your line: you are to say, **“I wonder if he will come back soon?”** Go to the back of the stage and try again. Of course he did but on arriving at the edge of the stage and lifting his hand in a wonderful gesture said **“Washona laphaya!” “He disappeared over there!”** I was rather irritated and once more asked him to go back and try again. He did so even more solemnly than before and on arrival at the edge of the stage said **“Washona laphaya!” “He disappeared over there!”** I was quite puzzled by this but decided to leave it at that for the time being hoping that in time for the pilgrimage he would get the one line right, the rest was OK as he did not have to speak again since we used the Gospel text with a commentator.

On the night of the pilgrimage the play was performed and all went well and when Mthembu came forward to the edge of the stage my heart was in my mouth “Would he get it right this time?” Mthembu raised his right arm and pointed with his hand out into space over the heads of the crowd and said very solemnly in the silence of the dark night, **“Washona laphaya!” “He disappeared over there!”** There was gasp from the crowd who picked up his distress. But I groaned inwardly: he didn’t get it right: Oh dear what a pity. This was the only hitch in the whole affair. How I wished he could have “got it right”.

Well on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 2002 about 25 years later, talking to Barry and Nicole Griffin in their Bookshop in Lourdes about the Prodigal son images they had for sale I told them of the play at Ntshongweni and my disappointment that Mthembu could not get his ONE LINE right, and in a sense spoiled the play by using his own line.

It was in discussing the event that suddenly clarity came about. Barry said “What the man had said was the last thing that he remembered of his beloved son before he disappeared in the terrible departure that tore his heart. **“Washona laphaya!” “He disappeared over there!”** was in fact the cry of the father in the face of the terrible ever-widening gap as the boy disappeared down the road and eventually out of sight over the hill to a future that had to end in disaster but to which he had to consent if the boy was to grow in freedom. This scene it seems was burnt into the father’s memory and was the one and only thing he could repeat and repeat. He hung on to this last memory. The return that I suggested he speak of was not a reality for him and so he could not enter into it. He could not make the return happen, but he could hang on to what he did have, the memory of his beloved son’s disappearance.

I suddenly realised how the instinct of Mthembu was that of a real father. Maybe he had himself lived a similar situation in his own family. The essential element he lived with, was not the possible return, but the very real pain of the departure. I was not able to enter into his insight till 25 years later so blocked was I by my sterile logic.

Today I believe that this story could be for us a call to respect the other in what he or she experiences. Why force the situation? Why try to set things up? Why insist on my way as the only one possible? It is life that indicates what is to be done and said, we must not destroy or ignore it. I understood that one must start from where life is trying to surface and aid its growth It is for this reason that Jesus is so right in saying “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly” John 10/10



## **THE DREAM OF KHUMALO**

Many years ago in her youth MaZuma was bitten by a Green Mamba, a very poisonous snake. Fortunately the doctors managed to save her life, but she lost her sight and never regained it for the rest of her life. I met her when she was about 75 years old; living in a little valley about 5 km across from the church in that sub area of the mission. It was mainly on her account that I went to celebrate Mass once in a while over in their valley. It was also the moment for all in that area to gather at her daughter-in- law's home.. In front of the altar on the ground was always a 25 litre drum of water. This water they always asked me to bless after Mass. Each person brought their own bottle or plastic container to take some home.

As part of the Mass preparations I had instructed the people to put their own little host into the small ciborium on the altar. This removed the need to call for a count of hands later on in the Mass. I had tried a number of ways to avoid having too many or too few hosts and this seemed to be the ideal way. Up to the present it had worked very well. Each person on arrival carefully put their host in the ciborium with great care. It was in itself a good experience to see the reverence with which the people picked up a host and placed it in the ciborium.

On one of these special trips to MaZuma's house the Zulu catechist told me that we would go that day after Mass to give Communion to an old man who lived on the other side of the mountain. "Very well" I said, "but be sure to put a host in the ciborium for him" I need not have given him this reminder as .the catechist never forgot and all went well.

But this particular day was to prove the exception. A series of circumstances coming together on one day would prove too much for our system and all collapsed.

I began Mass when all were settled and all went as usual. Then at the end of the Mass I blessed the water provided in the drum. After this we had some bread and tea. As I was packing up my few books I suddenly remembered Khumalo who wanted to receive Holy Communion. I went to the catechist and asked him if he had put a host in the ciborium for Khumalo. "Yes" he

said. "Well" I said "where is it now?" It was true. After communion in the Mass there should have been one host left over but there had not been any left and it had not occurred to me.

It was then that Margaret rather sheepishly spoke up. Margaret is the owner of this home we say the Mass in. She is also the daughter-in-law of MaZuma. Margaret said; "Father I must be the one who ate Khumalo's communion" "Oh" Was all I could say "how is that possible?" "Well" she said "you see I was late getting started with my housework this morning because the baby was sick and I had to cross the river early this morning to go to the clinic. So when I came home I still had to go to the river to get the drum of water. When I came back the Mass had already started. I could not get near the altar because of the number of children present. You did not notice the absence of the drum due to the extra number of children who filled the house. So I did not get to put my host in the ciborium. But when it came to communion time I received communion because it did not occur to me that I would be eating the communion of someone else. I am very sorry"

We were all stumped. In fact there was no solution other than that we to go and visit Khumalo and explain what had happened. So we all agreed. Yes we must go. Khumalo is waiting for us. We set off. About 30 people in all. Singing one of the usual hymns. It was always a joy to be with the community especially in these more informal settings. People could be more relaxed.

It took about 45 minutes walking up and over the mountain and down the other side. The river we had left behind again appeared in front of us flowing down to our right and around the mountain. As we approached Khumalo's house we all stopped and the question was asked "What are we going to say?" I did not know what to say and so simply said "Let's wait and see what happens"

So we all filed into Khumalo' home and found a place to sit against the wall He was sitting next to the fire place in the middle with a gentle curl of smoke just floating up from the fire going up to the grass roof and finding its own way out through the grass. As usual it took a while to get one's eyes focused due to the dim light. Then the greetings followed. It was at this point that Gogo that is MaZuma being the oldest asked Khumalo in her deep modulated

voice how he was keeping. A very innocent question at the best of times but here and now it certainly was strategic as it took the focus off ourselves and the reason for our coming. Khumalo said in answer that he was in fact very tired. Gogo pursued the point. This led to a fantastic revelation.

"You see" Khumalo said "I have not been able to sleep for these last three nights because of a dream that has kept coming back. I hope your visit today and your prayers will bring me some peace and free me from this dream". I by this time had become more relaxed and said "Khumalo would you like to tell us your dream?" "Yes" Khumalo said, "Listen to this".

*Each night I dream that I am walking along the sandy shore of the river just nearby. Then I see my neighbour Zondi coming along mounted on a horse. As he approaches I see that he has a basket on his arm and it is full of loaves of bread. The loaves are sticking out the top that is how I know it is bread. I am very hungry and shout 'Zondi give me some of your bread.' But he gallops off. I run after him shouting and shouting. Then I notice as he disappears around the bend in the river that a loaf of bread had fallen out of the basket and on to the ground. Oh I am so glad and rush up to the loaf and bend over to pick it up, but as I reach down to pick it up the loaf seems to jump 2 meters away. I quickly walk forward and reach down again to pick it up, but the bread continues to elude me. You can imagine that after some time I just collapsed on the sand exhausted. This is when I wake up. I am so tired I can't sleep again. This has happened 3 nights in a row. Please help me to get some peace"* As he finished his story there were audible gasps of exclamation from the people sitting around. They had the intuition which I am sure was correct that our not coming with Holy Communion was somehow connected to this dream. We then explained to him what had happened at Mass and why we had not brought him, Holy Communion. But we did pray and sing and leave him some holy water. We hoped he would have a much better night and be able to sleep in peace.

As we walked back over the mountain and crossed the river to our truck, I found myself repeating and repeating one of my favourite passages of scripture that seemed so appropriate at this moment in time. Romans 8/28  
*"We know that by turning everything to their good, God co-operates with all those who love Him"*



## **THE TROUBLESOME SPIRIT**

Every day of our lives we are surrounded by lights and sounds, people and machines, all clamouring for our attention. Advertising has perfected this factor;

This is of course the world of **visible beings**. Something that is a little beyond this world is that of the subliminal. In this form of advertising one hardly sees the picture presented for our attention as it is desired that it rather remain almost in the unconscious. Hence an advert for a particular cold drink could be used by flashing just one very brief sight of the bottle and its trade mark while watching a movie viewing a desert scene where one has the sense of being parched. This mini second of the desert scene flashed before our eyes is registered by the subconscious and is seen as a solution to our thirst.

Then there is the world that is inhabited by **beings invisible to the eyes** but is very real nevertheless to those who are willing to believe and no doubt more so those who have experienced personally this kind of reality. In the valleys where I lived and ministered, the people were very close to this **spirit world**. For them it was a VERY great REALITY and had a tremendous influence on their lives.

The reason for this is that these spirits were no unknown ghosts but their very own ancestors. Having buried an elderly parent or grandparent, it was necessary to show them adequate respect by offering some memorial services. "Out of sight out of mind" was not part of their culture. I found this an admirable quality as it took into account the fullness of our world with its many realities visible and invisible. This belief of course had its implications for life and in fact more than once touched my own life. People came to me for some help in dealing with situations that were beyond their ordinary memorial services.

So it happened one day that my catechist told me that I was called upon by a family who lived not far from the church to come and pray for and with them as they had a problem. The catechist explained to me that a spirit was troubling the family every night. No one could sleep especially the children and babies. So during the day hours of these children there was much crying and upset behaviour that dragged on the whole day. It was bad enough being kept awake at night by the troublesome spirit but the fact of having to deal with the results of this for the rest of the day was too much to bear.

So it was that at a certain moment in time they just HAD to reach out for help. My catechist told me they had called in about 6 other churches to pray and chase

away the unwanted spirit but to no effect. The nightly harassment continued unabated. So they came to ask us to please come and help them. We discussed the pros and cons of going and eventually decided we would go and see what could be done on the spot.

A day was chosen. We all arrived about 11h00. It was a rather big rondavel. The fire was burning in the centre on the floor, the traditional - eziko -fireplace. A few food utensils nearby and a three legged cooking pot on the coals. At the edge of the fireplace rim was a cat stretched out in utter contentment because of the gentle warmth coming from the dimly glowing coals just covered with a greying of ash.

On occasions like this one, we always came with a small group of church members. So it was that we were about 15 men and women. The men filtered along the right wall and the women along the left one. It took a few minutes of shuffling for all to find a place and sit down on the grass mats.

Once seated there was silence. This silence could be very unnerving for someone coming into this kind of setting for the first time and be interpreted as "something has gone wrong". No, on the contrary. It is a moment as I have come to see it, when the visitors are given time to catch their breath before launching into conversation. It really was a very welcome and thoughtful custom especially if one had just climbed a very steep hill to get there.

The silence was broken by the man of the house greeting us. "Welcome to all" "Sanibona" he said and then came over to shake hands and returned to his place on the right side of the fireplace. His wife was on the other side of the fireplace.

It was when my eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light in the rondavel that I noticed that women were sitting everywhere left and right sides, so big was the crowd. Near me on the right was a small group of 5 very old women with extremely wrinkled but charming faces. Well they also wanted to see and hear what would happen to this spirit that had become something of a celebrity in the district already defying 6 church groups.

The greetings over I said we had come because we had been invited to come and pray. Would they kindly explain to all of us what the problem was. The case was laid out before us in all its details going back to the beginning some months ago narrating all the attempts that had been made to appease the spirit that troubled them. But they said nothing had happened to make life any easier. So the husband and wife said "Please help us so we may have peace for ourselves and our family.

We are all exhausted".

So now it was my turn to speak. I said as simply as I could that I thought it was a matter of faith. Their faith. That if they had called in a number of church's to pray and there had been no betterment in the situation

But, it was at this point that one of the very old women sitting just a meter away from me on my right hand side spoke up in a tremolo kind of voice.

"IT SEEMS TO ME THIS UMFUNDISI = PRIEST IS IN CAHOOTS WITH THE TROUBLESOME SPIRIT, SO HE DOES NOT WANT TO CHASE IT AWAY." Once more silence reigned .Then I realised the ball was back in my court. I looked over at the catechist for some help and saw him nodding his head vigorously.

**Yes we would pray. We would trust that the faith of the household members was stronger today.** So we sang and prayed for some time.

It seems the troublesome spirit did not leave immediately but after some time peace did return to the family.

However, it was only later, some months later that I got the full story. Apparently the relationship between the husband and wife was going through a bad patch with some marital problems. These had been translated into public terms of troublesome spirit. So it happened that when they had settled their personal problems the "Troublesome spirit" also departed and left them in peace.. It was their faith in each other and more likely their faithfulness to each other that was in question. However the fact remains that once they attended to this matter between themselves the troublesome spirit also disappeared.

I have also secretly been very grateful to the old granny who had the nerve to accuse me of being in cahoots with the evil spirits, as it was this statement that clinched my indecision of doing anything at all. I also reflect often on the situation Jesus found himself in one day when a Caananite woman asked him to cure her daughter tormented by a devil and wonder if He felt a little like I did that memorable day in the rondavel.

**Matthew 15/25-28** Jesus at first kept quiet but the disciples pleaded with Jesus to give her what she wanted. Jesus said *"I was sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel. It is not right to take the children's food and throw it to the house dogs"* *"Ah yes sir "she said" but even the house dogs can eat the scraps that fall from their masters table". Jesus said "Woman you have great faith, let your wish be granted"*



## **THE NEW ROAD**

The unspoilt and untouched areas of any country are beautiful to the eye. Rolling hills with waving grass and small rivers following their self-made watercourses from their source down to a bigger river and then onto the sea.

It is through this beautiful valley that I passed regularly for 10 years to an outstation. We simply gathered in the home of one of the local community who was generous to let us use her home for a few hours each month, to celebrate the Eucharist. Because of the nature of the terrain I had the use of a Land Rover, a 4 wheel drive vehicle. The 4 wheel drive does have its advantages. In very wet and muddy weather I could travel where the average car or truck just could not venture, or risk being bogged down in mud up to the axle and having to be towed out at great expense and many hours later. The Land Rover just sailed through mud and sandy places and through rivers that were not too deep.

So it was that to reach the outstation of Emboyi, I had to use a dry-river-bed, to avoid a part of the road that had been washed away and was now impassable, even for a 4 wheel drive. It had not been repaired for some time. Of course all road traffic stopped this side of the damaged area and people coming by bus or taxi just had to get out and walk the further 5Km to the village where they lived. It was to this village I would go, but I had the advantage of being able to avoid the damaged road by going down the dry-river-bed and then turn further on back onto the road on the other side of the damaged spot. I could then continue on to the outstation in comfort.

One day as we approached the point where we would turn off to the dry river-bed ,my catechist drew my attention to a group of men and women, about 20 in all working a little to our left down in the dip where the damaged section of the road was. He said that the owner of the Bus Company had called a group of people together to repair the road, so that his busses could continue on the road for the further 5Km to the terminus , which was near my outstation. It seems he was losing revenue as everyone had to get out at the broken bridge and only payed for the journey that far. The last 5Km they walked at the expense of their own feet. So he had decided to repair the road and increase his revenue. I said to the catechist we would investigate the new road on our way back since we had already turned off and were in the dry-

river-bed and it was unwise to tempt fate by trying to turn around on the very deep sand and in a very narrow pace, besides the river bed was strewn with half submerged rocks. If I hit one with the sump it would be disastrous.

The visit to the outstation was as usual very pleasant. The community was small for a week day, only about 50 people but their joy at being able to celebrate and receive the Eucharist was very obvious. After Mass we were served a very nice lunch of boiled chicken and rice. Also a delicious cup of tea all made in a big teapot with sweetened condensed milk, to my taste delicious.

Then we began the return trip. After a descent of 1Km we came in sight of the group of people working on the road. They had in fact made a very simple but effective bridge. As we approached the bridge a man lurched out onto the road in front of the Land Rover, obviously drunk. He came round to my side of the car and simply said in a very slurred aggressive tone, "You can't use this road it belongs to the Company!" I was annoyed that he did not greet us as is customary and then explain the situation, or even that someone else seeing the situation had not come forward to explain in more polite terms. He then added, "You have to pay to use the road!" I said I did not know this and was willing to pay to help with expenses but I did not accept to be informed in this manner. So we drove on.

I discussed the matter with the catechist as we drove home and I said as far as I was concerned I would not use the road if that was how the Company was going to let us know what the situation was. So we continued for some months to use our usual detour along the dry-river-bed turning off each time just before the new bridge both in going and coming back.

Then one day as we were returning from the outstation, a man waved us down. I stopped the Land Rover. He came up to the passenger side and spoke to the catechist in a subdued voice for a few minutes. Then he withdrew with a timid "Good-bye - Hamba kahle !" The catechist told me to drive on. Then he began to explain what the man had been saying to him. I was of course going to drive down our detour road and turned the wheel to do just that when the catechist said "No father, today we cross the new bridge, the man I was just speaking to is the Director of the Bus Company. He told me to apologise

for the way that drunk man spoke to you some time ago. It was very rude of him." Then he added, the company director would like us to use the new bridge. I was just at the point where we would turn off; "OK" I said "if he wants us to use the bridge we won't be stubborn, let's go "

So down the road we went and across the new bridge. I must admit it was much better than the dry-river-bed detour, besides it was much quicker to go this way. "Do you like to know the REAL REASON why he wants us to use the new bridge?" "Yes surely " I said, "Is there another reason that is more real than the one already given?" "Oh yes" said the catechist. "Just a few minutes ago you heard the reason given by the bus company director but I have heard another one from the people" Of course I was curious now. "So tell me "I said "What is the REAL reason?" " Well" the catechist said " You know the bus could only go as far as the broken bridge and due to that the bus company lost a lot of money, losing out on the final 5Km. Ever since that drunk man cheeked you and we never again went on the new bridge, people whose destination is beyond the new bridge have insisted on getting off the bus BEFORE the bridge and walking home the last 5 Km. Hence the company is STILL losing money despite the fact that the road is repaired. You want to know why the people get off the bus and rather walk 5 Km to the terminus? Simply because they say you have been insulted and so must have cursed the road, especially the bridge. This is their conclusion because you don't use the road. They will only go on the road once they are sure the curse is lifted and this can only be clearly seen when you are seen to drive on the road and cross the bridge yourself. Unknowingly you have given the "All clear signal" to the people who use the bus. From today on they will travel on the bus across the new bridge on to the terminus AND NO DOUBT THE FINANCES OF THE Bus Company will go up. I think everyone will be happy with this";

Lord I asked that day that I may have as great faith as these people. Despite the fact that in their case it was misguided, it certainly governed their lives. They were willing to make a great sacrifice of walking the 5Km. Guide my life-actions and give me a faith to trust in you and follow you no matter what the cost. In Matthew 21/21 Jesus said "*If you have faith and do not doubt... if you say to this mountain ,Get up and throw yourself into the sea it will be done"*

# BANTUBA hle

**INTRODUCTION**

**PREFACE**

**THE PASCHAL CANDLE**

**THE BAPTISMAL ROBE**

**THE HOLY YEAR CROSS 1975**

**THE THATCHED RONDAVEL**

**THE CHRISTMAS MIDNIGHT MASS**

**THE PRAYER VIGIL**

**THE NTSHONGWENI PILGRIMAGE**

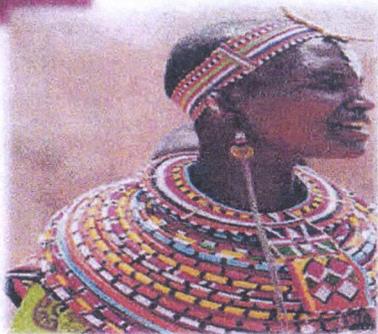
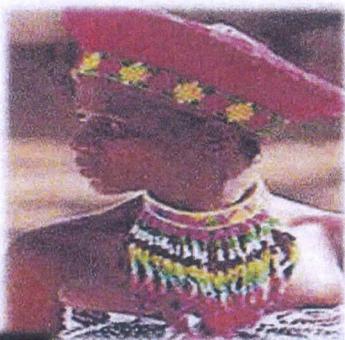
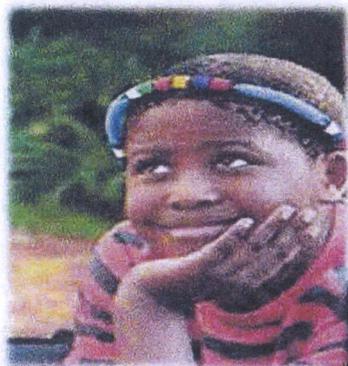
**THE DREAM OF KHUMALO**

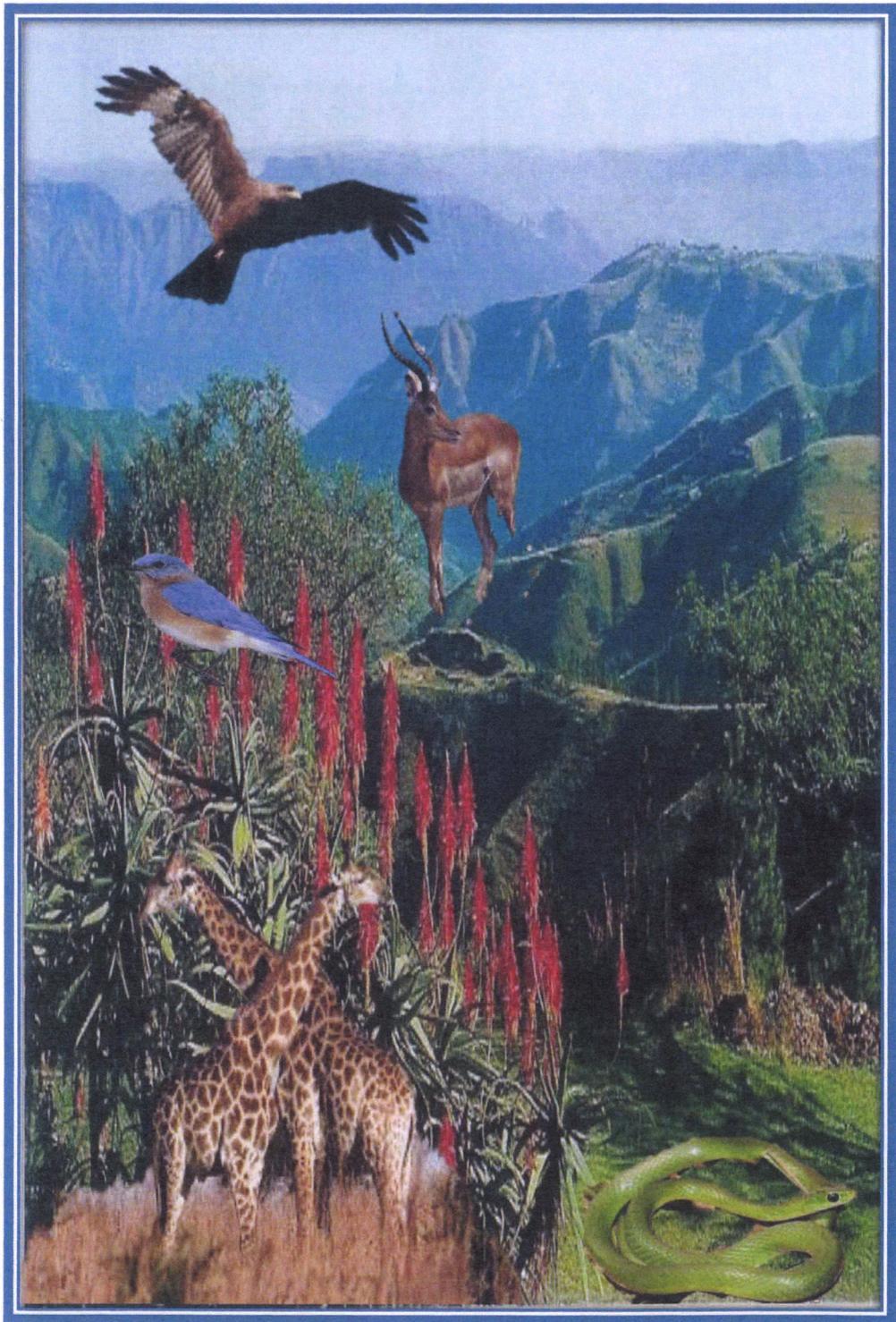
**THE TROUBLESOME SPIRIT**

**THE NEW ROAD**

**CONCLUSION**

**DEDICATION**







## CONCLUSION

The 10 stories you have just read happened between 1973 and 1978

at the Mission Station of St Paul Mbava in the Valley of a 1000 Hills with its 9 outstations: EmaGqongqo, EmBoyi, EmSunduzi, EmaBedlane, EnSutha, EmaLangeni, ODLameni, EmaPhephetheni and Kwamaphumulo.

The stories tell of my attitude in Ministry in those 5 years. I was 37 years old at the time, full of energy and probably on hindsight misplaced zeal.

I wrote these 10 stories at Lourdes between 1993 and 2002. Thus there was a gap of 20 + years during which time I changed or “I was changed” as Mary Magdalene sings in Godspel. I believe the central element that facilitated the grace of God to make the changes was the ministry of Chaplain-Cconfessor at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Pyrénées in the south of France.

My reason for saying this is that some years ago in preparing for the Year of the Father we were invited to focus on the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Each confessor was given a painting by Rembrandt for his confessional. On rereading the Gospel text of this Parable in Luke 15/11-32 and an excellent commentary, I was struck by the highlighted aspect of the compassion of the Father- all the rest fell into the shadows.

Guided by this single response of compassion of the Father to his returning son, I found myself adopting this same attitude of compassion to the people who presented themselves before me. I had nothing to **judge**, nothing to **criticise**, nothing to **question**, simply to be present to the person with what Solomon asked for from God a “Lebshomea” a “listening heart” so as to be open to hear what direction the Holy Spirit was inviting the person take.

The focus like that of the Father in the Parable was not on the sins and unfortunate bad behaviour of the past, but the possible new life of the present moment.

Hence here in front of me is some one asking to be forgiven and given the chance to begin life with a different vision.

The actions and words of the Father are the key to my ministry as confessor. It was with these new eyes and new ears that I was able to see the mistakes of my earlier ministry and hence the writing of the 10 stories to witness to the grace received at Lourdes through the intercession of Our Lady of Lourdes.

*This is the Priest*

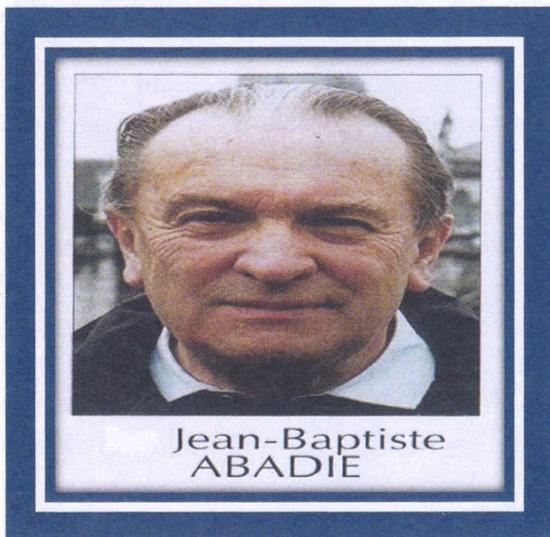
*Fr Jean-Baptiste Abadie MFC*

*who painted the 11 images to illustrate the 11 stories in*

*BANTU BATTLE*

*Maison des Chapelains*

*Lourdes 1994*



Father Jean-Baptiste ABADIE Missionary of the Immaculate Conception was a chaplain at Lourdes during my 10 years at Lourdes also as chaplain. Fr Abadie very kindly listened to a summary of the stories and then captured the essence of the story in his drawing. These drawings give life to the stories and make it easy for the reader to place themselves at the scene of these events and almost relive the same experience I had back in 1975.

Fr Abadie is born near Lourdes and is thus a Bigourdan and spoke the same dialect as Bernadette did back in 1858 and was spoken to by Our Lady in this language, hence when asked by Bernadette her name Mary answered in Bigourdan

## **Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou**

### **I am the Immaculate Conception.**

Bernadette had not ever heard these two words before and did not know what they meant till later they were explained to her. The only way she could manage them was to repeat them all the way back from the grotto to the Parish Priest's house and blurted them out as soon as she was in front of the priest. Fr Peyramale was shocked to hear these very words coming from the lips of Bernadette who has never heard them before and did not understand the meaning of them. Especially as the Dogmas of the Immaculate Conception had just been promulgated in the parish church in 1854. How could this little 13 year old who did not speak French know them? The answer was that she indeed had met and conversed with Our Lady at the grotto.

I will be eternally indebted to Fr Abadie for his drawings and pray the Lord and Our Lady to bless him and thank him on my behalf.

