

The last safari of Fr. Victor-Luke Odhiambo, SJ

By Lucas Ng'hwagi, SJ

Thursday November 15, 2018

The Jesuits in Rumbek community, got the news at around 02:00hrs that Fr. Victor had been shot dead by assailants. The Jesuits in Rumbek, through the leadership of Fr. Ekeno begun contacting other people for practical issues including how to preserve the body of the late Victor.

At around 09:30hrs, the body of Fr. Victor arrived at the Cathedral accompanied by Fr. Siriack Malasi, SJ. At the cathedral, many people had already heard at the morning mass the news of Fr. Victor's demise. Fr. Augustine Ekeno, SJ., conducted some prayers at the door of the church, then, the procession to the 'hospital' continued where a 'room' was given to put the late Fr. Victor's body.

At 17:00hrs there was Holy Mass at Rumbek Cathedral, praying for Victor's repose. Many faithful, religious and priests who are working in the diocese of Rumbek attended the mass. Fr. Michael Mungai, presided over the Eucharistic Celebration, and Fr. Lucas gave the reflection.

Friday November 16, 2018

Friday at 17:00hrs there was a second mass praying for Victor. The Mass was held at St. Theresa Reconciliation Parish. Many faithful from the parish and neighboring parishes, people who knew Fr. Victor-Luke attended the mass. The AOR Provincial, Rev. Fr. Joseph had arrived in Rumbek and he too joined the faithful, religious and priests for the mass.

Fr. Augustine Ekeno, SJ, the Parish Priest and Acting Superior presided over the mass. In his homily, he dwelt on how much Victor has touched so many people in different ways. Using the gospel of Jesus feeding 5,000 people, Fr. Ekeno said that Victor fed and cared for so many people in Southern Sudan: from Wau, Rumbek and finally Cueibet Victor fed so many people with knowledge. He concluded his homily by praying for the conversion of the criminals and their collaborators.

Saturday November 17, 2018

Saturday November 17, at 17:00hrs there was a third mass for Fr. Victor-Luke. The Holy Mass was presided over by Fr. Luka Dor, a diocesan priest (Parish Priest at the Cathedral Parish). Fr.



Dor, in his homily, dwelt on how he was touched by the life of Fr. Victor-Luke. He is an English former student of Fr. Victor-Luke at Wau Secondary School. Fr. Dor, narrated passionately how Victor was a friend to many people, regardless of their affiliation. He went further by saying that 'a non-Christian told him that they too are praying for the 'good father, now murdered.'

Present in the mass were Victor's siblings: Sr. Maryanne Odinga Odhiambo, and James Odinga Odhiambo. After mass they were introduced to the community. Sr. Maryanne spoke few words of condolences from the parents. She narrated how much Victor was at home or had found a home in South Sudan. James, a person of few words, only said that he prays for those who killed Victor to come to their senses and get conversion. The message [that] the sibling brought from the parents was that of 'forgiveness' for those who killed their son.

Finally, before the final blessing, one of the elderly priests in the diocese (Fr. Benjamin Madol), who also happens to be a friend to Victor, intoned a song in Dinka: the whole church sung enthusiastically. It was a song about heroes and heroic deeds that he associates to Victor's life of service in South Sudan.



Monday November 19, 2018

Monday was a climax of all the events related to Fr. Victor's earthly life. Victor-Luke Odhiambo, S.J., was laid to rest in Cueibet, at Mazzolari Teachers' College grounds next to the College chapel.

At 07:15hrs, the procession taking the body of late Fr. Victor-Luke to his final rest begun.

Religious and priests working in Rumbek Diocese and many faithful came to accompany the father for his final journey. Many people were along the road: some were praying rosaries, others weeping while others waving their hands to bid Victor farewell. Among those along the road-side, were students of Loreto girls who stood waving their goodbye, while others just cried.

At 10:15hrs, the funeral mass begun at Cueibet Parish Church, Fr. Provincial (Rev. Joseph Afulo, SJ) presiding. The church was fully parked by faithful from Cueibet, students of Mazzolari Teachers' College, and government dignitaries who came to pay their last respect to Victor.



Fr. Provincial's homily dwelt on Fr. Victor's life of service (if a grain of wheat dies, it bears much fruits); forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace (quoting: Mahatma Gandhi that "...the principal of an eye for an eye will make everyone blind," and Martin Luther King that "hatred begets hatred").

After the Holy Mass some few individuals representing various groups gave speeches:

Mazzolari College: Fr. Kizito Busobozi, S.J., narrated how Fr. Victor was killed. He ended his speech by thanking those who responded to their desperate call for help during that fateful night. He said that Jesuits will stay and continue their work at the institute.

Fr. Victor's family: Sr. Maryanne Odinga Odhiambo gave the message of condolences from the larger family of Victor in Kenya. She narrated how Victor loved the people he was serving and how much they loved him too. The killers killed their own brother, because Victor took them for his brothers and sisters. James Odinga, the youngest brother to Victor, asked for conversion of the killers. The siblings ended their joint speech by saying that their family “offers forgiveness for those who killed their son/brother.”

Coordinator of Rumbek Diocese: Fr. Mathiang expressed his disappointment over the insecurities in the area. He asked the government to do its best to apprehend those who perpetuated the killing. He also urged those responsible to come forward and ask for pardon. God always forgives.



Fr. Provincial: He expressed the need for respect of one another from the community members; to the government officials he asked for security for the many organizations that work in the area for the good of the people of South Sudan. He ended his speech by inviting the Jesuits present to gather around Fr. Victor's coffin to sing the Suscipe.

Governor of Gok state: on behalf of the state of Gok, South Sudan (as a country), the president, and on his own behalf he asked for pardon: from the family of Fr. Victor-Luke, from the Diocese of Rumbek, from the Society of Jesus, and from Vatican – for the murder of Fr. Victor-Luke Odhiambo. He said, “two of the killers have been apprehended and the others will be apprehended soon. Their actions have projected Gok State negatively”. He concluded his speech by asking the family of Fr. Victor-Luke, the Diocese of Rumbek, and the Society of Jesus to open a case against the criminals who murdered the priest.

That is how the Jesuits in South Sudan have finalized the last safari of Fr. Victor-Luke Odhiambo, S.J. May his soul rest in peace – Amen!

