



## Reflection for Brother Paul’s Funeral Mass, by Canadian Jesuits International (CJI) Executive Director Jenny Cafiso

Brother Paul was a man of faith.

Hello, I am Jenny Cafiso, director of CJI. In one of our last conversations sitting just outside this building, Brother Paul said in passing how his understanding of God changed over the course of his life. I asked him to explain what he meant. He stumbled a bit and then said, “I am not sure I can find the words to explain it.” He hemmed and hawed. Then he said, “it is just to be aware of God’s presence. It is really very simple. God is good. God is full of Mercy. That is it.” Then he paused and said, “It is a nice day today – there is a cool breeze.” And we continued our conversation about this and that.

Brother Paul’s words echo the words of today’s readings. In the first reading in Lamentations, we hear:

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,<sup>[a]</sup>  
his mercies never come to an end;*

And the psalm reminded us that “*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*”

Brother Paul made these words his own. “God is good. God is full of Mercy. That is it.”

He was a man of prayer and of deep faith. That is not to say that he did not also feel the same sentiments which are expressed in the same reading of Lamentations “My soul is bereft of peace. I have forgotten what happiness is.” He was not ready to die yet. He told me “Jenny, God has been so good to me. I have loved my life; I have loved every minute of my time at KATC. I feel that what I have done in my life is God’s work. I would like to do more. I still have so many ideas.” But then he always ended by saying, “I guess God had other plans. He knows best”, again echoing the words in Lamentations, ‘it is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord.” Brother Paul was filled with gratitude.

### Brother Paul was a man of justice.

I asked Brother Paul what he wanted to be remembered for. He answered without a doubt “for my development work.” He spent decades working in Zambia committed to development work. During those years he changed his approach to the work, he moved from conventional agriculture to organic agriculture, but what did not change was his commitment to a faith that does justice. His work was guided by two unchanging principles rooted in his faith: first to be at the service of the poor. He believed that organic agriculture would benefit mostly small-scale farmers, those who have less than five hectares of land, and who are among the poorest people in Zambia. Secondly, he also believed that organic agriculture was a way to protect the environment, our common home.

Brother Paul told me that he just could not understand how some people don't see that our faith is intimately linked to Justice. For him it was all very clear and simple. We cannot love God if we don't love the poor. We cannot love God if we don't love nature. All his work and his life were rooted in this understanding.

The Gospel today reminds us that God has “*hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants.*” God has revealed himself to the pure of heart, to those who recognize his presence. I believe that God revealed himself to Brother Paul. “It is really very simple. God is good. God is full of Mercy. That is it.”

### Brother Paul was a witness.

Even though he had a jovial nature, Brother Paul's commitment was unrelenting and strong. He was uncompromising in his pursuit of ecological justice.

The testimonies of the many people who spoke at the Memorial Mass in Zambia which you can watch by going to our website and the tributes we have received, speak of that commitment.

When I was working in Rome with the Jesuit Refugee Service over 20 years ago, before I even met brother Paul I heard of him when two officials from the American embassy to the Holy See came to visit us and told me that our office had to stop two Jesuits in Zambia who according to them were responsible for the government of Zambia taking a position against genetically modified food and imports from the US. This was a problem for the US as the US depends on the export of food aid. The two Jesuits were Brother Paul Desmarais and Fr Pete Henriot, who knew that the introduction of GM seeds would make local small-scale farmers dependent on buying seeds which they could not afford. I was flattered that the US Embassy thought I had the power to make two Jesuits in Zambia or anywhere, do what I asked them to do, but especially, I was very proud that Jesuits were taking a stand like that and speaking truth to power.

When I finally met Brother Paul, I knew that his conviction was so strong that he was a force to be reckoned with. I witnessed this personally over the years. He was unrelenting in his defense of social and ecological justice. Even though he always did so in a generous non-judgmental manner. One of the last conversations I had with him, was when one of the nurses here called me because Paul wanted to talk to me. He was begging me to send help to Zambia. "Jenny please help us; we really need help." This was not unlike many calls and emails I got from him over the course of the years. He was always looking for help for KATC, and he would not take no for an answer. This time I did not ask for a report on the last funds we had sent!! I promised him I would continue to do my best. His last thoughts were for KATC and its wellbeing.

Last week at the Memorial mass celebrated for Paul which you can look at on our website, farmers, colleagues, and others paid tribute to Paul. Some said that Paul is the father of organic farming in Zambia and in Africa. They spoke of Paul as a man of the people,  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the farmers in Chongwe were trained by Brother Paul. "You can recognize who was trained by brother Paul through the trees they plant. They were planting trees of hope."

He was also recognized for his commitment to people and the communities. He recognized the leadership and role of traditional leaders, encouraging them to sit down with their community and to teach the people to take care of the land, to think of the children for the future. Mike Ngulube, the president of the KATC student Union for the KATC Agroecology course which Paul pioneered, wrote "we will forever remain indebted to him for the firm foundation that he built at KATC. Further we wish to whisper to Bro Paul as he goes into the next life that his efforts will never go in vain but bear abundant fruits not only in Zambia but also beyond."

One of the Jesuits from Zambia *Fr. Peter Paul Musekiwa SJ* wrote, "Those of us who were in the novitiate during his time at Kasisi all thought one day we will be like him as Jesuits: enterprising, innovative, hardworking, creative, revolutionary, rebranding the Jesuit brand, creators of both present and future, down to earth, lovers of the people of God and true Jesuits. *Hamba kahle* brother."

John Guiney, director of the mission office in Ireland, wrote to me yesterday, "He was a man of passion and commitment to the care of the earth. I imagine Paul rambling and rejoicing in the vast green acres of heaven free of pesticides and artificial stuff. He has arrived in Paradise after fighting the good fight for a better world. Bless him as he blesses us who walked with him.

Our companions like Bro Paul are the anonymous saints of our world. Their dedication, commitment, and passion -*en todo amar y servir* - shines out like bright stars and are ever inspiring."

I also believe that Paul had an inner burning for God, for the people of God, for god's creation. He was grateful for God's endless mercy, and God in turn revealed his love to him. As today's Gospel says, God has given him rest for his soul in life as in death.

Thank you, Paul, for showing us God's love and mercy. And for showing us that it is really very simple. "It is just to be aware of God's presence. God is good. God is full of Mercy. That is it." *Hamba kahle* brother!