



Br Benedict (Caspar) Ntshangase OSB

On Thursday, 5 October 2017, the senior of our community, Br Benedict Ntshangase, was called home to eternal life at the age of 86. He was born in Mbabane, Swaziland, on 25 Nov. 1930. His parents called him *MadodakaZulu* at birth to stress the fact that he was a son of the Zulu nation. At baptism, he received the name Caspar. His early schooling was done at Nongoma in the heart of Zululand where his father served in the Christ the King Parish as a catechist under Fr Romanus Pally OSB (1900–1972), Fr Wigbert Drzyzga OSB (1900–1979) and Fr Ignatius Jutz (1897–1973).

When he was still a teenager, Br Benedict showed a strong desire to dedicate his life to the service of the Church. He entered St Mary's Minor Seminary at Ixopo in southern Natal. This was followed by a few years at St Joseph's Major Seminary which the Catholic Bishops of South Africa had established at Pevensey for local vocations in 1946. Br Benedict used to mention with a sense of pride how privileged he felt to study for the priesthood together with the late Mansuet Dela Biyase (1930–2005) who, in 1975, was to become the first black bishop of the Diocese of Eshowe.

After becoming gradually aware that he was not really called to pursue the study for the priesthood, he returned to Zululand where he stayed in close contact with the Missionary Benedictines. In the early 1950s, it was Br Ethelwold Hettrich (1906–1969) who took him under his wing. He was a master tailor at Little Flower Mission outside Eshowe, training apprentices in tailoring. Br Benedict became one of his apprentices. Later he used to accompany and assist Br Ethelwold when electrical work had to be done at mission stations. Like many of the Benedictine brothers, Br Ethelwold had turned into a jack-of-all-trades during his time as a missionary in Zululand. He gave Br Benedict an opportunity to become familiar with other trades besides tailoring.

In 1954, the Benedictines began for the first time to recruit and train local candidates who showed an interest in the Benedictine way of life. Little Flower Mission was chosen as a venue for the training and Fr Waldemar

Dröber (1905–1988) was put in charge of the program. Br Benedict was among the first group of candidates. They began their postulancy at Little Flower Mission in October 1954 but moved to Fatima Mission a few months later as this was thought to be a more suitable place. The whole undertaking proved rather challenging as Fr Waldemar based his dealing with candidates firmly on the way he had been introduced to Benedictine life in his home monastery in Germany decades earlier, while monasticism was not at all a familiar concept to the candidates under his care.

This first attempt at introducing Benedictine monasticism in Zululand may have been unsuccessful, but it encouraged Br Benedict to keep in touch with the Benedictines. When Fr Albert Herold (1928–2010), who was at the time the prior of Inkamana Monastery, made a new attempt in the early 1960s, Br Benedict was the first one to respond. He entered Inkamana Monastery on 21 March 1964, the Feast of St Benedict. After a period of postulancy, he began his novitiate. Together with our Br Clement Sithole, he professed his monastic vows on 29 August 1965 and made his life-long commitment on 1 September 1969.

Br Benedict was for many years engaged in catechetical work at the monastery itself and in the neighbouring parish of the Holy Angels. He could be seen riding on a bicycle to Bhekuzulu which is about 6 km from Inkamana. He was also engaged in youth work. He was also part of the vocation team that was responsible for the recruiting of young men for monastic life. His special interest belonged to the group of “Children of Mary” whom he prepared for First Holy Communion. Besides, he used to visit regularly two local prisons conducting prayer services for the inmates. He was also the monastery sacristan for many years. He had an interesting philosophy which states “When you know much, you have to do much.”

Br Benedict was loved by the people and the services he rendered in various parishes were deeply appreciated. Although his physical and mental strength gradually diminished in the last few years, his sense of humour and his well-known smile never left him. Now that he has crossed the threshold of death, we trust that the Lord will reward him for his faithful service. Requiem Mass, followed by the burial, will be celebrated on Wednesday, 11 October, at 10:00.

Fr Prior John Paul and the monks of Inkamana.