



Father Frans FRANKEN

(1941 - 2014)

*Died 6 July 2014, in Genk -Winterslag (Belgium)
aged 73, with 52 years of Religious Profession.*

Frans was born on 14th June 1941 in Waubach, a small village in the mining area of Limburg in the Netherlands close to the German border. It's a village where miners and farmers live. He had a wonderful youth, there was lots of space to play and to horse around. They were not very talkative in his family, a simple word would do. Frans had a keen eye for the things that needed be done. He was intelligent and had practical solutions for all sorts of problems.

After primary school he went to 'MULO' (secondary extended primary school). But after one year he made a definitive choice for Ste-Marie, the Montfortian school in Schimmert where his brother Jan was already a pupil. He knew what he wanted. He studied and practiced a number of sports: football and relay.

When his brother Jan went to the Assumptionist Fathers in Boxtel, his father pushed Frans to go as well. But when he finished secondary school, he went back to his familiar nest: the Montfortians, and started his novitiate in Meerssen in 1960. After he was professed he went to Oirschot to study philosophy and theology but he was also very interested in birds. Just like saint Francis he loved them very much. He had a large birdcage, stuffed dead birds in a professional and perfect way and even worked on a farm in the neighbourhood.

He was ordained priest on 4th March 1967. He was very happy with his first obedience which was the Congo and left in 1968 for the diocese of Isangi. He suffered the aftermath of the rebellion. He was quick in learning the language and worked in the villages around Bondamba, a swampy area with a lot of sick people. He was able to help many of them because he was good at giving the right medication. I visited him in 1976 and he took me around to several villages where we were heartily welcomed.

Due to health problems he returned to Belgium after 20 years in the Congo. He took a sabbatical; it was hard for him to find a new orientation. First he thought that a life of contemplation was his vocation and he contacted the prior of Keizersberg, a Benedictine monastery in Leuven. For a while he lived the life of a hermit, but it didn't suit him very well.

Frans did not have an easy life. He was rather introvert, and not very communicative. He was not the kind of person who easily talks about his feelings and emotions. Sometimes he felt caged within himself and he suffered a lot because of his inability to express himself. On the other hand there were moments when he was cheerful, cordial and very grateful.

In 1989 he became chaplain in the Sacred Heart parish in Winterslag. He concentrated mainly on youngsters and he had this group of young people who regularly came together and with whom he even went to Taizé for a couple of days. He also organized a prayer

group and went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Lourdes and Rome, often accompanied by his mother.

After the sudden death of Father Jan Vangehugten, he became parish priest in the St.-Eventius parish in Winterslag in October 1996. It most certainly became the happiest period in his priestly life. He felt at home there in a large presbytery with beautiful icons, birds, chickens and a dog, Jefke, who meant a great deal to him.

He restored the church both inside and outside. He was very clever and handy with all sorts of material. His church was always very clean and well maintained.

He was struck by a heart attack in 2004. He managed to continue his work but his body gave signals that things were not well with him. Four years later, in 2008, his calvary really began: operation on the aorta, a sudden heart-failure, heart attacks, into hospital, out of hospital, convalescence in Lanaken, convalescence in Waterschei.

After 3 months in hospital in 2011 he decided to cut down the huge number of pills he had to take. He just wanted something to ease the pain. The doctors told him he had another three or four months at the most. And then a medical miracle happened: he went on living for more than three years! Was it inner strength, was it his will to live and/or the exceptional care in his familiar surroundings, the presbytery? Michel, his friend and sacristan, no doubt largely contributed to this special care. Day and night there was someone to keep Frans company; he was never alone. Michel really did his utmost to give him all the comfort he needed. Many, many thanks to Michel, and to the numerous devoted helpers and all those who surrounded him with love and care. During these last three years his family visited him every week. His brother came every Saturday all the way from Eindhoven and his sister and her husband every Sunday from Eyselshoven. Congratulations!

During the last year Frans redecorated his sickroom into a sort of chapel for the dying. He invited his visitors to follow him and to join him in prayer. He then took the lead in his wheelchair. Near the door was a holy-water font to make the sign of the cross. In his room there were a few beautiful icons, the pictures of his parents and their rosaries. Of course there was also a statue of Our Lady, Mary, whom he loved very much, and the obituary cards of his father and his mother, his sister and his niece, his godchild who died early this year, 29 years old. He felt very close to them all and then he asked his visitors to pray together. Here we saw Frans' inner side.

The last few days he was confused, he often repeated: 'I want to go home, come let's go home.' To his family who visited him he said: 'Come, let's go to Waubach, let's go home.'

Frans is home now with God, his Father. Jesus says: 'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and welcome you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.' Frans is happy now with an immensely dear God, joined together with his parents, his sister, his godchild, his confreres who already passed away and many, many others.