



Father Jean-Marie PEUZET
(1924 - 2014)

*Died 22 April 2014, in St Laurent sur Sèvre (...)
aged 89, with 69 years of Religious Profession.*

Father Jean-Marie Julien Peuzet was born on 2 September 1924 in Sion-les-Mines (Loire Atlantique), the son of Julien Peuzet and Yvonne Brossier, both working people. Jean-Marie was baptised on the day of his birth. He pursued his secondary studies at the Apostolic School of the Calvary in Pontchâteau from 1938 to 1943. After his year of novitiate in Chézelles, he made his first vows on 8 September 1944. Then he left for the scholasticate in Montfort-sur-Meu, where he made his perpetual vows on 21 September 1949. Cardinal Roques, Archbishop of Rennes, ordained him sub-deacon in the Major Seminary on 9 October 1949, deacon in the Cathedral on 17 December 1949, and priest at the Abbey in Montfort-sur-Meu on 19 February 1950.

Father Jean-Marie was immediately appointed to the Malawi Mission, then known as Shiré. He left Southampton on 8 December 1950 and arrived at his destination on 26 December 1950. After one year learning Chichewa in Mlanje (until April 1951), he went to the parish of Mpiri for his pastoral work, and he stayed there until 1957. In the meantime he was appointed superior of the Montfortian community in 1953. After his leave in 1957, he went to the mission of Ulale where he was also superior until his leave in 1964. Returning to Malawi in 1965, he founded the missions of Matiya (1965-1970) and Liwonde (1971-1978). After four years in Putea (Lingoni), he returned to Liwonde in 1982 (the delicacy of Providence, he wrote to the Provincial!) where he stayed until 1987, at which date he left for Namitembo (1987-1997) and Sitima, where he remained until his return to France in 1999. In 1993, Father Jean-Marie was awarded the Medal of Merit.

After a short stay in the community of the Holy Spirit in Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre, Father Jean-Marie joined the community of La Chartreuse d'Auray on 1 September 1999. For health reasons, he returned to Saint-Laurent-sur-Sèvre on 1 October 2000. Gradually old age and sickness (notably a cerebral haemorrhage in 2005) were to cause numbness in his limbs and his spirit, but Father Jean-Marie was to retain to the end his gentleness, and hearing a few words in Chichewa would always raise a smile on his face and a few words on his lips. He was to live out his last Holy Week with a remarkable presence, as though preparing his own Easter, which occurred on Tuesday 22 April in Easter Week...

The various circular letters that he used to send to his numerous friends and acquaintances show us a missionary who was full of goodness, wisdom, the spirit of faith, an invincible hope and a deep charity for his parishioners.

Writing from Matiya in June 1967, he expresses wonderment at the kindness of people always ready to render him various services and to "get him out of a fix", and, as for himself, he judged himself "very demanding" with regard to his workers. He saw himself as

sent to build churches, maternity units, dispensaries, schools; and he was aware that he had also to dig wells and open up roads and re-plant trees, "for perseverance and tenacity are part of the baggage of any missionary." But what is important for him is human and fraternal contact with the people: "isn't this the best method to draw them to God and also to a little more of material well-being. To understand them... so as to love them. To love them so as to understand them. To make oneself one of them. To accept to share with them their stew of maize and dry fish... What an enrichment for the missionary!!" Again he writes in December 1967: "I would be a fool to think that I have everything to give and nothing to receive. Even if I had learnt only this truth: to learn to keep quiet sometimes... to allow others to speak and to listen to them... It is in these genuine, personal, human contacts... in the village, that we learn to know ourselves, to value ourselves, to love ourselves." And again: "I told myself that the only Gospel message I should offer them was to share my bread with them while waiting to give them the means to gain their own. There is no religious liberation, no liberation at all, without economic, social and political liberation." In December 1968, he gave "witness to the heroic courage" of the population that was tried yet smiling, and he took on the role of philosopher when he concluded "that joy, a smile for and against everything, are the most beautiful things in the world. A good lesson for us!!" A missionary work with everyone: "we work in close collaboration with the whole population, without distinction of religious allegiance; Catholic, Protestant and all denominations, pagans and of course a few Muslims... what an example of unity, of entente, of ecumenism" (June 1969). Then he describes the countenance of his parishioners: "its deepest heart lies in serenity, politeness, hospitality, charity." And just before leaving again for Malawi in December 1970, he wrote: "My heart is African. It is only there that I feel myself fully a man and fully a priest, for while we are building the Church of God we are building the Malawian nation."

In May 1971, before leaving for the Liwonde mission that he was going to establish, he wrote: "In Malawi, if you believe you don't have time to chat and listen, then truly you are wasting your time." He was to spend the first months there in a caravan belonging to the public works, and was to meet the first Christians in a world that was above all Muslim: "We feel this joy in opening the Liwonde Mission. A tremendous sense of simple but ardent faith that makes me think of the early years of the Church." And to the Provincial he declared: "I am happy to be a priest in the midst of this charming people; and I feel the immense joy of playing my part, however small it may be, in the human and Christian advancement of the whole of this region." In October 1971 he reported that the Muslims were surprised but happy to see him greeting everyone without distinction of religion... Besides, he would say of a Muslim chief in Sifa: "from the point of view of charity, justice and human relations, it has to be said that he could teach many Christians a thing or two!" (December 1971; and in December 1973 he would again speak of his "good friend" the Muslim chief with whom he had struggled to open a primary school). In May 1973, he described the "Montfortian" way of celebrating tercentenaries in this way: "In our own way, without any spectacle but with fervour, we celebrated the tercentenary of the birth of our Founder."

Hardly arrived in his new mission of Putea, he would say: "I am happy wherever there is good to be done" (September 1979). The population was mostly Muslim with a Protestant chief who was "open and sympathetic"... Father Jean-Marie was always open to hear the wisdom of the people: "Joy and smiles always and everywhere! Fatalism, some might say. But might it not be, rather, quite simply human wisdom?? To overcome a difficult situation, optimism is a better ally than moroseness or continual recrimination" (December 1980). For him, life was never monotonous, for "it is always up-lifting because it is at the service of others" (December 1981). All his time was given for others: "to welcome everyone, with a kind word for each as though he or she were my only visitor for the day... I have the impression of having wasted my time!!! And yet, when I reflect well on it, I believe that the

sum of joy and of happiness instilled in the hearts of these casual visitors, is immeasurable. After all, that is what counts. And I sleep with my heart completely at peace!!!” (December 1981).