

Didier Michon



1935 - - 2016

Didier was born in the Nièvre region, a rural area in central France on the 29th July 1935. He was the third child in a family of seven children. His childhood and adolescence, lived in this rustic region in a united and joyful family marked him all his life. He always maintained strong links with his family even if communications were not very good in the 60s. He told them of his missionary life and took an active interest in all of them. He was always happy to receive members of his family in South Africa and his home leaves were an occasion to find his roots again. The 15 days of his last holidays in the family home just before he returned to rue Friant gave him the opportunity to see his family and friends again.

Didier entered Kerlois, near Lorient in 1952 for two years study of Philosophy. In October 1955, he was at Maison Carée, near Algiers, for his spiritual year. He then studied Theology for one year in Thibar, in Tunisia. Like all good Frenchmen, he had to do his military service, which he did in Algeria at a particularly difficult time during the fight for independence.

After his military service, Didier was sent to Eastview, near Ottawa in Canada for his remaining theological studies. He pronounced his Missionary Oath there on the 17th June 1961 and he was ordained priest on the 29th June 1962 in Bonnelles. In December of that same year, he left for his mission in English speaking East Africa. He spent six months in Malawi learning Chichewa and he was hard at work in the Diocese of Chipata, Zambia by June 1963. He was to exercise his missionary work in the missions of Chikowa, Vubwe and Msipazi.

In 1979, Didier did the session retreat in Jerusalem. However, he was to stay in France for several years subsequently. He spent some time in rue de Ringaud, Toulouse to promote missionary vocations. He kept very good memories of the many Missionary Routes and its contact with young people which, according to his own words, marked him deeply.

Fr. Michon was appointed Assistant Provincial of France in July 1984. He was to serve two mandates in that role and this meant that he had to move to Paris. Dominique Mallet, the Provincial testified, "he was a man of great merit, upright, faithful, enterprising in the service of the apostolate, driven by an unwavering belief and by a deep sensitivity that was always under control.

Didier was finally able to return to Africa in 1990. From now on, South Africa would be his field of mission. It was a particularly troublesome time as the country searched for the end of

the apartheid regime and a new future. He had to learn a new language, Zulu, in order to work in the mission posts of Lebombo and Siyabusa. Lebombo was an area where numerous former refugees from Mozambique were living. The Church was just beginning to establish itself in the area. He got down to his missionary work with enthusiasm and with great affection for the population. Lebombo always occupied a special place in his heart.

When he went to Siyabusa in the Archdiocese of Pretoria in 2004, he worked with the same enthusiasm. In between times, he did the 60+ and 70+ sessions in Rome in 2000 and 2009 respectively. He returned to Lebombo in 2008 and finally, he was guest master in our house in Edenglen near Johannesburg in 2015. He exercised this latter function with warmth and generosity.

Didier was appointed to France in August 2015 for health reasons. He joined the reception team at rue Friant. He worked there right up to the end; he was found unconscious in the reception office just two days before he died.

He left us for our Heavenly Father on Monday night, 6th September 2016. Many people attended his funeral, which took place in the Parish Church of St. Pierre de Montrouge showing their deep attachment for Didier. Didier was a convinced missionary, very attracted by the Focolari spirituality. He believed he was called to proclaim the Good News unceasingly firstly by his life but also by word.

Here are just some of Didier's missionary characteristics that those who knew him well will recognise easily: The first thing that impressed those who lived with him was the importance of prayer in his life. This was so important that some confreres compared him to being a monk. When asked about this, Didier replied, "First of all it is the origin of my missionary and priestly vocation.

Every morning, I try to pass one hour with the Lord. This has always been a source of strength for me in my life and in moments of difficulties." Fundamentally, he was a man of peace and joy. He liked to laugh and he had a subtle sense of humour. He liked to tease but never in a sarcastic or nasty way. His remarks automatically provoked a smile.

While he was at rue Friant, Didier accepted the role of Spiritual Director to some people and to a group interested in living their lives inspired by Ignatian spirituality. Different people often commented on his gift for listening. One of his passions was to celebrate beautiful liturgies where singing had an important place. In Zambia and South Africa he organised many training sessions in liturgical practice and he worked a lot at the inculturation of hymns. He talked about this all the time in Africa and he emphasised it when he presented himself to his confreres in rue Friant. He would have participated with all his heart and in his own way in the Zulu hymn sung by his nephews and nieces during his funeral Mass.

Another of his passions was to proclaim the Good News by a homily that was well prepared and well presented. Thank you Didier for your passionate testimony of the Good News

Jacques Amyot d'Inville

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