

Gilles Graffin

1933 - 2015



Gilles was born at Le Mans on the 29th June 1933. However, his deep roots and his heart were to be found in Brittany in the Morbihan in the region of Vannes. Gilles seldom spoke of his family, or the events of his childhood or of his education. He was shy and not inclined to chat and seldom spoke about his personal life.

Gilles wanted to consecrate his life to the African mission. After

two years of being initiated into Scholastic Philosophy in Kerlois, France, he entered the novitiate at Maison Carrée in Algeria in September 1955. His theological studies took place in Thibar and Carthage in Tunisia. While he was a serious student, he did not really have a taste for intellectual studies and felt much more at home in pastoral and manual activities. It was during his two years of military service that he got a glimpse of his gifts for pastoral work. He got fully involved in the pastoral activities of the base where he was serving. The chaplain of the base testified to this at the end of his military service.

Gilles took his Missionary Oath at Carthage on the 27th June 1961 and he was ordained priest in Vannes on the 2nd July 1962. He was appointed to Tansilla in Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) in order to learn the local language, Bobofing. In January 1964, he was a founder member of the mission of Boura in the Diocese of Sikasso in Mali. All his life, he

remained much attached to this parish.

Between 1967 and 1986, Gilles worked successively in the parishes of Karangasso, Kimparana and Koutiala. However, he always kept an eye on Boura, which had to be closed due to lack of personnel. In 1987, he was appointed to France because he was exhausted and needed to regain his health. The Provincial asked him to go to Lille to work with the team involved in Missionary Promotion work. During his time there, he invested a lot of time in the scout movement. He also tried to give lay people more responsibility in promoting the missions. After three years, He returned to the Diocese of Sikasso and the parish of Boura. He resided in Koutiala but the Bishop charged him with special responsibility for the Boura Sector.

However, in 2005, the Missionaries of Africa decided to hand over Koutiala Parish to the Malian clergy. Gilles asked to remain and join the new team of priests. With the agreement of the Bishop and the Malian priests appointed there, the White Fathers also agreed that he live in this 'mixed' community. All went well until the end of May 2006

when he developed major health problems. He had frequent losses of memory and at times he did not know where he was. The Malian priests began to get worried.

At the end of August 2007, the Provincial Council of Mali decided to appoint Gilles back to France. It was a definitive return and Gilles found this decision very difficult to accept. He stayed briefly in Mours but he still wanted to get involved in pastoral work. With the Bishop's agreement, he was appointed to the Diocese of Blois. After a time in Mondoubleau, it was proposed to him that he take charge of the chaplaincy of the Bon Secours sisters in Vendôme where he could be of service to the sisters and the sick. However, after only a year, his health took a turn for the worst and he had to join the community of Bry sur Marne.

Unfortunately, the following year 2011, Bry needed significant renovation and the care that Gilles needed could not be assured. He went to the nursing home of Saint Jean Eudes at Chevilly-Larue and it was there that Gilles left this world to enter the house of the Father on the 22nd September 2015.

From his youth, Gilles wanted to consecrate his life to the Kingdom of God in Africa. He accomplished this vocation by giving himself totally to the Diocese of Sikasso in Mali. He never suspected that this gift of himself

would end in the Way of the Cross that he learned to put up with by accepting the illness that fully conformed him to the passion of Christ.

Armand Duval

Joseph LEDUC 1915 - 2015



Father Joseph Gabriel Leduc was the last of four boys of Justin Marie Leduc and Josephine Marie Loiseau. His parents were farmers and worked a holding of 28

hectares in the village of La Guignardais some 20kms from St. Nazaire in Brittany, France. Joseph was born on the 25th March 1915 in St Père en Retz. His family was very pious and gave two of their four sons to God. Joseph's brother, Pierre joined the De La Salle Brothers.

Joseph's primary school was four kilometres from home so he did the eight miles daily from home bringing his lunch with him. In his final year, his grandmother paid for a bike. At 11 years of age, he entered the Junior Seminary of Guérande with four other comrades from his parish. Of the five, three became priests.

A maternal uncle, Joseph Loiseau known as Bro. Pierre was a Missionary of Africa. He

died in the Military Hospital in Tunis on the 26th November 1918. Joseph entered the Senior Seminary in Nantes but after reading the White Fathers' magazine he asked his Bishop for permission to join the White Fathers. He had already done his military service.

We find Joseph in the novitiate of Maison Carrée in October 1937 under the guidance of Fr. Paul Betz (+1955). He went to Thibar in Tunisia for four years of theological studies. However in June 1939 he was called up and reported to the 4th Zouaves in Tunis. In February 1940, his father died at the age of 64 years and Pierre received permission to return home. In May 1940, his army embarked for France. In June 1940, his contingent were in action in Bry sur Marne but it is a complete rout and Joseph with other members of the army and the population flee towards the south. He was wounded and taken prisoner. However with the cessation of hostilities between the Vichy regime and Germany, he was released and returned to Thibar in July. He did his 2nd and 3rd year of Theology there.

The American Army invaded North Africa on the 8th November 1942. Most of the theology students were called up (27 would

die in the conflict). Joseph with four other deacons reported to Constantine. So as to be able to serve as military chaplains, their ordination was advanced and Joseph was ordained on the 25th November 1942 by the Bishop Thiénard of Constantine.

Fr. Joseph Leduc, military chaplain with the rank of Sergeant, took part in the campaign in Tunisia especially around Kairouan. He celebrated Christmas 1943 in Naples. He took part in the fighting at Monte Cassino where a piece of a shell struck the pyx containing the Eucharist which he was carrying on his chest. He saved a German soldier by carrying him to safety on his shoulders. He arrived in Rome in June 1944 and he celebrated 15th August at sea while his army group were on their way to Marseille. From there it was on to Alsace. At the end of May 1945, he was discharged from the Army. Of the 128 French White Fathers who took part in the war, he received the most citations, six in all. The fourth is as follows: "The Regimental Chaplain performed numerous acts of courage and devotion. During the battle of the Belvedere from the 31st January 1944 to 4th February 1944, he never stopped moving about on the front line, ignoring fatigue

and danger in order to bring the comfort of his ministry to the soldiers. He had performed with distinction in the same way on the previous 24th January at Monte Carella and was admired by all both Christians and Muslims.” He returned to his native parish and to his mother who had no news of him for over three years. She did not even know that he was a priest!

In June 1946, he finished his fourth year of theology. He spent two months teaching in the Junior Seminary of St Laurent d’Olt. He was then appointed to the Apostolic Prefecture of Gao (then in the French Sudan). It was a huge territory which would give birth to four dioceses, Mopti and San in Mali and Nouna and Dedougou in Burkina Faso. His first mission was in Toma where he arrived on the 16th November 1946. The PP had just turned 50 and Joseph at 31 considered him to be rather old! He learnt the local language spoken by the people of south Samo called ‘San.’ His teacher was Eloi Paré, a blind catechist who knew French very well. He remembered his first safari very well after six months of study. After morning Mass, the catechist invited Christians and catechumens to put into practice what the father had said. Whereupon a young girl put up her hand and

asked “but what did the Father say?” Joseph knew that he had some way to go.

Joseph became Parish Priest of Toma four years later. At the end of October 1952, he moved to Bonnelles in France to become Master of the Novice Brothers. He had no preparation for the job and he did his best to infuse a missionary spirit into young men in his care. From his experiences in Toma, he knew the usefulness and efficiency of the brothers in the apostolate.

He returned to Toma in December 1957. The following year, the first priest of the diocese, Fr. Zephirin Toe was ordained. He later succeeded Bishop Jean Lesourd (+1990) as Bishop of the Diocese. In September 1962, he did the Long Retreat at Villa Cavalletti near Rome. He returned to Africa and he had to learn another language. The Mossi had migrated in great numbers from the east of the country in search of agricultural land. The Diocese was involved in the evangelisation of these people and Joseph consecrated himself to them in all the mission posts he worked in : Dedougou, Toma (1963-68 and 1975-81), Kiembara (1968-75 and 1981-93) and finally Boni (1993-1997).

Joseph was appointed to France in 1997. It was a definitive return. He was 82 years old. He wanted to continue working and the Diocese of Nantes offered him a place as Chaplain in the an old folks home where about 100 elderly people like him were preparing 'to end their stay on this planet and move to eternal life.'

Joseph's final stage of life began in October 2002 when he moved to Billère. His life was noticable by his faithfulness to prayer, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in the neighbouring Churches and to the rosary. He was always ready to go to Lourdes near Billère and he was saddened when he lost his independence and had to use a wheel chair and that he was no longer able to preside at the Eucharist. He had the joy of celebrating 65 years of priesthood in his native parish of St.Pierre en Retz in 2007.

Joseph's visible missionary life ended on the 12th December 2015. He was faithful to prayer and whatever service he could give right up to the end. There was a big feast on the occasion of his 100th birthday. His expression was that

he was going to find everybody whom he had loved and served in joy with the Eternal Father.

Personally I worked with Fr. Joseph Leduc from June 1967. For more than 30 years we met every two months, and replaced each other when one of us had to go on home leave. As it was underlined during the funeral mass, his devotion, his discrete and effective support of the Christians, the catechumens and others was for him an daily activity. At Toma, the catechists composed a song singing that he showed his care for them by regaling them with meat at their meetings. He never missed a safari. He was a water diviner and his little pendulum was always in his pocket. He detected dozens even hundreds of sources of water which allowed the people to dig wells. He could blow up unexpectedly from time to time but his basic kindness soon returned. His arms during his whole missionary life and not just the period from 1940-45 were "prayer, the Mass and the rosary." He was a humble man and never spoke to me about his military distinctions.

Charles Sarti