

## MARTIN MBENDE

Bafoussam 11.12 1982

Quezon City 22.10.2013

*The righteous man, though he die early, will be at rest ... He pleased God and was loved by him (Wis 4:7-10). It's not the years in your life that count; it's the life in your years (Abraham Lincoln)*

I begin this biographical profile of Martin Mbende with these two quotes because I believe they are appropriate in the face of a death that leaves us perplexed, not only for the tragic manner in which it occurred, but, above all because a young life was suddenly cut short, just when Martin's dreams and aspirations were coming to maturity. It is only natural that such events cause sadness and trauma even in those who have faith and see beyond time and appearances.

One of the General Counsellors, Fr. Eugenio Pulcini, who lived almost four years with Martin, wrote on 22 October 2013: *"In spite of his young age, Martin stood out with his smile, simplicity, tenacity and wisdom, the typical characteristics of his rich humanity."*

I am grateful to God for the opportunity to prepare this profile; although I never knew Martin personally, I have come to know him through the words of those who lived with him. I have the impression of being in the presence of an *"exceptional"* person, who lived a full life inspired by a great spirit of faith and love for the Xaverian family during his brief existence. Martin leaves the Xaverian Congregation *"a great and positive sign"* that can only be explained by faith.

### 1. Early life

Martin Mbende was born in Bafoussam, on 11 December 1982, one of eight children born to Koum Tounga Pierre Damien and Bokop Augustine. His father was already a pensioner and had previously worked as a nurse with the public health authority,. His job meant he had to move often with his family to wherever his employers sent him.

Thanks to his mother, a very tender woman with a great spirit of sacrifice, Martin managed to overcome the difficulties and problems he encountered, especially during his years at school, when he had to change his study course from the sciences to philosophy. He graduated from school in 2007 and began to make concrete plans for his future.

The family was large, with nine brothers and sisters, all of them united by the authentic African and Christian life vision that their parents lived out in simplicity and fidelity to their Christian commitment, and which they inculcated in their children.

Martin's parents worked hard to ensure their children lacked nothing and they also accompanied them in their personal growth in a serious and constant manner.

Martin stood out in the family with his practical sense, a very positive and open mentality and he was always willing to help, share his creativity and work for peace and harmony.

Martin had a special affection for his mother.

*"I grew up surrounded by the warm affection of my mother. I now understand how the best way of understanding God's love for us is to consider how a mother loves her child. Thanks to my mother's love, I understood very early in life what it means to love God and neighbor.*

*"My mother's only concern was her home and family; she gave her entire life for her children. It still moves me every time I think about her. She always looked upon her children as her greatest treasure. She was the woman of the house and she expected nothing from her husband. With her creativity and dedication to work, she was more than capable of looking after the family's needs. She spoiled us and adored us; sometimes she gave us a severe scolding, but always with love and tenderness.*

*"She instilled love in her elder children for their younger siblings, encouraging them to look after them. She used to say that "when there is enough for one, there will be enough also for two ", inspiring us to think of others in every circumstance."*

*"My mother was a religious woman, baptized and confirmed in the Catholic faith. She always loved and served God. She used to say: God's will is that I take care of the children he has entrusted to me."*

Martin's relationship with his father was a mixture of fear and respect. *"My father was a nurse at the provincial hospital in West Bafoussan . Unlike my mother, he had a strict and harsh temperament, which inspired fear and respect in his children. Yet later, when he retired from work and we had already grown up, he became more gentle with us."*

## **2. Martin's vocation**

*"Opposite the cathedral, there stood a beautiful house inhabited by white people. We did not know what it was. Later, I met one of the Xaverian Missionaries and he explained to me what kind of house it was and I discovered, to my great surprise, that it was the Xaverian seminary of Bafoussan. Today, as I write these words, I am convinced that nothing in life happens by chance, and it is the hand of God that guides our life from all eternity. I had admired that house from a distance, but God led me to enter it and make it my home."*

Martin joined the seminary of Bafoussam for the preparatory year at the end of his school studies. We do not know if his parents, brothers and sisters expected him to take this step, but it must have been rather difficult, despite the profound religiosity of the family. I imagine the reactions when Martin expressed his desire to become a priest. I imagine his father, a strict and demanding man, a member of the parish choir, who was always ready to scold his children when they were late for church on Sunday morning. I imagine the father with his doubts and, above all, with the plans he had already made for his son. I imagine the anxious and loving silence of his mother, who was undoubtedly already aware of her son's plans, who had always prayed for him and was dreaming of the day when she would see him at the altar, celebrating his first Mass.

Finally, his father said to him: *“My son, you know what my plans for you were and how I wanted grandchildren to carry on our name. This is not possible because God is calling you to be a priest. May his will be done. I will not stand in the way of God’s will.”*

Martin was now free to pursue his dream and allow himself to be led by God.

Martin thus described his early experiences: *“The district in which we lived was full of young people and, very soon, my heart awoke to the beauty of friendship. When I reached school-age, I was enrolled first in a public school and then in a Catholic school. Later, upon the request of a great friend of my father, I had to leave my family to go and live with him. This experience cost me a great deal, but, at the same time, it very soon taught me to detach myself from my family, which is most dear and precious to me. Now that I am far from my country and my family, I trust in God, who has slowly but surely guided me in the missionary life, far from those that I love more than anything. I spent two years in another place, with another family; I learned new habits and, above all, I learned to live with people I do not know. The experience has made me even more sociable. The enclosure around the house and the need to ask permission to go outside motivated me to internalize things and explore my inner world. It was then that I began to examine my life and this introspection has remained a part of my personality.*

*When I returned home after two years, I was no longer the same. I was very happy to see my family, especially my mother; I resumed my normal life, but I felt that I was now more courageous. Indeed, how could I have left my mother and the others without courage? God had always foreseen this departure and he prepared me for it from my early childhood.”*

Frs. Bruno Calderaro and Gerard Olmos commented on Martin’s application for admission to the Novitiate, which he wrote on 10 May 2005: *“Martin’s desire to become a priest comes from afar. He was thinking about it in junior high school and his decision came to maturity in his commitment to apostolic activities. At Tonga he was very involved in the parish. He had been an altar server since his childhood, he was in charge of the group for 4 years; he attended the basic Ecclesial Communities (CEB) of Christ the King for four years; he served as a catechist for 5 years, and took part in the Monligeon prayer group with some of his friends. In his own words: “ **taking stock of our apostolate among the young people, it was then that my desire to become a priest was born**”.*

### **3. Martin is called to the mission**

Thus began a period of great searching for Martin. He felt that God wanted him to become a priest. He also felt attracted by the house inhabited by white people that stood opposite the cathedral. Frs. B. Calderaro and G. Olmos wrote: *“He is searching for a way to commit himself to God’s service and for this reason he visits the St. John Brothers in Yaoundé, but their lifestyle does not attract him. He discovered the Xaverian Missionaries during the preparatory year in the seminary and he met Fr. Franco, with whom he began a process of accompaniment that lasted several months. During the vacations of 2004, he decided to join the Xaverian Family and consecrate himself to God for the mission ad gentes.”*

Martin expressed his desire to become a missionary to the Rector of the Bafoussam seminary, Mgr. Joseph Atanga: *"It is important for me to clarify that I have always tried, in a spirit of love, to fulfill my duty for the greater glory of God and the happiness of all. This year I became even more determined to fulfill my dream to take the Good News of salvation to the very ends of the earth, following in the footsteps of the apostle of the Gentiles"*.

Martin was by no means a demanding person, accustomed as he was to a simple lifestyle from his early childhood. In his own words: *"I offer to God all the suffering I will encounter so that I may live this life project, just as I offer all the fruits it will bear, for the greater glory of God, my salvation and the salvation of all those who do not know him."*

In 2006, the report of the formation team said: *"Martin is very motivated in his desire to offer his life to the Lord for the evangelization ad gentes. He takes an active part and shows interest in research on the Xaverian charism and the spirituality of our religious family"*.

Martin began the PAF in Douala in October 2004 and spent three years there studying Philosophy: *"During the PAF and Philosophy, he revealed himself as a serious and hardworking young man, with a spontaneous faith that characterized all his actions. When he lived with his family, he was involved in many parish activities, as a catechist, animator of the Christ the King CEB and a prayer group. These activities opened his heart to the Lord's call and he followed it faithfully. He was a simple and reserved young man who generously put his good qualities at the service of others. He was a generous person who brought peace to every situation and who always sought the good of others. He loved community life"* (P. Franco Sana).

His reading and meditation of the Acts of the Apostles inspired him to give a definitive and courageous response, which consisted in leaving his home country, affections and culture, in order to respond to the demands of the mission *ad gentes*.

#### **4. Novitiate**

Martin arrived in the Congolese capital of Kinshasa in August 2008 to begin Novitiate. At that time, the Novice Master was Fr. Mario Sciamanna and the Regional Superior was Fr. Gianni Brentegani.

Benjamin Mugisho Balika, who did Novitiate with Martin, remembers this year as *"a great gift"*, emphasizing Martin's meekness and extraordinary personality: *"He was truly a meek person in his words and actions. He was a good listener and faithful to his commitments: prayer, work in the garden, taking turns at preparing dinner and the apostolate in the parish of St. Bernard."*

*"Martin was a moderate person in eating and dressing, as befits a simple man. In his conversation he showed great depth and intelligence. A great lover of literature, he knew almost by heart the writings of St. Theresa of Lisieux and Antony De Melo. He was friendly with everyone. We were eight students of four different nationalities and called him the "wise man of the group"*.

*"He was always smiling and welcoming; he spread optimism and joy. A man of prayer, he inspired others to pray like him. He went against the current when it was necessary to stress certain values for the good of the community. He was a true brother, a man of dialogue and sincerity, he inspired trust"* (Fr. M. Sciamanna, his Novice Master in Kinshasa).

On 14 April 2009, the Novice Master, Fr. Mario Sciamanna, wrote in his report: *“Martin has a good understanding and acceptance of the Mission vow. The Word of God inspired his missionary vocation (Acts 1:8). The situation of the Church and the world are a powerful stimulus in his call to the mission, for which he is more than willing to live detachment from his family and go out to those who are far from Christ. His pastoral commitment in the parish of St. Bernard has helped him to grow in his option for the mission.”*

*“Martin has a good sense of belonging to the Xaverian Family, which he loves very much. The experience of living this year in a community of four different nationalities has made him very happy and more committed to the Xaverians’ goal: to make of the world a single family. He has shown great sensitivity and attention to the Xaverian charism in its dimensions of Christocentrism, family spirit, total self-giving to the mission and openness to all peoples and cultures.”*

Aimé Nshole thus remembers Martin:

"I knew Martin Mbende at Kinshasa, during his novitiate in the Democratic Republic of Congo. At that time, I was an aspirant and was preparing to begin the Preparatory year in Bukavu. Martin was a calm person who was capable of dialogue with others; he was a simple and smiling person. I remember one day, after the first profession at Kinshasa, he called me and other aspirants before his departure for the Philippines. He said to us: 'Brothers, I have nothing to give to you ... '. However, he was hiding something in his hands and asked us to choose between them. I chose the left hand, in which there was a rosary (in the right hand he was holding an icon of St. Anthony of Padua). "

## **5. The Philippines**

On 11 May 2009, Martin sent his application for admission to Theology to the Superior General, Fr. Rino Benzoni. He expressed his desire *“to contribute to the evangelization of Asia”* because *“by studying in Manila I could both deepen my knowledge of the reality of this great continent, and prepare to announce the Gospel in total fidelity to our Institute’s charism.”* Martin also emphasized the complementarity that is an important aspect of the internationality of a religious family: *“Furthermore, my presence in this community could help my confreres to achieve a deeper knowledge of the African continent.”*

The reply of the General Direction, signed by Fr. Katindi Ramazani, arrived on 27 May: *“Your departure for the Theology community of Manila is a further step in your experience of departure that you already initiated when you left your family for the first stage of your formation. It is an exodus that will not end with this assignment to the Manila Theology community. The journey continues.”*

Martin arrived in Manila towards the end of August 2009. Fr. Eugenio Pulcini, who accompanied him for four years, takes up the story: *“The first year (September 2009 - April 2010), he studied English in preparation for Theology studies. He then spent a couple of months in the initial study of Tagalog, a task that he embraced with enthusiasm, fully aware of the importance of a basic knowledge of the local language for communicating with the people he met every day.*

*Martin attended the first year of Theology (June 2010- March 2011) in Quezon City, at the Loyola*

*School of Theology. At the end of that year, in April 2011, he was sent on a pastoral year to the community of Project 8, Quezon City, where we were in the initial stages of the Xaverian philosophy community. His good performance in the study of Tagalog, his dedication to service in the formation community and his intense pastoral activity at Sitio Militar (a slum near our house in Project 8) all showed clearly just how strong was Martin's strength of heart and mind in his love for the missionary vocation and our missionary family, and his strong desire to belong to it forever.*

*He was a young man of Faith with a powerful sense of Divine Providence. This helped him to deal with some serious difficulties during that year (problems that he did not cause) with humility and tenacity, by asking for advice and maintaining a fundamental serenity in his formation process.*

*He returned to the theology community in April 2012 and completed the second year of Theology during the academic year June 2012 - March 2013. At the end of this year he went home to Cameroon to spend time with his family, for the first time in five years, and for a well-deserved vacation.*

*He returned to the Philippines at the end of May and began the third year of Theology in June 2013. During the last community planning in which he took part, he was chosen as community coordinator for the year 2013-2014. His formators thus described him: "Martin is a very positive, well-integrated and constructive presence in our theology community. He has a rich humanity and is sensitive, refined, generous and responsible in his relationships with his companions. As one of the community's "elder brothers", he strives to create opportunities for conversation and spends time gratuitously with the younger brothers.*

*Since Martin was a disciplined young man, his academic performance was always very good. He enjoyed study and was well-liked by his fellow students at school, including those who belonged to other congregations. He was not afraid to ask for advice and guidance. He enjoyed the theological subjects and willingly shared his study, which he also concretely linked to his personal Faith journey.*

*The pastoral and missionary commitment of these years saw him work above all in the catechesis of children, the formation of catechists, liturgical animation and adult bible groups. Here, too, he was steadfast, organized, very sensitive to the suffering of the poor, always attentive and gentle in his relationships with the lay people with whom he collaborated."*

He loved and respected his own cultural roots, yet he also felt very free and embraced with courage and simplicity the journey of Jesus, who showed him the path of consecration and the mission. He was ready to go wherever obedience assigned him.

This attitude is explained by what Fr Eugenio Pulcini describes as the mystical dimension of Martin's personality.

*"Martin very often used the word "tremendous" to convey the sense of something beautiful, fascinating, stupendous and good and to describe simple people and ordinary events, such as an encounter with a child at catechism, a visit to a poor family, a lesson given by a teacher at school, an ordinary dish at dinner or lunch, a homily of a priest, a newly-learned hymn, a verse from a*

*Scripture reading, etc. We made fun of him for this, yet he truly seemed capable of seeing beyond appearances and he enjoyed it immensely! This is why I speak of his mystical dimension: without a sense of wonder we cannot open ourselves to God. For Martin, it seemed that everything was always new and tremendous! ... Probably the Lord allowed him to see and savor His beauty and greatness, the goodness of life and the world in the ordinary events of every day."*

## **6. A sack of rice**

Ms Josie Manuel is a Filipino lady who was a volunteer lay missionary in Brazil several years ago. She is a friend of the Xaverians who knew Martin and wrote a long tribute to him.

In August 2009, the Xaverians invited her to the welcome party for a new group of Xaverian missionary Theology students from all over the world. She was pleased to receive the invitation and the opportunity to speak about her own missionary experience.

*"As missionaries, we are called to respond to the call serve the Lord's mission, crossing the boundaries of our own culture, sex, religion and race, leaving the comfort zones of our own community, family and home, to join another family in a different cultural context ... "*

Ms Josie had immediately perceived with feminine intuition that there was something new in this group: *" Martin was a very calm young man, with a gentle spirit but firm in his perception. From a distance, he seemed a very serious person, but whenever you approached him, he welcomed you with a smile and his kind and gentle voice, speaking words of gratitude."*

Ms Josie had other sporadic meetings with Martin that never went beyond a friendly greeting. However all of this changed when *"Martin and I went to Marikina to pick up some fruit trees and fertilizer. I got to a different Martin, one who was a good speaker! He was more confident about his English and his Tagalog. He told me he was very busy with his studies. His language was serious and, something quite exceptional, he had learned not one, but two languages in such a short period of time. I found him more dynamic and with a zest for life, success in his studies and joy in his apostolate."*

### **6.1 - What must we do to be remembered forever?**

*"I remember with pleasure a conversation with Martin; I recalled asking him for what reason he would like to be remembered forever. I told him it was necessary to do at least one of the following things: have a child to carry on his name, write a good and inspiring book and, finally, plant a tree.*

*Martin laughed! He told me that he could plant one or more trees if there were enough space. He could write a book later, when he finished his studies, if he had enough time to do so. As for fathering a child, he told me that he could only be a spiritual father because his vocation was to become a priest. Nevertheless, of the three things, he was most interested in the land and seeing plants grow.*

*I felt humbled. I saw in him simplicity, kindness and humility. A young man who was very open and generous ... very calm, kind and patient." "He never complained, he knew how to see beauty even in an unpleasant situation, and always had a positive outlook and a profound sense of spirituality that was deeply rooted in his life of prayer, openness and gratitude."*

## **6.2 Looking for a sack of rice**

In August 2013, Ms Josie received a telephone call from Martin. She hadn't heard from him for months and her reaction was a mixture of joy and surprise. She knew that he had been on vacation with his family in Cameroon. She cancelled all her appointments and accompanied Martin to collect a sack of rice because she knew that it was for the undernourished children of the community in which Martin was pastorally involved.

*"As he was driving the van, he told me about his vacations and how he looked after his sick mother. He said he had been very surprised to see their situation and, above all, how his parents had aged. However, at the same time, he was also very happy and grateful for the chance to spend some time at home with his family, especially his mother, but he was also very happy to return to the Philippines."*

When they found no one at the address they had been given, they continued along the road and arrived in a poorly inhabited area. Finally, they saw a group of children coming towards them, who were very curious about Martin. He asked them for information in Tagalog and the children, instead of answering the question, were curious to know more about Martin, who seized the opportunity to dialogue with them in Tagalog. He told them who he was, where he came from and what he was doing in the Philippines. Josie remembered how she too, as a child, had been curious when she had first encountered the missionaries, just like these children were with Martin.

In Josie's own words: *I saw Martin easily engage with the children, giving each one of them his time and attention. They really wanted to know about him and hung onto the car, asking him many questions. Martin did not send anyone away, but spoke with them in a gentle and interested manner and the children listened to him very willingly.*

*I saw the missionary grasping the opportunity to sow, just as we read in the biblical parable. I said to Martin: "Did you see the happiness in the eyes of those children? You see, you can remain here in the Philippines forever. You can be a missionary here forever! Martin began to laugh and he said: "I don't know if it is God's will. All I know is that I must remain open". I replied: " Oh no! You can be a missionary here forever. "*

They finally found the house where the sack of rice was being kept. Going inside, they were met by an elderly lady. Josie noticed once again the same reaction of curiosity in the people. *"I am surprised that he greets and speaks with everyone in Tagalog . The mother asked me if he was a missionary and I said: 'Yes , he is a Xaverian missionary."* The elderly lady told Martin the story of her life and how she was converted to the Mormons; she blessed him and said she was pleased he had come to visit her and handed over a sack of rice. Martin listened carefully when she told him

about the work of the foreign missionary brothers who had shown her the way and how they had helped her to grow in her faith.

*“Martin accepted all the blessings. All the members of the family had gathered outside the house; they asked for his blessing and, in accordance with their custom, they kissed his hand. As we took our leave of each other, I gave him two cobs of corn, which he graciously accepted and told me he would take them home to his brothers. I was very impressed by this.”*

*“Only some days later did I understand. Martin was a leader, he was the coordinator of the seminarians. He shared what he had with his brothers, no matter how little. He was altruistic, not selfish! I was deeply touched by his sense of belonging and love for his confreres and community ... that was the last time I saw him alive.”*

*When I heard the news of his death, the memories of our meetings came flooding back. He had already planted some trees at the Conforti house and it was only then that I realized that Martin was the seed to be planted in our land, and that he will remain forever here in the Philippines as a missionary! Brother Martin truly incarnated the way of love in his life (1Cor 13:4-8).”*

## **7. Martin’s spiritual testament**

Reading Martin’s life project for the year 2012-2013 gives one the sensation of looking at his spiritual testament. Martin had given the following title to his personal life project: “The project of Christ” and had chosen a saying of St. Paul as his reference point: ***“In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus ”*** (Ph 2:5)

*“Looking back at these last three years in the Philippines, I can say that the main goal of my Life Project has been, first and foremost, my human growth. I have examined myself deeply with the purpose of acquiring a human mentality and a heart that is ever more shaped on the rock of self-awareness. Considering the two and a half years that separate me from Final Vows (if this is God’s will), I believe the time has arrived to unite all my resources, in a more profound way, around the person of Christ.*

*The lack of enthusiasm I have observed in the life of some priests immediately after ordination, the easily lost religious and evangelical values that I have seen in the life of some of my confreres, and the temptations of materialism and hedonism, all motivate me to make an even stronger commitment so that I might be today as I would like to be in the future. Since Christ, and only Christ, is my ideal, I have no other goal than to serve him faithfully and live constantly with him and in him.*

*Therefore, my goal this year will be to initiate an intimate journey with Christ. In a more profound way, more than in previous years, I would like to work hand in hand with Christ. I have chosen as my starting point to learn from his humanity, beginning with his fidelity to God and his way of sharing the life of his contemporaries, except their sins. In order to reach this goal, in addition to the many traditional instruments offered by our religious family, Martin committed himself to a profound study of Christology and the Synoptic gospels.*

Martin wrote:

*I find this statement very stimulating and enlightening for the journey that I would like to make this year. We are invited to acquire the mentality of Christ, which implies something more than the mere imitation of Christ: it means to become like Christ by following, with courage and perseverance, the same path that he travelled.*

*On various occasions the Gospels give us clues concerning Christ's will. With their help, I will try to convert my will to the will of Christ. This is very important for me for two reasons: first of all, I do not see any other efficacious way for preaching Christ unless I am rooted in his mentality; Secondly, as a missionary, I should commit myself more to think not only of the salvation of others but, in a special way, of my own sanctification.*

Martin chose the specific instruments and times for his spiritual, community and intellectual growth, so that *"all might be achieved in full harmony"*.

For the spiritual life, Martin placed special emphasis on

*"Meditating on the Word of God and personal prayer, confession and spiritual direction once a month", cultivating "self-awareness, with the help of some spiritual books" and a monthly "formation dialogue". Regarding the community life, he emphasized his duties, participation in the formation meetings, respect for every member of the community and fraternal correction, finishing with "the love for our Congregation that nourishes me like a Mother".*

Martin concluded his personal life project 2012-2013 with the first words of Psalm 89: " Lord you have been our refuge."

*"Faith in God has always been my unfailing support. I look at my life, not as a sum of events, but, rather, as the progressive unfolding of God's plan for me. It is this attitude that accompanies me during this year's journey.*

Almost as if he foresaw his final encounter with God, he concluded with two verses from chapter 8 of Paul's letter to the Romans: *"we know that by turning everything to their good God cooperates with all those who love him, with all those that he has called according to his purpose" and " what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory, as yet unrevealed, which is waiting for us."*

*I entrust this journey, first and foremost, to God, whose love never fails. I entrust myself to the intercession of Our Blessed Lady, who knows the will of Christ more than anyone. I am sure of the intercession of our Founder and Father, St. Guido Conforti .*

At the beginning of the third year of Theology, as he prepared to renew his vows, Frs. Everaldo dos Santos and Fabien Kalehezo T'Chiribuka wrote:

*"Martin is profoundly motivated and seriously committed to all the dimensions of his personal journey. He seems to have reached the maturity appropriate to his age as a religious man. Martin*

*loves our religious Family and is sincerely convinced that his vocation is to be a Xaverian missionary and priest."*

Martin had written to Fr. Rigali in 2011 for the renewal of his vows, expressing his deep attachment to the Xaverian Family: *"Year after year, I become more aware of the great gift that God has given to me by calling me to follow in the footsteps of St. Guido Maria Conforti. In spite of my limits, sins and faults, I look with confidence to St. Guido Conforti as a sure guide who will lead me to a great joy, and will make me dedicate my life to the service of Christ's Gospel in the Family of the Xaverian Missionaries."*

## **8. An unexpected death**

*"When I heard the news of his death, the memories of our meetings came flooding back. He had already planted some trees at the Conforti house and we were supposed to make another journey to collect compost to fertilize the soil." Josie was looking forward to this, but Martin's unexpected death changed their plans. Josie Manuel made a very beautiful reflection: "Only then did I realize that Martin was the seed to be planted in our land, and that he will remain forever here in the Philippines as a missionary! Brother Martin truly incarnated the way of love in his life (1Cor 13:4-8)."*

*"When he spoke about his departure for the Novitiate and Theology, Martin Mbende made us understand that only one conviction helped him to deal with the fear of the future and living in a foreign world: perfect love casts out fear. Since our life is a via crucis, "without Good Friday there is no Easter Sunday". He encouraged in our difficulties as students. For him, the missionary life was not speculation, but realism, a concrete reality. He advised us to always have a positive vision of every person, culture and formation ..." (Philosophy students, Bafoussam, March 2013)*

*At Quezon City, on 22 October 2013, the Theology student Martin Mbende drowned in the swimming pool of the Sacred Heart Novitiate Retreat House. No one knows exactly what happened as he was alone at the time of his death. He was taken to the St. Lawrence hospital quickly, but the doctors were unable to revive him. He was only 30 years old ... " (General Direction)*

Martin, your birth made your parents Agostina and Pietro Damiano so proud and filled their lives.

Thanks to you, they became parents once again, creators with the Creator of a new life, and through you they lived gratuitous love, which sees beyond appearances and suffering.

Now that you are in Heaven, help them with your love as a son; help them to see what is invisible to the eyes, and fill their hearts with peace, strength and hope.

Help us too: help us to take your enthusiastic faith to all, a faith composed of simplicity and acceptance without limits. Our desire is to make God known in every part of our world strive to make peace and serenity reign in the hearts of all.

*Fr. Luigi Lo Stocco, sx*