

## **FEBRUARY 15, 1993 Fr Pelasio Vakarorogo, CM**



Fr Pelasio Vakarorogo led a quiet life and passed away quietly at the Colonial Memorial Hospital, Suva, 3.00 am, Monday 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1993. He was about four months short of his 59<sup>th</sup> birthday, being born on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1934. He was the first Vincentian priest from Fiji and he was also among the first group of graduates from Corpus Christi Teachers' College.

After he graduated from Corpus Christi, he taught for a few years at Nabala and Natovi primary schools until he joined the Vincentians in 1967. After his priestly training in Australia, Fr Pela was ordained at Natovi, 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1973.

As a priest he worked at Napuka, Naililili, Natovi and Nausori parishes. Those who knew him well saw in Fr Pela one who was a very private person, but one who cared for others. Fr Pela died of cancer, but even in his last days he would have something funny to say to make his visitors laugh. Nausori parish priest, Fr Jose Koyickal, CM, said Fr Pela was a man with simple tastes and full of humility. Until his death, Fr Pela was assistant to Fr Jose as Nausori parish priest. The following is a tribute written by Marist Brother, Eugene Flaherty.

The provision of accommodation at Suva Street for priests from the Mission Stations goes back a long way. Nowadays, most Congregations to which the priests belong, have Regional Houses in the city, but in earlier times that was not the case, and priests visiting the city were welcomed in the Brothers' community. Fr Pela was a former student of the Brothers, and at Napuka he was associated with the Brothers as pastor, during the formative years of Napuka Junior Secondary School. When a transfer brought him back to Viti Levu he was encouraged to seek the hospitality of the Brothers at Suva Street. This he did, and for ten years or so, had been a part-time member of the community. Pela was assigned a room, provided with the necessary keys, and proceeded to come and go when duty, or the need for rest, brought him to the city. Pela was a very private person; he made no demands, he had no intention of causing inconvenience or the disturbance of the Community programme. He was there, a man of simple tastes, a man of quite erudite conversation or impish wit, a man of wide sporting interests and knowledge, a mine of information on boxing, of all things. He was especially a deeply spiritual person, in touch with his God through a vibrant relationship with Jesus, whose priest he was, and through a filial devotion to Mary. Whenever in residence he was generous in the provision of morning Mass for the community, and for others in the neighbourhood who appreciated his punctuality, his no-frills approach to a reverent liturgy. Pela said his usual morning Mass on the Monday morning he entered hospital. As it turned out, this was the final Eucharist he offered.

Fr Pelasio was essentially a shy and retiring person, but these traits did not prevent people from warming to him. He was known and loved by many in the Archdiocese, testimony of which was seen at his Requiem Mass at Nausori and his burial at Natovi. A feature of his years, residing at Suva Street was the rapport he built up with the diverse inhabitants of Toorak. He felt impelled to provide the daily bread of the household. His early morning walk to nearby Wing Sang brought him in touch with the early risers of the neighbourhood and afforded Wing, the shopkeeper, with the first banter and wit of the morning. "Dominic's Corner" is a Toorak landmark, where men from far and near share a "bose" and a grog. Pela was a regular participant; his manna and influence was demonstrated by the response of the men at the time of his death. "Mama's Kitchen" is an unsophisticated Café in the vicinity. While Pela was in hospital the owners, Lalita and Bill, regarded it a privilege to provide his meals, as they had done so often during his residence at Suva Street. These few instances are some of the many which evidence his warm nature, and his facility to have ordinary folk feel comfortable in his presence. This bright presence will be sorely missed in the Toorak neighbourhood.