

When Father Vincent Machozi – a priest who served at Everett's Immaculate Conception Church – asked those who had come to kill him on Palm Sunday in his Parish, "Why are you killing me?" it was a very simple answer.

Those who killed him killed for the same reason they had killed hundreds of others before him, people Machozi had tirelessly defended while in Everett, and later, while serving as a teaching priest in the Congo.

Father Machozi was killed for some rare rocks – rare Earth minerals to be exact.

Those items are things that most reading this article have in their pockets – likely in their cell phone or computer device, as they are the minerals used in making computer chips. Huge deposits sat underneath the village where Father Vincent served, and warring factions in the Congo wanted access to.

To do so, they killed people, lots of people in what has been called the 'Blood Minerals' conflict, and Father Vincent had dedicated his life to spreading the word about the slaughter through his graphically honest blog on the Internet.

Government soldiers shot him, allegedly, in the Catholic community center that he had raised money in Everett to help fund.

“Why are you killing me?” were his last words as he was gunned down, according to another man who was there and was also shot, but not killed.

Last Saturday, Dozens of people gathered at the Immaculate Conception Church in Everett to take part in a Mass to honor the life of the assassinated Assumption priest Fr. Vincent Machozi.

Father Jerry Osterman of IC said Machozi spent five or six years at the Parish and had a big effect on the people in Everett, including diverse populations such as Africans, Haitians, Vietnamese and native-born Americans. While pursuing his doctorate at Boston University, Machozi said Mass and oversaw a prayer group at IC regularly – leaving for the Congo in 2012.

“He was a very gentle guy and soft spoken and humble, but very passionate when it came to his people who were being brutally killed,” he said. “His village sits on a large deposit of very, very valuable minerals used in computer chips. They were killing the people and taking the minerals and the local people were getting nothing. When he was here, he raised money with the help of some of the women here to build a community center in his village. I think he was there when he was killed. He was really trying to get the word out about what was going on. You don’t hear much about it in our mainstream press. It’s gruesome and sad the way people are being killed, and that now includes Father Vincent. When something like this happens, you really find out how many people someone touched in a personal way.”

Fr. Mulumba Matsogani, a Congolese Assumptionist currently working at Assumption College in Boston, spoke highly of Machozi.

“They may have killed him physically but his work will continue in spirit,” said Father Mulumba.

Father Mulumbai went on to explain that Machozi was one of 13 children, and one of the few that made it to adulthood from his family.

“His name literally means son of many tears,” said Mulumba.

Professor Dana Robert of Boston University's Center for Global Christianity and Mission was Father Vincent's advisor while he was at BU. She said he had been studying for his doctorate, but realized that his life was going to have to be dedicated to defending the people rather than pursuing his educational dreams.

"If you look around at human rights violations and genocide, it is always a Catholic priest that is the first and the last to witness to it," she said. "The role of being the defender occurs because of a love of people and because of following Christ. Vincent was following the example of Christ."

Ironically, she said he was trained in conflict resolution and non-violent solutions – as well as being a first-rate theologian and pastor. Another irony, she said, is he used the very thing that killed him to help get the word out.

"He was adamant about using modern technology here in Boston to get information out there about what was happening in eastern Congo," she said. "People all over his community would send him pictures of the atrocities and he would compile it all so the world would know. The irony of course is the people were being killed because the village was sitting on top of a huge source of minerals that were a major component of computer chips. The very technology that helped him to expose human rights abuses was the very resource the people were suffering because of. It's happening all over the world, the rape of resources for the wealthy."

As many teared up in the pews, a choir sang hymns in Congolese and a Haitian youth group performed dances in tribute to the fallen priest. It was a somber remembrance of a fallen man.

Assassinations are nothing new in Africa or the Congo. Many political leaders and those who oppose those in power have been killed when they were perceived to have too much sway in public opinion.

Machozi was fighting against the will of those in power who wanted to push out local villagers from their homes that sat on the mineral deposit.

Born in 1965, he would have been 51 on Monday, April 4. He decided to become a priest at the age of 17 and traveled to France to study. He achieved priesthood in 1994.

When arriving in Everett, Parishioners said he was particularly close to the Vietnamese community.

Ann Moore of Everett, an IC parishioner, said she used to cook for Father Vincent every week, and he would stop by on his way back to BU.

“He always came to have dinner with us,” she said. “He loved coconut – anything with coconut. So, every time he came over I had to make him a coconut pie or cake.”

Tearing up, she said Father Vincent was like a son to her, that he had become part of her family. Moore said she last spoke to him on Holy Thursday, and implored him to be careful. She asked him when he would come back to Everett where it was safe.

He didn’t answer that, she said.

“I heard other people say he knew what his life was going to be and that he knew his days were numbered and his purpose,” she said. “I think he knew that. I know God has a plan for us and I won’t question that, but I wonder why the Bishop would leave him in such a dangerous place. When Father Jerry told me there was some bad news, I didn’t think it would be my Vincent. When I heard it, my strength left me. I thought my heart stopped. He was like my brother.”

Father Mulumba said that Machozi believed his days were numbered as he had received threats about his work and website, but he believed in what he was doing and said, “I will not be silent.”

That was a theme as the service wrapped up on Saturday; that the Everett church would find a way to continue to let it be known that Father Vincent was murdered and why he was murdered.

“We will do something to continue Father Vincent’s work and not let it stop,” said Moore. “Father Vincent is gone, but his work and courage is still going. It can’t be stopped and we will continue. He is our Saint at Immaculate Conception.”

Added Robert, “It’s people like Father Vincent who do things that one day get them recognized as Saints.”

Father Jerry said one of the goals of IC would be to find a way to continue the work Father Vincent was doing.

“We’ll meet about this in the coming month,” he said.

Posted By Everett Independent - Everett Massachusetts Newspaper