



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO
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The Rector Major

Letter of the Rector Major, Fr. Ángel Fernández Artime, on the Servant of God, Salesian priest Joseph Augustus Arribat, being declared Venerable

Dear confreres,

On July 8, 2014, Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the Decree concerning the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, Joseph Augustus Arribat, a priest and professed member of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco.

This step in our confrere's journey towards beatification and canonization is a great gift to our Congregation and the whole Salesian Family in this third year of preparation for the bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth and in light of the path embarked upon by the 27th General Chapter. It is good for us to contemplate this figure of a Salesian priest, who was a true disciple of Don Bosco and whose heart radiated priestly piety, sweetness, selflessness and peace, and whose face always bore a constant, humble and welcoming smile. Here was a true "mystic in the Spirit", whose presence, not his words, revealed that he was entirely in God and for God; a "prophet of fraternity," who shunned "gossip" and made charity his way of life; and a "servant of the young", who was resolute in serving them and not being served, was always present in their midst and ready to perform the most menial services. He was a good-natured person, a happy religious, an experienced Salesian, a well-liked confessor and a wise spiritual guide.

Joseph Augustus Arribat was born on December 17, 1879 at Trédou (Rouergue - France). The family's poverty forced young Augustus to start middle school at the Salesian Oratory in Marseilles only at the age of 18. Because of the political situation at the beginning of the century, he began his Salesian life in Italy and received the cassock from the hands of Blessed Michael Rua. On returning to France he, like all his confreres, engaged in semi-clandestine Salesian activity, first in Marseilles, and then at La Navarre. He was ordained a priest in 1912. Drafted into the army during the First World War, he served as an ambulance stretcher-bearer. After the war, he continued to work intensely at La Navarre until 1926, when he went to Nice where he stayed until 1931. He then returned to La Navarre as Rector and at the same time assumed charge of the parish of St. Isidore in the Sauvebonne valley. His parishioners would later call him "the saint of the valley". At the end of the third year, he was sent to Morges in the Vaud canton of Switzerland. Thereafter he served three consecutive terms of six years each as Rector of Millau, Villemur, and Thonon in the diocese of Annecy. The period most fraught with danger but also laden with graces was probably his tenure at Villemur during the Second World War. In 1953 he returned to La Navarre and remained there until his death on March 19, 1963.

Fr. Arribat's life was an epitome of the Gospel statement, "I came not to be served but to serve" (Mark 10:45). He never refused any kind of work; in fact, he sought the most menial services. Because of his willingness to do cleaning work, the novices dubbed him "the knight of the broom". He kept sick people company all through the night. When, during the war, confreres passed through his house, he gave them his room and bed, and spent the night in an armchair or in the chapel. Miraculous cures came to be attributed to him.

In all his posts of responsibility, especially as Rector for several years and in various houses, Fr. Arribat showed himself to be an exemplary Salesian: he was always present among the young students in the playground and in the chapel, in Sunday school and in the infirmary; he easily moved from the dining hall to the dormitory, from the confessional to the garden, and was always attentive to everyone and everything. He showed an extraordinary respect and great consideration for every person, especially the little ones and the poor. He took such good care of the house that he was considered a "lightning conductor", another St. Joseph. With his open and smiling face, this son of Don Bosco never alienated anyone. While his thin and ascetic figure recalled the holy Curé of Ars, his gentleness and his smile were worthy of St. Francis de Sales. His spirituality was Christocentric and markedly Marian, with a particular devotion to the Help of Christians.

The declaration of Fr. Arribat as Venerable is a gift and a strong invitation to all the confreres to be present among children and young people with an educative and apostolic passion, to recognize in their lives the fruits and the work of the Spirit, to share their problems and sufferings, and to call down on them the light and power of God's presence.

To Rectors, Fr. Arribat is a model of a fruitful spiritual fatherhood that knows how to bring together in communion and apostolic ministry through the exercise of a charity that is caring, helpful and generous, and of an authority that takes the form of humble service.

To all the members of the Salesian Family he is an intercessor who pleads for the grace to live the preventive system today joyfully and in a spirit of sacrifice and service.

My wish is that you may truly draw inspiration from this example of Salesian holiness by learning more about the witness of his life, and ask through his intercession for the grace of a miracle that will pave the way for his beatification.

Rome, July 16, 2014

P. Ángel Fernández A.,SDB
Rector Mayor

