

SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

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 *Il Rettor Maggiore*

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***Message from the Rector Major regarding the communique that***

***Blessed Artemides Zatti will be proclaimed a Saint***

We are about to experience a special Easter. It is with immense joy that we have welcomed the great gift of the news that the Supreme Pontiff has authorised the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the Decree regarding the miracle attributed to the intercession of Blessed Artemides Zatti, professed lay member (brother) of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco; he was born 12 October 1880 in Boretto (Italy) and died 15 March 1951 in Viedma (Argentina). This official act of the Holy Father opens the way for the canonisation of Blessed Artemides Zatti.

We are deeply grateful to God and to the Holy Father, Pope Francis. Today, in the Salesian Family, the Church in Argentina, and especially in the diocese of Viedma, in Boretto, in Italy, his birthplace, and in the Diocese of Reggio Emilia there is an atmosphere of great enthusiasm.

1. **Witness to hope**

In the light of the Lord’s Pasch, this is a **message and seed of hope** in the dramatic times we are experiencing, marked by the pandemic but especially by wars, in particular the war in Ukraine, bringing death, sorrow and destruction. Artemides Zatti encourages us to experience hope as a virtue and attitude of life in God. The path to holiness very often requires a change in values and vision. This was the path taken by Artemides. **In the trials of life he discovered in the Cross a great opportunity to be reborn to a new life, when**:

* **as a boy** in the hard and tiring work of the countryside, he immediately learned to face up to the hardships and responsibilities that would accompany him always in his mature years;
* he left Boretto, Italy **with his family**, in search of a better future. Their move to Argentina, when Artemides was just 15 years old, was the necessary consequence of the family’s poverty;
* as a young aspirant to Salesian life he was **stricken with tuberculosis** which he contracted from a very ill young priest he was helping. Young Zatti experienced the drama of this disease in first person, not just in terms of bodily frailty and suffering, but also as something that touched the heart, gave rise to fear and so many questions. Foremost was the question of meaning, given everything that had happened to him, and what future was in store for him – everything he had dreamed of and yearned for had suddenly disappeared. In faith he turned to God to seek new meaning and direction for his life. The answer came but it was neither easy nor immediate. Thanks to the wise and encouraging presence of Frs Cavalli and Garrone, and interpreting life’s circumstances in a spirit of discernment and obedience, his Salesian vocation as a brother grew to maturity, by dedicating his entire life to the material and spiritual care of the sick, and by helping the poor and needy. He decided to stay with Don Bosco, living the original “coadjutor” (brother) vocation to its fullest;
* **he had to face up to trials, sacrifice and debts** to carry on the mission on behalf of the poor and the sick by managing the hospital and the pharmacy, always trusting in the help of Providence;
* **he saw the hospital** to which he had dedicated so much effort and energy, **demolished**, and had to set about building a new one;
* **he fell from a ladder in 1950** and the first symptoms of cancer appeared, something he had clearly diagnosed. It led to his death on 15 March 1951: nevertheless he continued to attend to the mission he had dedicated himself to, accepting the sufferings of this last stretch of his life.
1. ***Friend to the poor***

Artemides Zatti had dedicated his life to God in the service of the sick and the poor. As the one responsible for the San José (St Joseph’s) hospital in Viedma, he extended the range of its beneficiaries, reaching out to all the sick in the city, he with his inseparable bicycle, and especially to the poorest of them. He had to manage so much money, but his own life was very poor: when he went to Italy for the canonisation of Don Bosco he had to borrow a suit, hat and suitcase. He was much beloved and respected by the sick; beloved and respected by the doctors who had the greatest trust in him and surrendered to the ascendancy that came as a result of his holiness: “When I am with Zatti, I can only but believe in God”, a doctor who had said he was an atheist exclaimed one day. And the secret of this ascendancy? It is this: for him, every sick individual was Jesus in person. Literally! His superiors told him not to take in more than 30 sick people a day. He was heard to mutter: “And what if the 31st is Jesus in person?” He himself had no doubt: **deal with each with the same tenderness that Jesus himself would have dealt with them**, giving them his own bedroom in the case of an emergency, or even placing the body of a deceased person there in case of necessity. Often the Sister who looked after the linen closet heard him ask: “Have you got some clothes for a 12-year-old Jesus?” He continued his mission amongst the sick tirelessly, and serenely, until the end of his life, never taking a moments rest.

His upright approach restores for us **a Salesian perspective on “knowing how to stay with”** our mission scene in order to bring light to those who risk losing hope, to strengthen the faith of those who feel a sense of failure, and in order to be a sign of God’s love when “it seems” that he is absent from daily life. Artemides’ testimony as a **good Samaritan**, as someone who was as merciful as the Father, was a mission and a style that involved all those who dedicated themselves to the hospital in some way: doctors, nurses, caregivers, religious, volunteers who gave their valuable time to those who were suffering. At Zatti’s school their service to the sick, which they carried out competently and lovingly, became a mission. Zatti knew and nurtured the awareness that the hands of all those who were with him touched the suffering flesh of Christ and could be the signs of the merciful hands of the Father. All of this led to a recognition of the special quality of each sick person, who had their own dignity and fragility, in the knowledge that the sick person is always more important than the sickness itself. This is why he saw that patients were listened to, their stories heard, their anxieties, their fears. He knew that even when it was not possible to bring healing, it was always possible to look after people, always possible to console them, always possible to make people feel a closeness that demonstrated interest in the person before their illness. He would stop by, listen, establish a direct and personal relationship with the sick person, feel empathy with and be moved by them, and be involved in their suffering, taking it on himself as a service. **Artemides experienced closeness as an expression of the love of Jesus Christ the Good Samaritan.** Through compassion Jesus Christ became close to every human being wounded by sin. Artemides felt called to be merciful like the Father and to love, in particular, his sick, weak and suffering brothers and sisters. And going beyond personal closeness, he lived it in community: indeed he gave rise to a caring community that abandoned no one, and that included and welcomed the weakest in particular.

**Zatti established a pact between himself and those in need of care**, a pact based on trust and mutual respect, sincerity, availability, and those overcame all defensive barriers, placing the dignity of the sick person at the centre. For Zatti, this relationship with the sick person had its inexhaustible source of motivation and strength in the charity of Christ.

1. **Salesian Brother**

This charming figure of Artemides Zatti is an invitation to **suggest the charm of consecrated life to young people**, the radical nature of following the obedient, poor and chaste Christ, the primacy of God and the Spirit, fraternal life in community, spending oneself totally for the mission. The vocation of the Salesian brother is part of the special character that Don Bosco wanted to give the Salesian Congregation. It is certainly not an easy vocation to discern and accept; it blossoms more easily where apostolic lay vocations are promoted among young people and where they are offered a joyful and enthusiastic witness of religious consecration, like that of Artemides Zatti.

**Someone who has experienced the effective intercession of Artemides Zatti precisely with regard to the vocation of the consecrated layperson is Pope Francis himself, when he was provincial of the Jesuits in Argentina**. In a letter to Fr Cayetano Bruno sdb from Buenos Aires, 18 May 1986, among other things he wrote “In 1976, I believe it was more or less towards September, during a canonical visitation to Jesuit missionaries in northern Argentina, I spent some days in the archbishop’s residence in Salta. And it was there, chatting about things at the end of the meal, that Archbishop Pérez told me about the life of Bro. Zatti. He also gave me a book about his life and asked me to read it. What drew my attention was such a complete picture of the Coadjutor Brother. Right then I felt that I had to ask the Lord, through the intercession of this great Brother, to send us brother vocations. I made novenas and asked the novices to make them. […] In July 1977 the first young Brother entered (in fact he was 32 years old). On 29 October that year the second one entered (he was 33 years old)”. The letter went on, presenting year by year the further 16 brothers who entered between 1978 and 1986. He then went on: “Since we began to pray to Brother Zatti, 18 young brothers entered and persevered and a further 5 who left from the novitiate or juniorate. In total 23 vocations. The novices, students and young brothers often made the Novena in honour of Bro. Zatti, asking for brother vocations. I myself did so too. I am convinced of his intercession regarding this problem, since, considering the number, it is a rare case in the Society. In recognition of this, in the 2nd and 3rd edition of the Sacred Heart Devotionals, we included the Novena to ask for the Canonisation of Brother Zatti… In general terms this was the story of my connection with Bro. Zatti and the problem of Brother vocations for the Society of Jesus. I repeat that I am convinced of his intercession, because I know how much we prayed, using him as our advocate.”

A splendid and authoritative incentive for us, too, to call on the intercession of Artemides Zatti for the increase of good and holy Salesian Brother vocations.

1. **Saint Artemides Zatti!**

**In this year dedicated to St Francis de Sales, who upheld and promoted the vocation to holiness that everyone has,** the testimony of Artemides Zatti reminds us of what the Second Vatican Council said: “[that] all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect”. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco and Artemides make daily life an expression of God’s love, which is received and also reciprocated. Our saints wanted to bring the relationship with God closer to life and life closer to the relationship with God. It is the proposal of “next door holiness” or the “middle class of holiness” which Pope Francis speaks to us about with such affection.

Let us be ready to welcome the grace and the message that the Church communicates to us through the witness of Salesian holiness of this coadjutor brother. The figure of Artemides Zatti is an incentive and inspiration to make ourselves signs and bearers of God's love for the young and the poor.

This is the main prophetic form of Christianity: to surprise people with the radical choice of love, fearlessly challenging all ambiguity, working decisively against evil which humiliates people; to once again see the message transmitted by our personal and community life as a gospel unfolded in time, and an extension of the life and actions of Jesus. In a word, our holiness!

As I have written in this year’s Strenna: “We too, as a Salesian Family, need to make the ‘charism of the Visitation’ explicit as a desire of the heart to announce, without waiting for others to come to us, going into areas and places inhabited by so many people for whom a kind word, an encounter, a look full of respect can open their horizons towards a better life.” Artemides Zatti was a man of the Visitation, carrying Jesus in his heart, recognising and serving him in his sick and poor brothers and sisters joyfully and generously. May he intercede for us!