

# Holy Family of Nazareth

*Every year we celebrate the Holy Family of Nazareth on the last Sunday of the year. But we often forget that we celebrate with pomp the poorest and most delicate events of this Family. Obligated to give birth in a cave, persecuted at once, having to emigrate amidst so many dangers to a foreign country to survive, and this with an infant and no substance. But everything was an event of grace, permitted by God the Father, and announced in the Scriptures.*

*Let us read the beautiful story that Don Bosco himself told his boys of his time.*

**The sad annunciation. – The massacre of the innocents. – The holy family left for Egypt.**

*an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you. Matt. II, 13.*

*A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. Jer. c. XXXI, v. 15.*

The tranquillity of the holy family [after the birth of Jesus] was not to be of long duration. As soon as Joseph had returned to the poor house in Nazareth, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him "Arise, take the child and his mother away from thee, and flee into Egypt, and stay there until I bid thee return. For Herod will seek the child to put him to death."

And this was but too true. The cruel Herod, deceived by the Magi and furious at having missed such a good opportunity, in order to get rid of him whom he regarded as a competitor to the throne, had conceived the infernal design of having all male children under two years of age slaughtered. This abominable order was executed.

A broad river of blood ran through Galilee. Then

what Jeremiah had foretold came true: "A voice was heard in Ramah, a voice mixed with tears and lamentations. It is Rachel who weeps for her children and does not wish to be consoled; for they are no more." These poor innocents, cruelly slain, were the first martyrs of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Joseph had recognised the voice of the Angel; nor did he allow himself any reflection on the hasty departure, to which they had to resolve; on the difficulties of so long and so dangerous a journey. He must have regretted leaving his poor home to go across the deserts to seek asylum in a country he did not know. Without even waiting for tomorrow, the moment the angel disappeared he got up and ran to wake Maria. Mary hastily prepared a small amount of clothes and provisions for them to take with them. Joseph meanwhile prepared the mare, and they departed without regret from their city to obey God's command. Here, then, is a poor old man who renders the horrible plots of the tyrant of Galilee in vain ; it is to him that God entrusts the care of Jesus and Mary.

***Disastrous journey – A tradition.***

*When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. Matt. X, 23.*

Two roads presented themselves to the traveller who wished to go to Egypt by land. One went through deserts populated by ferocious beasts, and the paths were uncomfortable, long and not very busy. The other went through a little-visited country, but the inhabitants of the district were very hostile to the Jews. Joseph, who especially feared men in this precipitate flight, chose the first of these two roads as the most hidden.

Having set out from Nazareth in the thick of night, the cautious travellers, whose itinerary required them to pass Jerusalem first, beat the saddest and most tortuous paths for some time. When it was necessary to cross some great road, Joseph, leaving Jesus and his Mother in the shelter of a rock, would scout the way, to make sure that the exit was not

guarded by Herod's soldiers. Reassured by this precaution, he returned to get his precious treasure, and the holy family continued its journey, between ravines and hills. From time to time, they would make a brief stop at the edge of a clear stream, and after a frugal meal they would take a little rest from the exertions of the journey. When evening came, it was time to resign oneself to sleeping under the open sky. Joseph stripped off his cloak and covered Jesus and Mary with it to preserve them from the humidity of the night. Then tomorrow, at daybreak, the arduous journey would begin again. The holy travellers, having passed through the small town of Anata, headed on the side of Ramala to descend to the plains of Syria, where they were now to be free from the snares of their fierce persecutors. Against their custom they had continued walking despite the fact that it was already nightfall in order to get to safety sooner. Joseph was almost touching the ground ahead of the others. Mary, all trembling from this nocturnal run, was casting her restless glances into the depths of the valleys and the crevices in the rocks. Suddenly, a swarm of armed men appeared to intercept their path. It was a band of scoundrels, ravaging the district, whose frightful fame stretched far into the distance. Joseph had arrested Mary's mount, and prayed to the Lord in silence; for any resistance was impossible. At most one could hope to save one's life. The leader of the brigands broke away from his companions and advanced towards Joseph to see with whom he had to deal. The sight of this old man without arms, of this little child sleeping on his mother's breast, touched the bandit's bloodthirsty heart. Far from wishing them any harm, he extended his hand to Joseph, offering him and his family hospitality. This leader was called Dismas. Tradition tells us that thirty years later he was taken by soldiers and condemned to be crucified. He was put on the cross on Calvary at the side of Jesus, and is the same one we know under the name of the good thief.

**Arrival in Egypt – Prodigies that occurred on their entry into**

**this land – Village of Matarie – Dwelling of the Holy Family.**  
*Behold, the Lord will ascend on a swift cloud and will enter Egypt, and in his presence the idols of Egypt will tremble.*  
Is. XIX, 1.

As soon as day appeared, the fugitives, thanking the brigands who had become their hosts, resumed their journey full of dangers. It is said that Mary on setting out said these words to the leader of those bandits: "What you have done for this child, you will one day be amply rewarded for." After passing through Bethlehem and Gaza, Joseph and Mary descended into Syria and having met a caravan leaving for Egypt they joined it. From this moment until the end of their journey they saw nothing ahead of them but an immense desert of sand, whose aridity was only interrupted at rare intervals by a few oases, that is, a few stretches of fertile and verdant land. Their labours were redoubled during this race across these sun-baked plains. Food was scarce, and water was often lacking. How many nights did Joseph, who was old and poor, find himself pushed back, when he tried to approach the spring, at which the caravan had stopped to quench its thirst!

Finally, after two months of a very painful journey, the travellers entered Egypt. According to Sozomenus, from the moment the Holy Family touched this ancient land, the trees lowered their branches to worship the Son of God; the ferocious beasts flocked there, forgetting their instincts; and the birds sang in chorus the praises of the Messiah. Indeed, if we believe what we are told by trustworthy authors, all the idols of the province, recognising the victor of Paganism, fell to pieces. Thus were the words of the prophet Isaiah literally fulfilled when he said, "Behold, the Lord will ascend on a swift cloud and will enter Egypt, and in his presence the idols of Egypt will tremble."

Joseph and Mary, desirous of reaching the end of their journey soon, did but pass through Heliopolis, consecrated to the worship of the sun, to go to Matari where they intended to rest from their labours.

Matari is a beautiful village shaded by sycamores, about two leagues from Cairo, the capital of Egypt. There Joseph intended to make his home. But this was not yet the end of his troubles. He needed to seek accommodation. The Egyptians were not at all hospitable; so the holy family was forced to take shelter for a few days in the trunk of a big old tree. Finally, after a long search, Joseph found a modest room, in which he placed Jesus and Mary.

This house, which can still be seen in Egypt, was a kind of cave, twenty feet long over fifteen feet wide. There were no windows either; light had to penetrate through the door. The walls were of a kind of black and filthy clay, the oldness of which bore the imprint of misery. To the right was a small cistern, from which Joseph drew water for the family's service.

#### **Sorrows. – Consolation and end of exile.**

*I will be with them in trouble.* Ps. XC. 15.

As soon as he had entered this new dwelling, Joseph resumed his ordinary work. He began to furnish his house; a small table, a few chairs, a bench, all the work of his hands. Then he went from door to door looking for work to earn a living for his small family. He undoubtedly experienced many rejections and endured many humiliating scorns! He was poor and unknown, and this was enough for his work to be refused. In turn, Mary, while she had a thousand cares for her Son, courageously gave herself to work, occupying in it a part of the night to make up for her husband's small and insufficient earnings. Yet in the midst of his sorrows how much consolation for Joseph! It was for Jesus that he worked, and the bread that the divine child ate was he who had bought it with the sweat of his brow. And then when he returned in the evening exhausted and oppressed by the heat, Jesus smiled at his arrival, and caressed him with his small hands. Often with the price of privations, which he imposed on himself, Joseph was able to obtain some savings, what joy he then felt

at being able to use them to sweeten the condition of the divine child! Now it was some dates, now some toys suitable for his age, that the pious carpenter brought to the Saviour of men. Oh how sweet then were the good old man's emotions as he contemplated the radiant face of Jesus! When Saturday came, the day of rest and consecrated to the Lord, Joseph took the child by the hand and guided his first steps with a truly paternal solicitude.

Meanwhile the tyrant who reigned over Israel died. God, whose all-possessing arm always punishes the guilty, had sent him a cruel illness, which quickly led him to the grave. Betrayed by his own son, eaten alive by worms, Herod had died, bringing with him the hatred of the Jews, and the curse of posterity.

***The new annunciation. – Return to Judea. – A tradition reported by St Bonaventure.***

*Out of Egypt I called my son.* Hosea XI, 1.

For seven years Joseph had been in Egypt, when the Angel of the Lord, the ordinary messenger of Heaven's will, appeared to him again in his sleep and said to him: "Arise, take away the child and his mother from thee, and return to the land of Israel; for those who sought the child to bring him to death are no more. Ever ready for God's voice, Joseph sold his house and his furniture, and ordered everything for departure. In vain did the Egyptians, enraptured by Joseph's goodness and Mary's gentleness, make earnest petitions to retain him. In vain did they promise him an abundance of everything necessary for life, Joseph was adamant. The memories of his childhood, the friends he had in Judea, the pure atmosphere of his homeland, spoke much more to his heart than the beauty of Egypt. Besides, God had spoken, and nothing else was needed to decide Joseph to return to the land of his ancestors.

Some historians are of the opinion that the holy family made part of the journey by sea, because it took them

less time, and they had a great desire to see their homeland again soon. As soon as they landed in Ascalonia, Joseph heard that Archelaus had succeeded his father Herod on the throne. This was a new source of anxiety for Joseph. The angel had not told him in which part of Judea he should settle. Should he do this in Jerusalem, or in Galilee, or in Samaria? Joseph filled with anxiety prayed to the Lord to send him his heavenly messenger during the night. The angel ordered him to flee from Archelaus and retreat to Galilee. Joseph then had no more to fear, and quietly took the road to Nazareth, which he had abandoned seven years before.

Let not our devoted readers be sorry to hear from the seraphic Doctor St Bonaventure on this point of history: "They were in the act of departing: and Joseph went first with the men, and his mother came with the women (who had come as friends of the holy family to accompany them a little way). And when they were out of the door, Joseph took the men back, and would not let them accompany him any more. Then some of those good men, having compassion on the poverty of these men, called the Child and gave him some money for expenses. The Child was ashamed to receive them; but, for the sake of poverty, he set forth his hand and received the money shamefully and thanked him. And so did more people. Those honourable matrons called him again and did the same; the mother was no less ashamed than the child, but nevertheless humbly thanked them."

Having taken leave of that warm company and renewed their thanks and greetings, the holy family turned their steps towards Judea.

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# **“It was like heaven”. The first Christmas Mass at Valdocco**

*The first Christmas Mass celebrated by Don Bosco at Valdocco was in 1846. After obtaining permission to celebrate it in the poor Pinardi chapel, he began preparing the minds of his boys by teaching them to receive Holy Communion, make visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and to learn some devout hymns. Fr Lemoyne recounts.*

“The feast of the Immaculate Conception served as a preparation for Christmas. Don Bosco made much of all the mysteries of our Faith. Anxious to express outwardly and with greater transport his devotion to the Incarnate Word and to arouse it and foster it in others, he petitioned the Holy See for the faculty of distributing Holy Communion at the solemn Christmas Midnight Mass in the chapel of the oratory. Pius IX granted it for three years.

After announcing the good news to the boys, he taught his young singers a short Mass and several hymns which he himself had composed in honor of the Child Jesus. He also decorated the

small church as best he could and invited several people to join the boys during the novena. The archbishop had granted Don Bosco permission to impart Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament whenever he wanted to, but only on such occasions was he authorized to preserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.

A great crowd of boys was present, for he had instilled into the hearts of his little friends a deep love for the Divine Child. Since he was the only priest available, every evening throughout the novena he heard the confessions of many who wanted to go to Communion the following day. Early every morning he was there again to accommodate those boys who had

to go to work. After Mass and Communion, he preached a short sermon, which was followed by the chanting of the prophecies by several catechists he had trained, and by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

On Christmas eve he heard confessions until eleven o'clock, sang the Midnight Mass, and distributed Holy Communion to several hundred people. Afterwards, he exclaimed with tears in his

eyes: 'How wonderful! It was like heaven!' After the service, he gave the boys some refreshment and then sent them home to bed.

After a few hours sleep he was back in church, waiting for the larger crowd of boys that had been unable to attend the Midnight Mass. He celebrated two more Masses, and then went through his usual busy Sunday schedule.

The novena and the feast of Christmas were celebrated this way for many years, until Don Bosco had other priests to help him. But Christmas, in those early years, had a special flavor about it which made it truly unforgettable, because it not only symbolized the formal and definitive taking over of the Pinardi house, but also confirmed the promises of future buildings that would testify of the Lord's goodness to future generations. How fondly Don Bosco, his heart and mind full of plans, must have repeated on that blessed day, when reciting his breviary, the words of the Psalmist: "O God, we ponder your kindness within your temple! As your name, O God, so also your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Of justice your right hand is full!" (BM II 453-454).

The Masses on Holy Christmas Eve were celebrated by Don Bosco from then on until the last years of his life, with a special joy that shone from his face.

But it was not only this joy that encouraged lively devotion in everyone, but also the exhortations he made to his little friends to prepare themselves well for Christmas. He would say:

“My dear boys, tomorrow we begin the Christmas novena. There is a story about a man who was very devoted to the Infant Jesus. While going through a forest one winter day, he heard a child’s whimper.

Following the sound, he came upon a very beautiful child in tears. ‘My dear one,’ he exclaimed, ‘what happened? Why are you here alone?’

‘Nobody cares for me,’ the child replied tearfully. With that, he vanished. The man understood then it was the Infant Jesus Himself lamenting man’s ingratitude and coldness.

I have told you this story that we may all do our best not to give Jesus cause to complain of us too. Let us get set to make this novena well. Every morning, besides Holy Mass, we will have the chanting of the prophecies, followed by a short talk and Benediction.

I suggest two things to make this novena well:

1. Often think of the Infant Jesus and His love for you. He proved it by dying on the Cross. In the morning, rise promptly at the sound of the bell and, if you feel the cold, think of Jesus shivering in the manger.

During the day study your lessons diligently, do your homework, and pay attention to your teachers for the love of Jesus. Remind yourselves that Jesus grew in wisdom, age, and grace before God and men. Above all, take care not to do anything to displease Him.

2. Visit Him often in the Blessed Sacrament. We envy the shepherds who went to the grotto of Bethlehem to see Him, kissed His little hand, and offered Him their gifts. ‘Lucky shepherds!’ we exclaim. And yet there is no reason to envy them, for their fortune is ours too. The same Jesus they visited in the grotto is in our tabernacle. The only difference is that the shepherds saw Him with the eyes of the body, whereas we see Him with the eyes of faith. Nothing will please Him more than our frequent visits to Him. How? First, by receiving Him often in Holy Communion – a custom that has always been eagerly and fervently observed at the Oratory especially during this novena. I hope it will be the same this

year. Second, by slipping into church during the day, even for only a minute, even for only a 'Glory Be.' Have I made myself clear?

Two things, then, we shall do to make this novena well. What are they? Can you tell me? Let us often think of the Infant Jesus; let us visit Him by receiving Him in Holy Communion and frequently calling on Him in the tabernacle." (BM VI, 193-194).

Don Bosco's words are also valid today. If they bore fruit in the past, they can also bear fruit today, if we follow them with living faith.

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## **Missionary generosity in Southern Africa**

*South Africa, officially the Republic of South Africa, is a multicultural country, one of the few countries in the world with 11 official languages spoken by many ethnic groups. It is a country that has suffered for more than 40 years from racial segregation, which was instituted in 1948 by the country's ethnic white government and remained in force until 1991. Called apartheid, it was a racially segregated policy that was officially condemned by the United Nations in 1973, when it declared apartheid a crime against humanity.*

*Today, many years later, blacks, whites, mestizos and Asians live together, although segregationist mentalities can still be felt. Some 20 years ago, a Paraguayan Salesian, Fr Alberto Higinio Villalba, now provincial economist and rector of the Salesian house in Johannesburg, arrived in this country as a missionary. We asked him to tell us a little about the realisation of his missionary dream.*

I was born in Asunción, the capital of Paraguay, a small country in South America, surrounded by Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia. I come from a family of six children, three boys and three girls. I am the second son. My whole family is in Paraguay; my parents are still alive, although with some health problems related to their age. The desire to become a missionary came long ago, as a young man, together with the Salesian Youth Movement, when I went to do apostolate in villages and suburban stations, helping children with catechesis and in oratory activities. Then, when I was a Salesian pre-novice, I met a Spanish priest, Fr Martín Rodríguez, who shared with me his experience as a missionary in the Chaco Paraguayo: at that moment the desire to become a missionary was strengthened.

But it was thanks to the Rector Major Fr Vecchi that I decided to leave: his missionary appeal to all the provinces appealed to me and, talking with my Provincial, Fr Cristóbal López, today Cardinal and Archbishop of Rabat, I decided to take part in the 2000 missionary expedition.

Of course, it was not easy. From the beginning I encountered several cultural shocks that I had to overcome with patience and commitment. Before arriving in Africa, I was sent to Ireland to learn English: everything was very new to me, very challenging. Once I landed in South Africa, there was no longer one new language I did not understand, but many more! In fact, South Africa has eleven official languages and English is only one of them. On the other hand, the Salesians' welcome was very warm and kind.

I always say that to become a missionary you don't need to leave your country, culture, family, and everything else. To be a missionary means to bring Jesus to people wherever we are; and we can do this in our families, in our communities, where we work. However, becoming missionaries "*ad gentes*" means responding to the generosity of God who shared his Son with us through the missionaries who evangelised our

continents, and to the generosity of Don Bosco who sent his missionaries to share the Salesian charism with us. If there have been so many people who have left their countries and cultures to share Christ and Don Bosco with us, then we too can respond to that love and kindness to share the same gifts with others.

Speaking of Southern Africa, the Southern African Vice-Province includes three countries: South Africa, where the Salesians arrived in 1896, the kingdom of Eswatini (arrived 75 years ago) and the kingdom of Lesotho. Many changes have taken place over the years: we have moved from technical centres to schools, parishes and now projects. Currently we have seven communities, most of them with some parishes and training centres or oratories attached to the communities.

Having been in Africa for more than 20 years now, I would say that the best experience of my Salesian life was in Eswatini, working for Manzini Youth Care. When I was asked to take care of the project, the MYC was in a very difficult financial situation and the organisation had several months' salary arrears. However, the people working on the projects had never complained and every day they came with the same enthusiasm and energy to do their best to contribute to the lives of the young people MYC was working for.

This is where you can really see the commitment of our lay collaborators and it is a pleasure to work with them.

We want to do a lot, but from a vocational point of view, we are diminishing and we need the help of Salesians who willingly offer to help us spread the Good News and Salesian spirituality here in Southern Africa. Many Salesians and many provinces continue to show generosity, making their human resources available, sending missionaries to our countries of origin. Therefore, we are invited to share the same generosity and hope that it will turn into a spiral of growth. For the sons of Don Bosco, it is a duty to let people know who our father Don Bosco is, and the rich spirituality of the Salesian charism.

# Missionary Appeal 2024

Dear confreres,

Fraternal greetings from our Mother House in Valdocco.

As has been the tradition for some years now, today, 18 December, on the day Don Bosco founded our “Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales” in 1859, is a good opportunity to emphasise the missionary spirit as an essential element of Don Bosco’s charism, by sending you my annual missionary appeal.

In 2024 we will celebrate the second centenary of Johnny Bosco’s dream at nine. Don Pietro Stella said that it is the dream that “conditioned Don Bosco’s whole way of living and thinking”. For us today to follow the reflection on Don Bosco’s dream at nine requires us to emphasise his trust in Providence: «In due time you will understand everything». The dream at nine teaches us that God speaks in many ways. God does great things with “simple instruments”, even in the depths of our hearts, through the feelings that move within us. Today the dream at nine continues to make us dream and invites us to think about who we are and for whom we are.

It is interesting to note that in his fifth missionary dream, which took place while he was visiting the confreres in Barcelona on the night of 9-10 April 1886, Don Bosco saw a deep connection with his dream at nine. In his fifth and last missionary dream he saw a large crowd of boys running towards him shouting: “We have been waiting for you. We have waited so long for you. Now you are finally here. You are among us, and you will not flee from us!” The shepherdess who led a huge flock of lambs helped him to understand the meaning by asking

him: "Do you remember the dream you had when you were ten years old?", she then drew a line from Valparaiso to Beijing to highlight the immense number of young people awaiting the Salesians. Indeed, today in all continents there are young people who need to be transformed from 'wolves' into 'lambs'.

Today Don Bosco needs Salesians who make themselves available as "simple instruments" to realise his missionary dream. With this letter I appeal to the confreres who feel in the depths of their hearts, through the feelings that move within them, the call of God, within our common Salesian vocation, to make themselves available as missionaries with a lifelong commitment (*ad vitam*), wherever the Rector Major will send them.

To my appeal of 18 December 2022, 42 Salesians responded by sending me their letter expressing their missionary availability. After careful discernment, 24 were chosen as members of the 154th missionary expedition last September. The others are continuing their discernment. I hope that this year as many, or even more, will generously make themselves available.

I invite the Provincials, with their Delegates for Missionary Animation (PDMA), to be the first to help the confreres to facilitate their discernment, inviting them, after personal dialogue, to place themselves at the disposal of the Rector Major to respond to the missionary needs of the Congregation. Then the General Councillor for Missions, in my name, will continue the discernment that will lead to the choice of missionaries for the 155th missionary expedition which will be held, God willing, on Sunday 29th September 2024, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, as has been done since the time of Don Bosco.

The dialogue with the General Councillor for Missions and the shared reflection within the General Council allows me to specify the urgencies identified for 2024, where I would like

a significant number of confreres to be sent:

- to the new frontiers of the African continent: Botswana, Niger, North Africa, etc.
- to the new presences we will start in Greece and Vanuatu;
- to Albania, Romania, Germany, Slovenia and other frontiers of Project Europe;
- to Azerbaijan, Nepal, Mongolia, South Africa and Yakutia;
- to presences among the indigenous peoples of the American continent.

I entrust my last missionary appeal to the intercession of our Immaculate Mother and Help of Christians, that we Salesians may keep Don Bosco's missionary ardour alive.

I greet you, dear confreres, with true affection,

Prot. 23/0585

Turin Valdocco, 18 December 2023

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## Salesian House at Châtillon

*Located in a beautiful mountainous area at the foot of the Alps, close to Switzerland, the [Salesian House at Châtillon](#) has a special and successful history.*

In the region of Valle d'Aosta, there is a municipality called Châtillon (the name comes from the Latin "Castellum") located between Mount Zerbion to the north and Mount Barbeston to the south; it is the third most populated municipality in the region.

In 1917, during the First World War, a company, Soie de Châtillon (English "Silk of Châtillon"), was founded in this locality and started to work in the field of techno-fibres with modern technology. The presence of nearby hydroelectric

power stations that supplied electricity conditioned the choice of location for the company, as there were still no extensive power grids to transport electricity.

In 1942, the company came under the ownership of Società Saifta (*Società Anonima Italiana per le Fibre Tessili Artificiali S.p.A.*).

After the Second World War, the Saifta Company, which managed the Soie factory in Châtillon, initially intended as a boarding school for female workers, called in the Salesians and put these buildings at their disposal to take in war orphans and children of Soie employees as boarders. Thus began the Salesian *Don Bosco Orphanage in Châtillon*, a name that has remained to this day, even though the orphans are no longer there.

At the end of August 1948, 33 boys began an Industrial Vocational Training course in the two specialisations for Mechanics-Adjusters and Carpenters-Cabinetmakers: the latter specialisation was very useful in the mountainous, wooded area.

A few months later, on 5 February 1949, the Don Bosco Orphanage was officially inaugurated, destined to take in the poor youngsters of the Aosta Valley and initiate them into learning a profession.

With the introduction of compulsory schooling in 1965, the Vocational School was replaced by the Middle School, and the Technical School by the Professional Institute for Industry and Handicrafts (IPIA), in the two specialisations: Mechanical Carpenters and Cabinet-Makers.

At the end of the 1970s, the Saifta Company went into crisis, stopped supporting the Orphanage financially and put the Soie structure up for sale. The Valle d'Aosta Region, in May 1980, realising the importance and value of the work – which had developed so much in the meantime – bought the entire educational structure and offered it for management to the Salesians.

Educational activities continued, developing into the vocational school, the result of the Salesians' collaboration

with local companies.

Since 1997, the Vocational Training Centre (VTC) has offered courses for carpenters, mechanics and graphic designers.

In 2004 the CFP offered courses for electrical installers and also post diploma courses.

Since 2006 there have been courses for electrical fitters, mechanics, post diploma courses and car mechanics.

From the 2010-2011 school year, with the Gelmini reform, the Professional Institute changed from a three-year to a five-year course.

Currently, the Salesian House called the Don Bosco Salesian Orphanage Institute, has various educational areas

- a Vocational Training Centre: a three-year course in car mechanics and bodywork; courses for workers and businesses (daytime initial post-diploma training courses and evening refresher courses for the employed), which are part of the CNOS/FAP Valle d'Aosta Region federation, set up in July 2001

- a Vocational Institute for Industry and Craftsmanship (IPIA), with two addresses: MAT (Maintenance-Technical Assistance-Mechanical); PIA (Production-Industrial Handicraft-Made in Italy-wood);

- a middle school, an equal secondary school, which welcomes boys and girls from the lower-middle valley;

- a Don Bosco boarding school, reserved for students attending the IPIA, which hosts, from Monday to Friday, young people from nearby Piedmont or the valleys.

The preparation of these young people is entrusted to an educating community, whose primary protagonists are the Salesian community, the lay teachers, educators, collaborators, and also the parents and groups of the Salesian family (cooperators, alumni).

However, the educational focus has not only stopped at human and professional preparation to form upright citizens, but also to make good Christians.

Even though the house – being too small – did not allow for

Christian formation activities, a solution was found for these and for important celebrations. Further up and a short distance from the Salesian House in Châtillon is the ancient parish of St Peter (attested to go back as early as the 12th century), which has a large church. The agreement with the parish has brought many fruits, including the propagation of devotion to Don Bosco's Madonna, Mary Help of Christians, an invocation dear to the Salesians. The fruit of this devotion also manifested itself in the recovery of the health of various people (Blanchod Martina, Emma Vuillermoz, Pession Paolina, etc.), attested to by the writings of the times.

The sincere desire to do good on the part of all those who contributed to the development led to the success of this Salesian work.

First of all, the entrepreneurs who understood the need and importance of the education of at-risk children, and at the same time promoted the training of possible future employees. They not only offered their facilities, but also financially supported the educational activities.

Then there was the wisdom of the local authorities, who understood the importance of the work carried out over more than 30 years and immediately offered to continue providing support for the children and also for the companies in the area, thus providing them with qualified workers.

Last but not least, recognition must be given to the work carried out by the Salesians and their collaborators of all kinds, who have done their utmost to ensure that the hope of the future is not extinguished: young people and their integral education.

This professionalism in the preparation of the young, together with the care of the logistical structures (classrooms, laboratories, gyms, courtyards), the careful and constant maintenance of the premises, the connection with the territory, have led to widespread recognition that is also reflected in the fact that a street and a square in Châtillon are dedicated to St John Bosco.

When people sincerely seek good and strive for it, God gives his blessing.

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# Have you thought about your vocation? St Francis de Sales could help you (10/10)

[\*\(continuation from previous article\)\*](#)

## 10. Shall we plan?

As a young student, Francis de Sales (he was 22 years old) realised that dangers to the soul and body threaten at every moment; with the help of his Confessor, Father Possevino, he sketched out a Life Programme or Spiritual Plan to know how he should behave each day and on every occasion. He wrote it down and read it frequently. It goes like this:

**1. Every morning make the Preview Examination:** which consists of thinking what work, what meetings, what conversations and special occasions may arise that day and planning how to behave at each of those times.

**2. At midday visit the Blessed Sacrament in some Church and make the Particular Examination** about my dominant defect, to see if I am fighting it and if I am trying to practise the virtue contrary to it.

*There is an interesting detail here: for 19 years his Particular Examination would be about the "bad spirit", that very strong defect that is his inclination to get angry. When someone, already a bishop and wonderfully kind and good, asked him what he has done to arrive at such a high degree of self-*

*mastery, he would reply: 'For 19 years, day by day, I have carefully examined myself about my intention not to treat anyone harshly'. This Particular Examination was a practice supremely followed by St Ignatius of Loyola, with real spiritual success. It is like an echo of that teaching of Thomas a Kempis: 'If every year you seriously attack one of your faults, you will arrive at holiness'.*

### **3. No day without meditation.**

For half an hour I dedicate myself to thinking about the favours God has granted me, the greatness and goodness of Our Lord, the truths the Holy Bible teaches, or the examples and teachings of the saints. And at the end of the meditation I choose a few thoughts to turn them over in my mind during the day and make a short resolution on how I will behave during the next 12 hours.

### **4. Every day pray the Holy Rosary**

Do not neglect to pray it any day of my life.

This is a Promise that he made to the Blessed Virgin at a time of great distress and throughout his life he fulfilled it exactly. But later he would tell his disciples never to make this kind of promise all their lives, because they can bring anguish. Make resolutions yes, but promises no.

### **5. In my dealings with others be kind but moderate.**

Being more concerned with getting others to talk about what they are interested in than me talking. What I say I already know. But what they say can help me grow spiritually. By talking I learn nothing, by listening distinctly I can learn a lot.

### **6. During the day think of God's presence.**

Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. , (Cf. Psalm 138). "The Lord will pay to each one according to his works. Everyone will have to appear

before the Court of God to give him an account of what he has done, of the good things and the bad things” (Cf. St Paul).

**7. Every night before going to bed I shall do the Examination of the Day:** I shall remember whether I began my day by commending myself to God.

If during my occupations I have remembered God many times to offer Him my actions, thoughts, words, and sufferings. Whether everything I have done today has been out of love for the good God. If I have treated people well. If I have not sought in my deeds and words to please my own self-love and pride, but to please God and do good to my neighbour. If I have been able to make some small sacrifice. If I have endeavoured to be fervent in speech. And I will ask the Lord’s forgiveness for the offences I have caused him this day; I will make a resolution to become better from now on; and I will beg heaven to grant me strength to be ever faithful to God; and reciting my three Hail Marys, I will surrender myself peacefully to sleep.

*Office for Vocational Animation*

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## **Zatti the good Samaritan for the sick, doctors and nurses (video)**

**“Zatti – hospital”**

Zatti and the hospital were an inseparable pair. Fr Entraigas remembers that when there was a telephone call the Salesian Brother answered almost instantly: “Zatti-Hospital”. Without realising it he was expressing **the inseparable reality between himself and the hospital**. Having become responsible for the hospital in 1913 after the death of Fr Garrone and after

Giacinto Massini left the Congregation, little by little he took over every task, but he was first of all and unmistakably the “nurse” of the *San Jose* hospital. He did not prepare himself casually but tried to perfect what he had learned empirically through personal study. He continued to study throughout his life and gained a high level of experience thanks to 48 years of practice at *San Jose*. Doctor Sussini, who was among those who practised there the longest, after having stated that Zatti cured the sick with “*santa vocación*” adds: “From the time that I met him, as far as I know, being the mature and already prepared man that he was, Bro. Zatti did not neglect his general level of knowledge, nor his knowledge of nursing and pharmacy.”

Fr De Roia spoke of Zatti’s professional development: “Speaking of cultural and professional training, I remember seeing medical books and publications and asking him once when he read them. He replied that he did so at night or while patients were taking a nap, once he had finished his duties in the hospital. He also told me that Dr Sussini sometimes lent him some books and I saw that he often consulted the ‘*Vademecum e ricettari*’”

Doctor Pietro Echay said that for Zatti “***the Hospital was a sanctuary.***” Fr Feliciano López describes Zatti’s position at the hospital, after long experience with him: “Zatti was a man of leadership, he knew how to clearly express what he wanted, but he **accompanied this with gentleness, respect and joy.** He never lost his temper, indeed, he would downplay things in a good-natured sort of way, but his example of industriousness was overwhelming and more than being a director without title, he had become a kind of universal worker. Apart from this, he quickly advanced in professional competence, in order to achieve the respect of doctors and even more, his workers. So I never heard it said that peace did not reign in that small world of 60 or 70 patients, in the early days with several Sisters, other women who provided their service and some nurses. And even if there might sometimes be disagreements, as is natural, these did not degenerate thanks to Zatti’s

prudence. He was able to remedy these situations.”

The *San José* Hospital was a special sanctuary for human suffering where Artemides embraced and cared for the suffering flesh of Christ in every suffering brother and sister, and gave meaning and hope to human suffering. Zatti – and with him many men and women of good will – **embodied the parable of the Good Samaritan**: he was close to people, he stretched out his hand to them, uplifted them, and cared for them. For him, every sick person was like a child to love. Men and women, big and small, rich and poor, intelligent and ignorant, all were treated in a respectful and lovable way, without being upset by or rejecting the insolent and unfriendly ones. He used to say: ‘Sometimes you can have someone with a nice approach, sometimes an unpleasant one, but before God we are all the same.’

Though the hospital was poor, and though many of those who were hospitalised were poor, given the time, places and situations of all hospitals, including national hospitals at the time, Zatti followed the correct health and hygiene standards. Things then were done a bit more flexibly, but this never meant that Bro. Zatti, as a nurse, lacked either justice or charity towards his patients. He was well educated for his task and had good experience. He knew what he had to do and the limits of his skills. There is no record of any mistake, any neglect or any accusation against him. Dr Sussini said: “In his interventions with the sick, he always respected the legal norms, without exceeding his powers [...]. I would like to point out that in all his interventions he consulted some of the doctors who were always at his side to support him. As far as I know, he never attempted any serious operations [...]. It is certain that he used the established hygienic prescriptions, although sometimes, given his great faith, he considered them excessive. The socio-economic scenario in which Bro. Zatti mainly carried out his activity was one where the economy was poor, education was poor and the people generally had little education. In his activity within the hospital he put into practice the consolidated knowledge of

hygiene and technique that he already had and others that he learned by asking professionals. Outside the hospital, his activity was more difficult because changing the situation around him was very difficult and beyond anything he could do.”

Luigi Palma had more to say: “Bro. Zatti’s discretion and prudence was commonly spoken of in Viedma, and any abuse in this matter would have been quickly known in a small population such as Viedma, yet nothing of the kind was ever heard. Bro. Zatti never exceeded his competence. I don’t think he performed any difficult operations. If there had been any abuse, the doctors would have reported it, but they did nothing but praise Zatti’s work [...]. Bro. Zatti used the prescribed hygienic precautions. I know this because he treated me on several occasions: injections or small treatments done with all due diligence.”

For a man who spent his whole life with enormous sacrifice for the sick, **who was sought by them as a blessing**, who won the respect of all the doctors who collaborated with him and against whom a voice of accusation could never be raised, it would be unfair to deny some of the freedom that his experience and prudence could allow him in some particular circumstance: the sublime exercise of charity, even in this case, was worth more than the observance of any formal prescription.

### **With the heart of Don Bosco**

In Zatti, what Don Bosco recommended to the first Salesian missionaries leaving for Argentina had been fulfilled: **“Take special care of the sick, of the young, of the old and of the poor, and you will win the blessing of God and the good will of men.”** As a Good Samaritan, Zatti took the poor, the sick, and people discarded by society to the inn that was his heart, and to the San José Hospital in Viedma In each of them he saw Christ, looked after Christ, fed Christ, clothed Christ, hosted Christ, honoured Christ. As one doctor at the hospital testified: “The only miracle I have seen in my life is Bro.

Zatti, for the extraordinary nature of his character, the ability to serve his neighbour and his extraordinary patience with the sick.”

Zatti was able to recognise a gift in every brother, in every sister, in every person, especially the poor and needy, that he encountered: he was able to see the luminous face of Jesus in each of them. How many times he would exclaim when welcoming a poor or sick person: “Jesus is coming! Christ is coming!” This keeping his gaze fixed on Jesus, especially at a time of trial and in the dark night of the soul, would be the strength that would not allow him to fall prey to his own thoughts and fears.

In the exercise of this charity, Zatti showed God’s embrace for every human being, especially the lowliest, and by involving heart, soul and all his being, he lived with the poor and for the poor. It was not simply the rendering of services, but a tangible manifestation of God’s love, recognising and serving the face of the suffering Christ in the poor and sick with motherly delicacy and tenderness. Living with the poor, he practised charity in a spirit of poverty. He was not an official or bureaucrat, not a service provider, but a true charity worker: and in **seeing, recognising and serving Christ in the poor and the excluded**, he also educated others. When he asked for something, he asked for Jesus: “Give me a suit for an elderly Jesus”; “Give me some clothes for a 12-year-old Jesus!”

It is impossible to forget **his adventures on his bicycle**, his endless trips with his classic white dust coat with knotted ends tied at the waist, greeted with tender affection by those he met on his way. Given the slow progress on his bicycle he had time for everything: an affectionate greeting, a kind word, some measured advice, some therapeutic pointers, spontaneous and disinterested help. His large pockets were always full of medicines, all of which he distributed to the needy. He personally reached out to those who called on him, generously giving them not only his well-established medical knowledge, but also the trust, optimism, and faith that

radiated from his constant, broad, gentle smile and the kindness of his gaze. Any seriously ill person who received a visit from Bro. Zatti would feel the unmeasurable relief that came from this man at their side. Anyone who died with Zatti there did so without anguish. The charity so generously dispensed around Viedma's muddy streets meant that Artemides Zatti was remembered by the city with a street, a hospital and a monument named after him.

He carried out a small apostolate that showed the extent of his charity, but that involved much time, work, difficulty and many little inconveniences. Since everyone knew his goodness and goodwill in serving others, everyone turned to him for all kinds of things. The Salesian rectors of houses in the province wrote for medical advice, sent confreres to be looked after, brought people to his hospital when they were unable to bring themselves. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians sought favours no less than the Salesians. Italian migrants asked for help, had him write to Italy, asked for records. Those who had been well cared for in the hospital sent relatives and friends for him to look after as if it were an expression of gratitude, but it was because of the respect they had for his care. The civil authorities often had people who needed help and resorted to Zatti. Prisoners and other people, seeing how well he got on with the authorities, got him to ask for clemency for them or work on solving their issues.

One event that expresses Zatti's authoritative power to impact the lives of people by his gospel witness and persuasive word is the conversion of Lautaro Montalva. Known as "the Chilean" because of his country of origin, he was a revolutionary, exploited by the usual political agitators. He would disseminate magazines against religion. Finally, when everyone abandoned him, he fell into poverty and was on his deathbed, but with a large family. Only Zatti had the courage to enter his hovel, manage his first reactions of rejection then win him over with his charity. The revolutionary calmed down and asked to be baptised: his children were also baptised.

Zatti admitted him to the hospital. Shortly before his death he asked the parish priest: "Give me the sacraments that a Christian should receive!" Montalva's conversion was a conquest of Zatti's charity and Christian courage.

Zatti made the mission to the sick his own educational space where he embodied Don Bosco's Preventive System daily – reason, religion, loving kindness – in closeness and assistance to the needy, helping them to understand and accept the painful situations of life. He was a living witness to the presence of the Lord.

### **Zatti the nurse**

Artemides Zatti's professional profile, which began with a promise, was rooted in trust in Providence and developed once he recovered from his illness. The phrase "**I believed, I promised, I recovered**", the motto used at his canonisation, shows the total dedication that Zatti had for his sick brothers and sisters, the poorest and neediest.

He continued this commitment daily until his death in the hospital in San José, founded by the first Salesians to arrive in Patagonia, and he reiterated it during every home visit, urgent or otherwise, that he made to the sick who needed him.

On his bicycle, in his administrator's office, in the operating room, in the courtyard during recess with his poor "relatives", in the hospital departments he visited every day, he **was always a nurse**; a holy nurse dedicated to healing and alleviating, **bringing the best medicine**: the cheerful and optimistic presence of empathy.

### **A person and a team doing good**

It was faith that drove Artemides Zatti to tireless but reasonable activity. His religious consecration had introduced him directly and completely into the care of the poor, the sick and those who need the health and merciful consolation of God.

Bro. Zatti worked in the world of healthcare alongside doctors, nurses, healthcare personnel, Daughters of Mary Help

of Christians and many people who collaborated with him to support the San José hospital, the first in Argentine Patagonia, in Viedma during the first half of the 20th century.

The tuberculosis he contracted at the age of twenty was not an obstacle to persevering in his career choice. **He found in the figure of the Salesian brother the style of commitment to working directly with the poor.** His religious consecration, lived in his profession as a nurse, was the combination of his life dedicated to God and his brothers and sisters. Naturally this manifested itself in a special, unique and unrepeatable personality. **Artemides Zatti was a good person who worked directly with the poor, doing good.**

Direct contact with the poor was aimed at health, that is, soothing pain, enduring suffering, accompanying the final moments of their lives, offering a smile in the face of the irreversible, lending a hand with hope. For this reason, **Zatti became a “medicine-presence”**: he cared directly with his pleasant presence.

His main biographer, Salesian Raul Entraigas, made an original discovery. He identified the summary of Artemide Zatti's life in the phrase of a fellow villager: he seems to be “the kinsman of all the poor”. Zatti saw Jesus himself in orphans, the sick and the indigenous people. And he treated them with such closeness, appreciation and love, **that they looked like they were all family members.**

### **Training himself to help**

Seeing the needs of the village, **Zatti perfected his profession.** Gradually he became responsible for the hospital, studied and gained State credentials when requested. The doctors who worked with Artemides, such as doctors Molinari and Sussini, testify that Zatti possessed great medical knowledge, the result not only of his experience, but also of his studies.

Fr De Roia adds: “Speaking of cultural and professional

training, I remember seeing medical books and publications and asking him once when he read them. He replied that he did so at night or while patients were taking a nap, once he had finished his duties in the hospital.”

A document, the “Credencial Profesional”, issued by the Secretary for Public Health of the Nation, qualified him with the “**Matriculaprofesional de Enfermero N. 07253**”. They were the studies he had carried out at the National University of La Plata in 1948, at the age of 67. Added to this is a previous certification, in 1917, as “Eligible” in Pharmacy.

**His lifestyle led him to a commitment in which he directly met the poor, the sick, the most needy.** For this reason, the nursing profession had an added value: its presence was a testimony to the goodness of God. This simple way of looking at reality can help us better understand Zatti’s life, paying particular attention to the term “directly”.

In this perspective we find what is most genuine in Zatti, which highlights what is defined as “religious life” or “consecration”. This is why Artemides is a Salesian saint. He was a holy nurse. This is the legacy he left everyone. And this is the challenge he issues to everyone and invites them to take up.

### **1908**

Once his health recovered, Zatti entered the Salesian Congregation as a brother. He began taking care of the pharmacy at the San José hospital, the only one in Viedma.

### **1911**

After the death of Fr Evasio Garrone, director of the hospital, Zatti remained in charge of the pharmacy and the hospital, the first in Patagonia. He worked there for forty years.

### **1917**

He obtained the title of “Idóneo (Suitable) in Pharmacy” from the University of La Plata.

### **1941**

The hospital building was demolished. Patients and

professionals moved with Zatti to the "San Isidro" agricultural school.

**1948**

Zatti enrolled in Nursing at the University of La Plata.

**Zatti with the doctors: he was a father!**

Among Zatti's main collaborators at *San José Hospital* were the doctors. The relationships were delicate, because a doctor was the director of the hospital from a legal point of view and had professional responsibility for the patients. Zatti had organisational and nursing responsibility and conflicts could arise. After the first years, several doctors came to Viedma, the capital of the Rio Negro, and to Patagones and Zatti had to make use of their specialisations at the hospital without arousing rivalry. He acted in such a way as to win everyone's respect for his kindness and competence. We find the names of the directors in the documentation such as Dr Riccardo Spurr and Dr Francesco Pietrafraccia; then Antonio Gumersindo Sussini, Ferdinando Molinari, Pietro Echay, Pasquale Attilio Guidi and Giovanni Cadorna Guidi, who would speak about Zatti's holiness. Finally, there were also Drs Harosteguy, Quaranta and Cessi. There were others, certainly, but temporarily because, after a period of internship, the doctors aspired to more central and developed locations. There was unanimous recognition that Zatti, as a nurse, was subject to the instructions and directions given by the doctors, but he was respected by them all for his kindness and gave them no cause for concern for the assistance he provided to patients in his own house. Dr Sussini, who followed him up until his death, declared: "All the doctors, without exception, showed him affection and respect for his personal virtues, kindness, mercy and his pure, sincere and disinterested faith<sup>[i]</sup>."

Dr Pasquale Attilio Guidi explained: "Always correct, he followed the doctors' instructions. I remember that Dr Harosteguy, who was quite difficult, sometimes blamed Bro. Zatti for his problems when I was present during an operation, but at the end of the operation he would shake hands with him

and apologise. So we knew there weren't many complaints against Zatti. Zatti was someone respected by everyone<sup>[iii]</sup>." Dr Harosteguy's daughter and Dr Echay confirmed Harosteguy's strong character and the unjust complaints against Zatti, who won him over with his resistance to such. Indeed, when Dr Harosteguy fell ill, he would only allow Zatti to visit him, grateful and appreciative for his presence and closeness.

Dr Molinari testified: "Bro. Zatti respected the medical body and strictly followed their instructions. Given the large number of patients who exclusively required his intervention, he had to act spontaneously very often, but always on the basis of his excellent skills, experience and medical knowledge. He never attempted difficult surgery. He always called for the doctor. We doctors had affection, respect and admiration for Bro. Zatti. This feeling was general [...] I would say that the patients 'worshipped' Bro. Zatti and had blind faith in him<sup>[iii]</sup>."

Dr Echay makes this particular observation: "With all the staff of the Zatti hospital he was a father; even with us younger doctors he was a good adviser<sup>[iv]</sup>." Regarding the visits that Zatti made around the city, Dr Guidi says: "The doctors never looked upon this work of Zatti's negatively, but as a collaboration. [...]. The patients he helped would raise a monument to him<sup>[v]</sup>."

Even outsiders always saw close relationships of collaboration and respect between Zatti and the doctors, as witnessed by Fr López: "Bro. Zatti's behaviour towards the doctors was seen by them as warm acceptance. All the doctors I spoke to were, without exception, his admirers<sup>[vi]</sup>." Fr López once again: "Zatti always had a reputation for kindness towards doctors, tolerance and humanity in the face of the rudeness typical of many doctors; in particular Dr Harosteguy was an abrupt individual and Zatti's virtue in dealing with him can be deduced because he became an admirer of Zatti, even came close to revering him<sup>[vii]</sup>." Oscar Garcia puts it eloquently: "The doctors collaborated with the hospital in large part because Bro. Zatti was there, attracting people by his charity<sup>[viii]</sup>."

His life shook the religious indifference of some of them: "When I look at Zatti, my unbelief wavers[[ix](#)]." In many cases there were conversions and the beginning of Christian life.

### **Zatti and the nurses: he was everything to us!**

The largest group for the hospital service were female collaborators. The *San José*, at certain times had up to 70 beds: naturally, professionally trained nurses, kitchen helpers, laundry and ironing machines, cleaners and other staff were needed. It was not difficult to find staff for the lowliest and ordinary tasks because the population had many poor elements and employment in the hospital seemed particularly desirable and secure. It was more difficult to find nurses, because, perhaps throughout the country and certainly in Patagonia there were no schools to train them. Zatti had to deal with all this himself: choose, train, organise, assist the nurses, find what they needed to work with, think of wages to the point that he began the training of female staff for the hospital.

Providence brought several good but poor young people to the hospital who had themselves been ill and had recovered, and who wanted to do something with their life. Zatti was aware of their goodness and willingness; he showed by his own example and word how beautiful it was to serve the Lord in sick brothers and sisters. And then he made the suggestion that they stay with him and share the mission at the hospital. The best girls sensed the greatness and joy of this ideal and stayed at *San José*. Zatti took responsibility for preparing them professionally and – as a good religious – took care of their spiritual formation. Thus, as a group they ended up as a kind of congregation without vows, a group of chosen souls who chose to serve the poor. Zatti gave them everything they needed for life, even if he ordinarily did not pay them, and thought of good accommodation if they wanted to leave the service at the hospital. We should not think that the situation at that time required all the guarantees that hospitals require today. For those girls the solution offered

by Zatti was an enviable one from the material point of view and just as much from a spiritual point of view. In fact they were happy, and when the *San José Hospital* closed, or before, none of them found it hard to set themselves up. As a group they always expressed their gratitude.

Fr Entraigas recalled 13 names of the female staff who worked at the hospital at different times. Among the documents are reports by the nurses: Noelia Morero, Teodolinda Acosta, Felisa Botte, Andrea Rafaela Morales, Maria Danielis. Noelia Morero tells her story, which was identical to the stories of several other nurses. She arrived at *San José* as a patient: "I was a patient here and then I began to work with the hospital until the end of 1944, when I moved to the National Regional Hospital in Viedma, which opened in 1945 [...]. Zatti was much loved and respected by all staff and patients; he was everyone's 'handkerchief to wipe away tears'. I don't remember any complaints against him. When Zatti entered the ward, it seemed that 'God Himself' entered! I don't know how else to put it. He was everything to us. I never knew of any particular difficulties; as a patient I never lacked anything: not food, nor medicine, nor clothes. Bro. Zatti was mainly concerned with the moral training of the staff. I remember that he made us learn by practical lessons, accompanying him when he visited the sick and after one or two times he made us do it, especially with the most serious cases.[\[x\]](#)"

### **Film seen before the conference**

### **Video of the conference: Zatti the Good Samaritan, for the sick, doctors and nurses**

Lecture given by Fr Pierluigi CAMERONI, Postulator General of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco in Valdocco, on 15.11.2023.

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[\[i\]](#) Testimony of Dr. Antonio Gumersindo Sussini. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 139, § 561.

[\[ii\]](#) Testimony from Attilio Guidi, pharmacist. He knew Zatti from 1926 to 1951. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 99, § 386.

[\[iii\]](#) Testimony of Dr Ferdinando Molinari. He knew Zatti from 1926 to 1951. He became a doctor *at the San José Hospital* and looked after him during his final illness. He gave the official address on the occasion of the inauguration of the monument to Zatti. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 147, § 600.

[\[iv\]](#) Testimony of Dr Pietro Echay. *Positio – Informatio*, p. 108.

[\[v\]](#) Testimony of Attilio Guidi, pharmacist. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 100, § 391.

[\[vi\]](#) Testimony of Father Feliciano López. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 171, § 694.

[\[vii\]](#) *Ibid*, p. 166, § 676.

[\[viii\]](#) Testimony of Oscar García, police employee. He met Zatti in 1925, but dealt with him mainly after 1935, both as a leader of the former students and as a member of the Workers Club. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 111, § 440.

[\[ix\]](#) Testimony of Father Feliciano López. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 181, § 737.

[\[x\]](#) Testimony of Noelia Morero, nurse. *Positio – Informatio*, p. 112.

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# The great gift of holiness of Artemides Zatti, Salesian brother (video)

The chronicle of the Salesian college in Viedma recalls that, according to custom, on 15 March 1951 in the morning the bell announced the flight to heaven of Brother Artemides Zatti, and reported these prophetic words: **“One less brother in the house and one more saint in heaven.”**

The canonisation of Artemides Zatti on 9 October 2022 is a gift of grace; the witness of holiness that the Lord gives us through this brother who lived his life in docility to the Holy Spirit, in the spirit of family typical of the Salesian charism, embodying fraternity towards his confreres and the Salesian community, and closeness towards the poor and the sick and anyone he met on his path, is a blessing to be welcomed and made to bear fruit.

St Artemides Zatti turns out to be a model, intercessor and companion of Christian life, close to everyone. Indeed, his adventure presents him to us as a person **who experienced the daily toil** of existence with its successes and failures. It is enough to recall the separation from his native country to emigrate to Argentina; the tuberculosis that broke through like a hurricane in his young life, shattering every dream and every prospect for the future; seeing the hospital that he had built with so many sacrifices and which had become a sanctuary of God’s merciful love demolished. **But Zatti always found in the Lord the strength** to get back up and continue on his way.

## **Witness of hope**

For the dramatic times we are living in, marked by the pandemic, so many wars, by the climate emergency and above all by the crisis and the abandonment of faith of so many people, Artemides Zatti encourages us to **live hope as a virtue**

**and as an attitude of life in God.** His story reminds us how the path to holiness very often requires **a change of course and vision.** Artemides, at different stages of his life, discovered the great opportunity in the Cross to be reborn and to start again, when:

- as a boy, in the hard and tiring work of the countryside, he immediately learnt to face the hardships and responsibilities that would always accompany him in his mature years;

- at the age of 17 he emigrated with his family to Argentina in search of greater fortune;

- as a young aspirant to Salesian life he was struck down by tuberculosis, infected by a young priest he was helping because he was very ill.

The young Zatti experienced in his own flesh the drama of the disease, not only as fragility and suffering of the body, but also as something that touched the heart, gave rise to fears and many questions, making the question of meaning emerge with everything that happened affecting the future that lay ahead of him, seeing that what he dreamed of, and yearned for, suddenly failed. In faith he turned to God, sought new meaning and a new direction for life to which he found neither immediate nor easy answers. Thanks to the wise and encouraging presence of Father Cavalli and Father Garrone, and reading life's circumstances in a spirit of discernment and obedience, his Salesian vocation came to maturity as a brother, dedicating his whole life to the material and spiritual care of the sick and assistance to the poor and needy. He decided to stay with Don Bosco, living the original vocation of the brother to the full;

- when he had to face trials, sacrifices and debts to carry out his mission on behalf of the poor and the sick by running the hospital and pharmacy, always trusting in the help of Providence;

- when he saw the hospital, to which he had devoted so much energy and resources, being demolished to build a new one;

– when in 1950 he fell from a ladder and the symptoms of a tumour appeared, which he himself had clearly diagnosed, and which would lead to his death, which then occurred on 15 March 1951. He nevertheless continued to attend to the mission to which he had consecrated himself, accepting the sufferings of this last stretch of his life.

### **The Easter exodus: from Bahía Blanca to Viedma**

In all probability, Artemides arrived in Bahía Blanca from Bernal in the second half of February 1902. The family received him with the sorrow and affection one can imagine. Above all, his mother devoted herself to him with much love so that he would recover his strength and health, given the extreme weakness he was in, and she wanted to cure him herself. The one who opposed this solution was Artemides himself. Now feeling closely attached to the Salesians, he wanted to obey what Bernal's superiors had decided and go to Junín de los Andes to take care of his health. The overriding thought for him, and one he could no longer put off, was the desire to follow the vocation for which he had set out, to become a Salesian priest, and despite the darkness about his future, he would face every difficulty and sacrifice for it: he intended to renounce even his mother's and family's care, fearing that they might stop him in his resolve. He had encountered Jesus, heard his call, and wanted to follow him, even though it might not be in the ways he thought and desired.

His parents, in order to solve their son's problem, turned to the family counsellor Father Carlo Cavalli, who absolutely and providentially advised against sending Artemides to Junín, a place too far away for his weak strength. Instead, since it was precisely at that time that Father Evasio Garrone's reputation as a doctor had established itself in Viedma, Father Cavalli very wisely thought it best to entrust him to him. The distance of only 500 km, with the means of transport of the time, made this solution worthwhile. The family agreed, the good parish priest paid for the journey

on Mr Mora's Galera and Artemides, convinced by his spiritual director, set off for Viedma.

The Galera, a kind of horse-drawn coach, was the only public transport at the time able to travel from Bahía Blanca to Viedma, crossing the Colorado River. There was also the mishap when the Galera lost its way, so the travellers had to sleep outside and arrived on Tuesday and not Monday as planned. The journey must have been very painful, although Artemides "covers everything with the optimism of a saint with hunger and thirst for immolation. But what the poor man suffered only God knows."

Here is the text of the letter written by Artemides to his family immediately after his arrival in Viedma.

*Dear parents and brothers and sisters*

*Viedma, 5.3.902*

*I arrived in Viedma yesterday morning, after a happy journey on the "Galera", and today I am taking the opportunity to write to you to tell you that I went well, as I said, because the "Galera" was not so full of people and merchandise. I will only tell you that we were supposed to arrive on Monday at Patagones, **but because we had lost our way, we slept in the field under open sky** and arrived on Tuesday morning, where, **with great joy, I found my Salesian confreres**. As for my health, I was examined by doctor **R. D. Garrone** examined me and promised me that in a month I would be perfectly healthy. **With the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our good Mother, and D. Bosco**, I always hope for the best. Pray for me and I will pray for you and I sign myself yours*

ARTEMIDE ZATTI

Goodbye to all

This letter is a masterpiece of hope, a condensation of evangelical optimism: it is a parable of life

where, despite the spectre of death hovering and the road being lost, there is a horizon that opens up to infinity. In that night, spent in the fields of Patagonia contemplating the stars, the young Artemides emerges from his turmoil, from his discouragement. Freed from looking only downwards, he can lift his eyes and look up to the sky to count the stars; freed from the sadness and fear of having no future, freed from the fear of being alone, from the fear of death, he has the experience that God's goodness is as immense as a starry sky and that graces can be infinite, like the stars. So in the morning he arrives at Viedma as if in the promised land, where "with great joy" he is welcomed by those he already thinks of as his confreres, where he hears words and promises that speak of healing, where with full trust in "the help of the Blessed Virgin Mary our Good Mother and Don Bosco", he arrives at the city where he would lavish his charity for the rest of his life. Having passed through the fords in the flooded Rio Colorado, he was also reborn with hope for his health and his future.

### **Kinsman of all the poor**

Artemides Zatti dedicated his life to God in the service of the sick and the poor, who became his treasures. In charge of the San José Hospital in Viedma, he widened the circle of those he cared for by reaching all the sick of the city, especially the poorest he and his bike! He managed a lot of money, but his life was very poor: for the trip to Italy on the occasion of Don Bosco's canonisation, he had to borrow his suit, hat and suitcase. He was loved and greatly respected by the sick; loved and greatly respected by the doctors who gave him the utmost trust, and surrendered to the ascendancy that flowed from his holiness. The secret of so much ascendancy? For him, **every sick person was Jesus himself. Literally!** For his part, there was no doubt about it: he treated everyone with the same tenderness with which he would have treated Jesus himself, offering his own room in cases of emergency, or even placing a corpse there in times of need. He tirelessly

continued his mission among the sick serenely until the end of his life, never taking a rest.

With his upright attitude he restores to us a Salesian **vision of "knowing how to remain" in our mission land** to enlighten those in danger of losing hope, to strengthen the faith of those who feel they are failing, to be a sign of God's love when it "seems" that He is absent from everyday life.

All this led him to recognise the uniqueness of every sick person, with their dignity and frailty, knowing that the sick person is always more important than the disease, and this is why he took care to listen to the patients, to their story, their anxieties, their fears. He knew that even when it is not possible to heal, it is always possible to cure, it is always possible to console, it is always possible to make one feel a closeness that shows interest in the person before their illness. He stopped by, listened, established a direct and personal relationship with the sick person, felt empathy and emotion for them, allowed himself to be involved in their suffering.

**Artemides experienced closeness to people as an expression of the love of Jesus Christ, the Good Samaritan** whose compassion brought him close to every human being wounded by sin. He felt called to be merciful like the Father and to love, in particular, his sick, weak and suffering brothers and sisters. Zatti established a pact between himself and those in need of care, a pact based on mutual trust and respect, sincerity, availability, so as to overcome all defensive barriers, putting the dignity of the sick person at the centre. Zatti found the inexhaustible source for this relationship with the sick person in the charity of Christ.

And he lived this closeness, as well as personally **in community**: in fact he generated a community capable of caring, which does not abandon anyone, which includes and welcomes especially the most fragile. Artemides' witness to being a Good Samaritan, to being merciful like the Father, was a mission and a style that involved all those who in some way

dedicated themselves to the hospital: doctors, nurses, caregivers, religious, volunteers who gave precious time to those who were suffering. At Zatti's school, their service alongside the sick, carried out with love and competence, became a mission. Zatti knew and inculcated the awareness that the hands of all those who were with him touched the suffering flesh of Christ and should be a sign of the merciful hands of the Father.

### **Salesian brother**

The attractive figure of Artemides Zatti is an invitation to propose to young people the fascination of consecrated life, 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 character that Don Bosco wanted to give to the Salesian Congregation. It blossoms more easily where apostolic lay vocations are promoted among the young and a joyful and enthusiastic witness of religious consecration is offered to them, like that of Artemides Zatti.

### **Artemides Zatti – the saint!**

Following in the footsteps of St Francis de Sales, who promoted the vocation to holiness for all, the testimony of Artemides Zatti reminds us, as the Second Vatican Council states, that: "all the faithful of every state and condition are called by the Lord, **each in his own way**, to a holiness whose perfection is that of the heavenly Father himself." St Francis de Sales, Don Bosco and Artemides make daily life an expression of God's love, received and reciprocated. Artemides Zatti's testimony enlightens us, attracts us and also challenges us, because it is the **"Word of God" incarnated in history** and close to us.

Through the parable of Artemides Zatti's life, his experience of God's unconditional and gratuitous love stands out above all. First and foremost, it was not the works he

performed, but the amazement of discovering himself loved and the faith in this providential love in every season of life. From this lived certainty flowed the totality of self-giving to his neighbour for the love of God. The love he received from the Lord was the power that transformed his life, expanded his heart and predisposed him to love. With the same Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, love that heals and transforms us, Artemides:

- from an early age made choices and performed acts of love in every situation and with every brother and sister he met, because he felt loved and had the strength to love;

- while still a teenager in Italy, experienced the hardships of poverty and work, but laid the foundations of a solid Christian life, giving the first proofs of his generous charity;

- emigrating with his family to Argentina, knew how to preserve and increase his faith, resisting an often immoral and anti-Christian environment and maturing, thanks to the encounter with the Salesians and the spiritual accompaniment of Father Carlo Cavalli, in his aspiration to Salesian life, accepting the need to go back to the desks in school with twelve year old boys, despite his twenty years of age;

- readily offered to assist a priest sick with tuberculosis and contracted the disease, without uttering a word of complaint or recrimination, but experiencing the illness as a time of trial and purification, bearing its consequences with fortitude and serenity;

- cured in an extraordinary way, through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, after making the promise to dedicate his life to the sick and the poor, he lived his apostolic consecration as a Salesian brother in a radically gospel way and with Salesian joy;

- lived the ordinary rhythm of his days in an extraordinary way: faithful and edifying practice of religious life in joyful fraternity; sacrificial service at all hours

and with all the humblest of services to the sick and the poor; continuous struggle against poverty, in the search for resources and benefactors to meet debts, trusting exclusively in Providence; ready availability for all human misfortunes that asked for his intervention; resistance to every difficulty and acceptance of every adverse case; self-mastery and joyful and optimistic serenity that communicated itself to all those who approached him.

**Seventy-one years of this life before God and before people:** a life delivered with joy and fidelity to the end, embodied in daily life, in hospital wards, on his bicycle through the streets of Viedma, in the travails of daily life to meet demands and needs of all kinds, doing everyday things in a spirit of service, with love and without show, without claiming anything, with the joy of self-giving, enthusiastically embracing his vocation as a Salesian brother and becoming a shining reflection of the Lord.

**Film seen before the conference**

**Video of the conference: The great gift of holiness of Artemide Zatti**

Lecture given by Fr Pierluigi CAMERONI, Postulator General of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco in Turin-Valdocco, on 14.11.2023.

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# The Exercise for a Happy Death in Don Bosco's educational experience (5/5)

[\(continuation from previous article\)](#)

## 4. Conclusion

In the epilogue of Francis Besucco's life, Don Bosco makes the core of his message explicit:

I would like both of us to come to a conclusion which will be to our mutual advantage. It is certain that sooner or later death will come for both of us, and it is possible that it will come sooner than we think. It is equally certain that if we don't perform good works during our life we won't be able to reap their fruit at the point of death, nor we can we expect any reward from God. [...] I encourage you, Christian reader, I encourage you to perform good works whilst we have time; our sufferings are of short duration and what we shall enjoy lasts forever. [...] O Lord, help me, help me to persevere in the observance of your precepts during the days of my life so that we can one day go to Heaven to enjoy great happiness for ever and ever. Amen." [\[1\]](#)

It is on this point, in fact, that Don Bosco's discourses converge. Everything else appears functional: his art of education, his affectionate and creative accompaniment, the advice he offered and the programme of life, Marian devotion and the sacraments, everything is oriented towards the primary object of his thoughts and concerns, the *great business of eternal salvation*. [\[2\]](#)

Thus, in the Turin saint's educational practice, the monthly exercise for a happy death continues a rich spiritual tradition, adapting it to the sensitivity of his young people and with a marked educational concern. In fact,

the monthly review of life, the sincere account of it to our confessor-spiritual director, the encouragement to place ourselves in a state of constant conversion, the reconfirmation of the gift of self to God and the systematic formulation of concrete resolutions oriented towards Christian perfection, are its central and constitutive moments. Even the litany for a happy death had no other purpose than to nourish confidence in God and offer an immediate encouragement to approach the sacraments with special awareness. They were also – as the narrative sources show – an effective psychological tool to make the thought of death familiar, not in a distressing way, but as an incentive to constructively and joyfully value every moment of life in view of the “blessed hope”. The emphasis, in fact, was on virtuous and joyful living, “*servite Domino in laetitia.*”

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[1] Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi* , 179-181.

[2] This is how the Life of Dominic Savio concludes: “and like Dominic, when our time comes, see death approach with peace and joy in our hearts. How happy we will be then to meet Jesus Our Saviour who will judge us according to his mercy, and in his goodness lead us to an eternity of happiness. Amen.”, Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico*, 136.

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# The Exercise for a Happy

# Death in Don Bosco's educational experience (4/5)

[\(continuation from previous article\)](#)

## 3. Death as a moment of joyful encounter with God

Like all the considerations and instructions in the *Companion of Youth* the meditation on death is marked by a marked didactic concern.<sup>[1]</sup> The thought of death as a moment that fixes all eternity must stimulate the sincere purpose of a good and virtuous life that is fruitful:

Consider that your eternal happiness or your eternal damnation depend on that fateful moment. [...] Do you understand what I am saying? On that moment depends whether you go to heaven or to hell; whether you will be always happy or always tormented; whether you will be forever a child of God or a slave of the devil; whether you will rejoice with the angels and the saints in heaven or groan and burn with the damned in hell for all eternity. These are great issues for your soul and reflect that upon a good life depends a happy death and eternal glory. Therefore delay no longer but prepare to make a good confession and to put your conscience in order. Promise God to forgive your enemies, to repair the scandal you have given, to be more obedient, to abstain from meat on the appointed days, to waste no more time, to keep the Holy days of Obligation in a worthy manner, to fulfil the duties of your state. Meanwhile place yourself in the presence of God and tell him with all your heart: "My God, from this moment I return to you. I love you and I want to love and serve you unto death. Most Holy Virgin, my Mother, help me in that moment. Jesus, Joseph and Mary, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you."<sup>[2]</sup>

However the most complete and also the most expressive of Don Bosco's understanding and cultural

frameworks on the theme of death is found in his first narrative text, written in memory of Luigi Comollo (1844). There he recounts the death of his friend "...saying the holy names of Jesus and Mary, his beautiful soul quietly left his body and flew, as we devoutly hope, to its rest in the Lord's peace. His face was serene and a smile played about it as if he was seeing something marvellous." [3] But the placid passing so succinctly described had been preceded by a detailed description of a tormented final illness: "It is also good to note that an innocent soul adorned with so many virtues as was Comollo's, tells us that there is nobody who does not dread the approaching hour of death. He too experienced great apprehension." [4] Louis had spent the last week of his life but seemed "sad and melancholic, all taken up with the thoughts of divine judgement." On the evening of the sixth day, "Around eight o'clock the fever became very strong; at a quarter past eight he begun to go into convulsions and lost his senses. At first he cried out at length as if he were terrified by some frightening object or some grim spectre. From then until half past eight he came back to his senses somewhat and looking at those standing around he cried out in a loud voice: 'Oh, judgement!' Then he began writhing with such strength that five or six of us around him could hardly keep him in the bed." [5] After three hours of delirium, he "he returned fully to his senses." and confided to his friend Bosco the reason for his agitation: he had seemed to find himself in front of a wide-open hell, threatened by "a countless number of monsters", but he had been rescued by a squad "of strong warriors" and then, led by the hand of "a Woman" ("whom I consider to have been the Mother of us all"), he had found himself "in a delightful garden" which is why he now felt calm. Thus, "the fact was that however great was his fear of appearing before God, he then demonstrated his desire that this moment should come immediately. There was no more melancholy or sadness on his face. He was all smiles and happily wanted to sing psalms, hymns or spiritual praises." [6]

Tension and anguish are resolved in a joyful

spiritual experience: it is the Christian vision of death sustained by the certainty of victory over the infernal enemy through the power of Christ's grace, which opens the gates of blessed eternity, and through the maternal assistance of Mary. It is in this light that Comollo's account should be interpreted. The "great abyss like a deep huge furnace" near which he finds himself, the "countless monsters of all horrible and different shapes" that try to plunge him into the abyss, the "strong warriors" who rescue him "from such a predicament", the long staircase leading to the "delightful garden" defended "by many serpents ready to devour anyone who tried to climb up", the Woman "dressed in great magnificence" who takes him by the hand, guides him and defends him: it all goes back to the religious imagery that encapsulates a solid theology of salvation in the form of symbols and metaphors, the conviction of being personally destined for happy eternity and the vision of life as a journey towards beatitude, undermined by infernal enemies but sustained by the omnipotent help of divine grace and the patronage of Mary. The Romantic sense, which imbues the fact of faith with intense emotionality and drama, spontaneously makes use of traditional folk symbolism, yet the horizon is one of a broadly optimistic and historically active vision of faith.

Further on, Don Bosco reports an extensive discourse by Louis. It is almost a testament in which two main interrelated themes emerge. The first is the importance of cultivating throughout life the thought of death and judgement. The arguments are those of the preaching and devout publicity of the time: "you do not know if your days on earth will be short or long; but however uncertain may be the hour of death, it will certainly come; therefore do things so that your entire life is a preparation for death, for judgement... Men only think of death occasionally, they believe that this hour will come even though they don't want it to, but they do not ready themselves, so when the moment arrives they are agitated and afraid, greatly embarrassed in finding themselves needing to sort out matters of their soul." [\[7\]](#)

The second theme is the link between Marian devotion and the good death. "Since for all the time that we struggle in this vale of tears we have no other more powerful advocate than Mary most holy, you must therefore profess a special devotion to her. Oh! If people could be persuaded of the happiness that comes at the hour of death from devotion to Mary, everyone would be competing to find new ways to give her special honour. It will be her, with her son in her arms, who will be our defence against the enemy of our soul at the final hour. Even though all of hell might be arrayed against us, with Mary in our defence, victory will be ours. Look for other things from those who recite some prayer to Mary, or offer some simple mortification, and then believe they are protected by her, while they lead a shameless life. [...] May you always be truly a devotee of Mary by imitating her virtues, and you will experience the sweet effects of her goodness and love." [8] These reasons are close to those presented by Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort (1673-1716) in the third chapter of the *Traité de la vraie dévotion à la sainte Vierge* (which, however, neither Comollo nor John Bosco could have known). [9] All classical Mariology, conveyed by preaching and ascetic books, insisted on such aspects: we find them in St Alphonsus (*Glorie di Maria*); [10] before him, we find them in the writings of Jesuits Jean Crasset and Alexander Diaotallevi, [11] from whose work Comollo is said to have drawn inspiration for the invocation before his death:

Holy Virgin, kind mother, dear mother of my beloved Jesus, of all creatures you alone were worthy to bear him in your immaculate womb. Through the love with which you gave him suck, held him on your arms, suffered with him in his poverty, saw him ill-treated, spat upon, flogged and finally die suffering terribly on the cross. Through all of this obtain for me the grace of courage, keen faith, firm hope, ardent charity, sincere sorrow for my sins; and to all the favours that you have granted me throughout my life add the grace that I might die a holy death. Yes, dear and merciful Mother,

assist me at this moment when I am about to present my soul to divine judgement; you yourself can present me in the arms of your divine Son; if you promise me this here I am with ardent and frank spirit, dependent on your clemency and goodness and I present my soul through your hands to the Supreme Majesty from whom I hope to receive mercy.[\[12\]](#)

This text shows the solidity of the theological framework underlying the religious sentiment with which the story is imbued, and reveals a “regulated” Marian devotion, an austere and very concrete spirituality.

The *Cenni sulla vita di Luigi Comollo (Life of Louis Comollo)*, with all its dramatic tension, represent the John Bosco’s sensitivity as a seminarian and student at the *Convitto*. In later years, as his educational and pastoral experience among young people grew, the Saint preferred to highlight only the joyful and soothing side of Christian death. We see this especially in the biographies of Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco, but we find examples of it already in the *Companion of Youth* where, narrating the holy death of Aloysius Gonzaga, he states, “The things that can disturb us at the point of death are especially the sins of our past life and the fear of divine chastisements in the next life”, but if we imitate him by leading a virtuous life, which is “truly angelic”, we will be able to welcome with joy the announcement of death as he did, singing the *Te Deum* full of “joy” – “Oh what joy, we are leaving: *Laetantes imus*” – and “in the embrace of the crucified Jesus he died peacefully. What a beautiful death!”[\[13\]](#)

All three *Lives* conclude with the invitation to be prepared for a good death. In Don Bosco’s pedagogy, as mentioned, the subject was presented with particular emphases aimed at conversion of the heart which is “frank and resolute”[\[14\]](#) and of the total gift of self to God, which generates an ardent living, fruitful of spiritual fruits, of ethical and at the same time joyful commitment. This is the

perspective in which, in these biographies, Don Bosco presents the exercise for a happy death:[\[15\]](#) is an excellent tool to educate to the Christian vision of death, to urge an effective and periodic review of one's lifestyle and actions, to encourage an attitude of constant openness and cooperation to the action of grace, fruitful in works, to positively dispose the soul to the encounter with the Lord. It is not by chance that the concluding chapters depict the last hours of these three characters as a fervent and calm expectation of the encounter. Don Bosco reports the serene dialogues, the "tasks" entrusted to the dying,[\[16\]](#) the farewells. The instant of death is then described almost as a blissful ecstasy.

In the last moments of his life, Dominic Savio had the prayers for a happy death read to him by his father:

"Dad, it is time; get my *Companion of Youth* and read me the prayers for the Exercise of a Happy Death".

At these words his mother burst into tears and hurried from the room. His father's eyes filled with tears, but choking back his sobs, he got the book and read the prayers. As he went through them Dominic answered clearly.

"Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me ...".

When his father reached the final part which runs: "When for the first time my soul will see the wonderful majesty of God, do not drive it away, but take it to heaven to sing your praises for all eternity . . .", he said:

"Yes, Dad – that is what I want so much, to sing the praises of Jesus for all eternity".

He dropped off to sleep again, but it was like he was reflecting on things of great importance. He awoke after a short while. Then in a clear voice he said: "Goodbye, Dad, goodbye . . . what was it the parish priest suggested to me ... I don't seem to remember . . . Oh, what wonderful things I see ...".

And so saying, with a beautiful smile on his face, and his hands joined on his breast he gave up his soul to God without any struggle.[\[17\]](#)

Michael Magone passed away “peacefully”, “He parted his lips as if to smile and gently fell back in death”, after kissing the crucifix and invoking, “Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I place my soul in your hands.”.[\[18\]](#)

The final moments of Francis’ life are characterised by extraordinary phenomena and uncontainable ardour: “His face appeared to be stronger and to have more colour in it than when he had been healthy. Its beauty and radiance was such that it eclipsed the infirmary lights”; “the dying boy lifted his head a little and stretched out his hands as if to shake hands with someone he loved. Then in a joyful resonant voice he sang, ‘Praise Mary, [...]’. Afterwards he made several efforts to lift himself up and devoutly stretching out his hands, he began to sing again, *O Jesus of burning love* [...]. He seemed to have become an angel with the angels in paradise,”[\[19\]](#)

[\(continued\)](#)

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[\[1\]](#) Cf. Bosco, *The Companion of Youth*, 36-39 (consideration for Tuesday: *Death*).

[\[2\]](#) *Ibid.*, 38-39.

[\[3\]](#) [John Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo morto nel Seminario di Chieri ammirato da tutti per le sue singolari virtù. Scritti da un suo collega*, Torino, Tipografia Speirani e Ferrero, 1844, 70-71.

[\[4\]](#) *Ibid.*, 49.

[\[5\]](#) *Ibid.*, 52-53.

[\[6\]](#) *Ibid.*, 53-57.

[\[7\]](#) *Ibid.*, 61.

[\[8\]](#) *Ibid.*, 62-63.

[9] Grignon de Monfort's work was only discovered in 1842 and published in Turin for the first time fifteen years later: *Trattato della vera divozione a Maria Vergine del ven. servo di Dio L. Maria Grignon de Montfort*. Version from the French of C. L., Turin, Tipografia P. De-Agostini, 1857.

[10] Second part, chapter IV (*Vari ossequi di divozione verso la divina Madre colle loro pratiche*), where the author states that to obtain Mary's protection "two things are necessary: the first is that we offer her our respect with our souls cleansed of sins [...]. The second condition is that we persevere in devotion to her" (*Le glorie di Maria di sant'Alfonso Maria de' Liguori*, Torino, Giacinto Marietti, 1830, 272).

[11] Jean Crasset, *La vera devozione verso Maria Vergine stabilita e difesa*. Venezia, nella stamperia Baglioni, 1762, 2 vols.; Alessandro Diotallevi, *Trattenimenti spirituali per chi desidera d'avanzarsi nella servitù e nell'amore della Santissima Vergine, dove si ragiona sopra le sue feste e sopra gli Evangelii delle domeniche dell'anno applicandoli alle meditoli alla medesima Vergine con rari avvenimenti*, Venezia, presso Antonio Zatta,

1788, 3 vols.

[12] [Bosco], *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo*, 68-69; cf. Diotallevi, *Trattenimenti spirituali...*, vol. II, pp. 108-109 (Trattenimento XXVI: *Colloquio dove l'anima supplica la B. Vergine che voglia esserle Avvocata nella gran causa della sua salute*).

[13] Bosco, *The Companion of Youth*, 70-71.

[14] Cf. Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele (Life of Michael Magone)*, 24.

[15] For example, cf. Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico (Life of Dominic Savio)*, 106-107: 'On the morning of

his departure he did with his companions the exercise for a happy death with such devotion in confessing and taking communion, that I, who witnessed it, do not know how to express it. It is necessary, he said, that I do this exercise well, because I hope it will truly be for me that of my good death'.

[16] "But before I let you leave for paradise I would like to charge you with an errand [...]. When you are in paradise and have seen the great Virgin Mary, give her a humble and respectful greeting from me and from those in this house. Pray to her that she deigns to give us her holy blessing; that she may receive us all under her powerful protection, and help us so that none of those who are, or who Divine Providence will send to this house may get lost", Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele (Life of Michael Magone)*, 82.

[17] Bosco, *Vita del giovanetto Savio Domenico (Life of Dominic Savio)*, 118-119.

[18] Bosco, *Cenno biografico sul giovanetto Magone Michele*, 83. Fr. Zattini could no longer control his emotions and exclaimed: "O Death, you are not a punishment for innocent souls! For these you are the great benefactor who opens the doors to joys that will last for ever.. Oh, why cannot I be in your place, Michael?" (ibid., 84).

[19] John Bosco, *Il pastorello delle Alpi ovvero vita del giovane Besucco Francesco d'Argentera*, Turin, Tip. dell'Orat. di S. Franc. di Sales, 1864, 169-170.