

There is much more 'thirst for God' than you might think

Today there is so much need for listening, for free and open dialogue, for personal encounters that do not judge and do not condemn, and so much need for silence and presence in God.

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, not so long ago I attended the funeral of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. It was he himself who wrote the magnificent Encyclical "Deus Caritas est" a year after the beginning of his service as Pontiff, and in it the following statement that seems to me to be the essence of the magnificent fragrance of Christian thought: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" ([*Deus Caritas est, 1*](#)). Certainly that Person is Jesus Christ. And beginning from this Benedict XVI leaves us with statements like these:

- "Jesus Christ is the Truth made Person, who draws the world to himself.

- The light radiated by Jesus is the light of truth. Every other truth is a fragment of the Truth that is him and to which he refers.

- Jesus is the North Star of human freedom: without him, it loses its orientation, because without knowledge of the truth, freedom is denatured, isolated and reduced to sterile arbitrariness.

- With him one rediscovers freedom, recognises it as created for good and expresses it through charitable actions and behaviour.

- This is why Jesus gives man full familiarity with the truth and continually invites him to live in it.

- And nothing more than the love of truth can

propel human intelligence towards unexplored horizons.

– Jesus Christ, who is the fullness of truth, draws the heart of every man to himself, expands it and fills it with joy.”

There is a whole Christian teaching in these few compact sentences that is far from being merely “moral” or a set of cold and rigid rules devoid of life. The Christian life is first and foremost a *true encounter with God*.

And that is what I stated in the title of this message. In my opinion and deep conviction, there is much more “thirst for God” than we imagine, than there seems to be. It is not that I want to change the statistics of sociological studies or draw up some fictitious reality. I certainly do not intend to do so, but I do wish to make it understood that in the “*visa vis*” in the “face to face” encounter with the real life of so many people, of so many fathers and mothers, of so many families, of so many teenagers and young adults, what one finds, very often, is a life that is not easy, a life that must be “healed” daily, human relationships in which love is desired and necessary and which must be taken care of in every small gesture, in every small detail, in every action. And in this “face to face” there is so much need for listening, for free and open dialogue, for personal encounters that do not judge and do not condemn, *and so much need for silence and presence in God*.

I say this with great conviction. Right here in Valdocco, Turin, where I am, it surprises me and fills me with joy when a group of young people take the initiative to invite other young people for an hour of presence, silence and prayer before Jesus in the *Eucharist*, that is, an hour of *Eucharistic adoration*, and a hundred or so people – so many young people – respond to the appointment. Or in Rome, at Sacred Heart, we used to meet on Thursday evenings, and young people and young couples, some with their children, and even engaged couples were present at this moment because they felt that their lives needed this encounter with a Person who gives meaning to our

lives.



And I have experienced it as an example in many countries and places. That is why I am invite you here to do as Don Bosco would do. He did not hesitate for a moment to offer his boys the experience of an encounter with Jesus. And that God who is presence, who is God-with-us, as we celebrated at Christmas, is still the same God who calls, who invites, who reassures in every personal encounter, in every moment of rest in Him.



I remember one of Don Bosco's many "surprises" as he recounts in his Memoirs: "I was entering the church from the sacristy and I saw a young man raised to the height of the Tabernacle behind the choir, in the act of adoring the Blessed Sacrament, kneeling in the air, his head inclined and leaning against the door of the Tabernacle, in a sweet ecstasy of love like a Seraphim from Heaven. I called him by his name and he was soon roused and came down to the floor all upset, begging me not to reveal it to anyone. I repeat that I could recount many other similar facts to make it known that all the good that Don Bosco does he owes especially to his children."

Is it possible that Jesus is still the same God who wants to meet all of us today and many others, or are we ashamed and afraid to go down this road? Is it possible that many of us do not dare to invite others to experience what we are experiencing and that has been freely given and offered to us? Is it possible that because we are told that this is unfashionable and out of date, we believe too many negative messages and lose the strength to witness that many of us continue to enjoy every *personal encounter with the One who is the Lord of life?*

Pope Benedict was convinced that his life and his faith were "right" and **this is great, an encounter with his Lord**, and

this is how Pope Francis bid him farewell in the last words of his homily: 'Benedict, faithful friend of the Bridegroom, may your joy be perfect in hearing his voice finally and forever'. Let us therefore continue to promote, my friends, those encounters of Life that give us *profound life*, because there is more "thirst for God" than there is said to be or that we believe there is.

Rector Major's Message. That young man said to me: "My passion is Christ"

It had been many years since I had last heard that expression from a young man in such a light-hearted context, in the presence of all his companions crowding around us.

Dear friends of the Salesian Bulletin, we have 'rounded the cape' of the year, as they say in seafaring parlance, and are facing up to the New Year. Every beginning possesses something magical, and the new always has its own special charm. The year 2023 seemed like a distant time, and yet here it is. The New Year is each time a promise that some good news will come for us too. The New Year springs from the light and enthusiasm given to us at Christmas.

'There is a time to be born' says Qohelet in the Bible. It is never too late to begin again. God always begins anew with us, filling us with his blessing.

One lesson I have learnt from these last few years: to be prepared for surprises and the unexpected. As St Paul says in a letter, that no human heart: 'has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' (1 Cor 2:9). The content of

Christian hope is to live by surrendering oneself into the arms of God. Today, many ways of living, of expressing oneself, of communicating have changed. But the human heart, especially the hearts of young people, is always the same, like a bud in spring, full of life ready to burst forth. Young people 'are' walking hope. What I am telling you now seems to me very appropriate for this greeting from the Salesian Bulletin for January, the 'month of Don Bosco'.

A few weeks ago, I visited Salesian presences in the United States of America (USA), and one day, early in the morning, I arrived at St Dominic Savio Middle and High School in Los Angeles. I spent several hours with hundreds of students, followed by a panel discussion with forty-five young people from the high school. We talked about their personal plans and dreams. It was a very pleasant and enriching few hours.

At the end of the morning, I shared a sandwich with the young people in the courtyard. I was sitting at a wooden table in the courtyard with my sandwich and a bottle of water. Four other Salesians were with me at the time; I had greeted many young people, some sitting at tables, others standing. It was a cheerful lunch. At my table there were two empty seats, and at one point two young men approached and sat down with us. Naturally I started talking to them. After a couple of minutes, one of the young men said to me: "I want to ask you a question" to which I replied, "Of course, ask me."

The young man said: "What do I have to do to become Pope? I want to be Pope."

I looked surprised, but I smiled. I replied that I had never been asked such a question and that I was surprised by his clarity and determination. It came to me spontaneously to explain to him that among so many millions of Catholics there is a lot of competition and it is not so easy to be elected Pope.



Rector Major in the Salesian Family Youth Centre located in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, USA, Nov. 2022

I suggested: "Listen, you could start by becoming a Salesian." The young man smiled and said: "Well, I'm not saying no" and added, very seriously: "because what is certain is that my passion is Christ'." I must say that I was impressed and pleasantly surprised. I think it had been many years since I had heard that expression from a young man in such a light-hearted context, in the presence of all his companions, who were now crowding around us.

The young man had a genuine smile on his face and I told him that I liked his answer very much, because I understood that it was absolutely sincere. I added that, if he agreed, I would like to recount our conversation at another time and place, and so I did.

But already at that moment my thoughts had flown to Don Bosco. Surely Don Bosco would have appreciated a conversation with a young man like this. There is no doubt that in many conversations he had with Savio, Besucco, Magone, Rua, Cagliero, Francesia and many others there was much of this, the desire of those young men to do something beautiful with their lives.

And I thought how important it is today, 163 years after the beginning of the Salesian Congregation, to continue to believe deeply that young people are good, that they have so many seeds of goodness in their hearts, that they have dreams and projects that often carry within them so much generosity and gift of self.

How important it is to continue to believe that it is God who acts in the heart of each of us, each of his sons and daughters.

It seems to me that today, in our time, we are in danger of becoming so practical and efficient in looking at everything that happens to us and what we experience that we risk losing the ability to surprise ourselves and others and, more worryingly, not letting ourselves be "surprised by God".

Hope is like a volcano within us, like a secret spring gushing

in our hearts, like a spring bursting forth in the depths of our souls: it involves us like a divine whirlpool into which we are inserted, by the grace of God. I think that like yesterday with Don Bosco, today there are thousands and thousands of young people who want to see Jesus, who need to experience friendship with him, who are looking for someone to accompany them on this beautiful journey.

I invite you to join them, dear friends of the Bulletin, and I wish you time to be amazed and time to trust, time to look at the stars, time to grow and mature, time to hope again and to love. I wish you time to live each day, each hour as a gift. I also wish you time to forgive, time to give to others and plenty of time to pray, dream and be happy.

New missionaries

La prima spedizione missionaria fu benedetta dalle lacrime di don Bosco che disse: «Noi diamo principio ad una grand'opera. Chi sa, che non sia questa partenza come un seme da cui abbia a sorgere una grande pianta?». La profezia si è avverata. La prima volta fu [...]

Letter Rector Major. Appeal for missionaries 2023

We remember 163 years ago – 18th December 1859 – when Don Bosco founded our “””Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales.” Since then, it has never stopped expanding. Thanks to our

missionaries today Don Bosco's charism is present in 134 countries, and next year we are preparing to start new presences in Niger and Algeria. Don Bosco's 6th successor, Fr. Luigi Ricceri, had reminded us that the missionary spirit and commitment were not only a personal interest of our founder but a true *charisma foundationis* that he transmitted to us and to the whole Salesian Family (ACG 261, p.14). Therefore, today is a beautiful opportunity to send you this appeal for missionaries.

During the send-off of the first missionary expedition in 1875 Don Bosco had made a prophecy: "... Who knows if this departure, this humble beginning, may be the seed that will grow into a mighty tree? ... Who knows if this departure may awaken in many hearts a desire to consecrate themselves to God in the missions, to join forces with us and reinforce our ranks? I hope so. ..." (BMXI, 385). In 1875, even though there were only 171 Salesians (64 perpetually professed of whom 49 were priests, 107 temporarily professed) and 81 novices, Don Bosco sent 11 Salesians to Argentina. At his death in 1888 there were 773 Salesians of whom 137 were missionaries sent by Don Bosco himself in eleven missionary expeditions.

Today we find ourselves in a vastly different context from Don Bosco's time. Today "missions" cannot be understood solely as a movement towards "mission lands" as in the past. Today Salesian missionaries come from the five continents and are sent by the Rector Major to the five continents. In a world where borders are in danger of closing more and more, Salesian missionaries are sent not only to respond to the need for personnel but, above all, to bear witness that for us there are no borders, to contribute to intercultural dialogue, to the inculturation of faith and of our charism, and to trigger processes that can generate new local vocations.



In my first letter as Rector Major, I expressed my conviction

that “a great treasure of our Congregation is precisely its missionary capability.” (ACG 419, p. 24). I have a firm conviction that we Salesians need to journey towards a greater awareness of our intemationality. And the missionary generosity of the confreres is a prophetic witness that our Congregation is without borders. Indeed, the presence of missionaries in a Province helps better reflect the intemationality of our Congregation and that the Salesian charism is not monochromatic and that differences and multiculturality enrich the Province and our whole Congregation.

On the contrary, a Province composed only of confreres from the same culture risks being reduced to an ethnic enclave that is less sensitive to the challenge of interculturality and less able to see beyond the boundaries of its own cultural world. This is why I have insisted several times that we do not make our religious profession for a country or a Province. We are Salesians of Don Bosco in the Congregation and for the mission, wherever we are most needed and wherever our service is possible.



Already in 1972, our Special General Chapter had considered missionary relaunching as “the thermometer of the pastoral vitality of the Congregation and an effective means against the danger of taking a middle-class lifestyle.” (SCG, 296). Likewise, the capacity of the confreres to welcome and accompany the new missionaries sent to their Province is a thermometer of their missionary spirit.

Thanks to the missionary spirit in our Congregation, confreres continue to give their lives to God as missionaries. To my appeal last 18th December 2021, 36 Salesians responded by sending me the letter expressing their missionary availability. After careful discernment 25 were chosen as members of the 153rd missionary expedition this year. The rest continue their discernment.

Therefore, with this letter, I invite you, dear confreres, to pray and make a careful discernment whether the Lord is calling you, within our common Salesian vocation, to be missionaries, which implies a lifelong commitment (*ad vitam*).

I invite the Provincials, together with their Delegates for missionary animation (PDMA), to be the first to help the confreres cultivate the missionary desire and 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 the Missions, in my name, will continue the discernment that will lead to the choice of the missionaries for the 154th missionary expedition that will take place, God willing, on Sunday 24th September 2023, in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, as it has been done since the time of Don Bosco.

The dialogue with the General Councillor for the Missions and the shared reflection within the General Council allows me to indicate the urgencies for 2023 and where I would like a considerable number of confreres be sent:

- to South Africa, Mozambique and to new frontiers on the African continent;
- to Albania, Kosovo, Slovenia and to other new frontiers of Project Europe;
- to Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Mongolia, and Yakutia;
- to our many presences in the islands of Oceania;
- to missionary frontiers of Latin America and amongst indigenous peoples.

I greet you, dear confreres, with genuine affection and with a remembrance before Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco here in Valdocco.

Turin Valdocco, 18th December 2022

Letter Rector Major. Artemides ZATTI

**«I BELIEVED, I PROMISED, I
RECOVERED!»**

Artemides Zatti: Gospel of vocation and a Church that cares

“The mosaic of our saints and blessed, though rich enough in the categories represented – Founder, Co-founder, Rector Majors, missionaries, martyrs, priests and young people, still lacked the figure of a coadjutor brother. Now, even this gap is being filled.”^{[1](#)}

The above is how Juan Edmundo Vecchi, eighth Successor of Don Bosco, began his letter for the occasion of the Beatification of Artemides Zatti.

If the “mosaic of our saints” was missing a tile, today this mosaic has a very special glow to it because, in a few weeks, we will experience a great gift from the Lord: to see one of Don

Bosco's
sons, a Salesian coadjutor brother, Italian emigrant to
Argentina and
nurse, canonised by Pope Francis on 9 October 2022.

This
mean that Artemides Zatti will be the *first*
Salesian saint not a martyr to be canonised.
Undoubtedly, the canonisation of the first Salesian saint and
Salesian coadjutor brother offers and will continue to offer a
note
of completeness to the range of models of Salesian
spirituality which
the Church officially declares as such.

Let
me quote the beautiful personal testimony, filled with
spiritual
depth and faith, given by Artemides Zatti in 1915 in Viedma,
at the
inauguration of a funerary monument placed over the tomb of
Father
Evasio Garrone (1861–1911), a well-deserving Salesian
missionary and considered by Artemides to be his distinguished
benefactor:

If
I am now well, in good health and in a position to do some
good to my
sick neighbour, I owe it to Father Garrone, a doctor. Seeing
my
health deteriorate day by day, since I was suffering from
tuberculosis and frequently spitting blood, he told me point
blank
that if I did not want to finish up like many others I should
make a
promise to Mary Help of Christians to always remain at his
side,

helping him in the care of the sick, and that if I trusted in Mary,
she would cure me.

I BELIEVED,

because I knew by reputation that Mary Help of Christians helped him
in visible ways. **I**

PROMISED,

because it was always my desire to help my neighbour in some way.

And, since God listened to his servant, **I**

RECOVERED.

[Signed]

Artemides Zatti”

We

see that the generous and confident soundness of Artemides Zatti’s

Salesian life was based on three verbs. To appreciate the gift of

holiness of this great Salesian Brother, we would like to meditate on

these three verbs and their extraordinarily good fruits, so that they

may deeply touch the desires, dreams and commitments of our Congregation and of each of us, and foster a renewed and fruitful

fidelity to Don Bosco’s charism in us all.

A

profile of Artemides Zatti²

Artemides

Zatti was born in Boretto (Reggio Emilia) on 12 December 1880 to

Albina Vecchi and Luigi Zatti. This peasant family raised him to a

life that was poor and hard-working, enlightened by a simple, straightforward and robust faith which guided and nourished his life.

At

the age of nine, Artemides began work as a labourer with a nearby well-to-do family in order to contribute to the family economy.

The

Zattis emigrated to Argentina in 1879 and settled in Bahia Blanca.

Artemides was seventeen when he arrived there, and he soon learned to

cope with the hardships and responsibilities of work while still

within the bosom of the family. He found work in a brick factory, and

at the same time he nurtured and grew in a profound relationship with

God under the guidance of a Salesian, Fr Carlo Cavalli, his parish

priest and spiritual director. Artemides found Fr Carlo to be a

sincere friend, a wise confessor and a genuine and skilled spiritual

director who formed him to a daily rhythm of prayer and weekly reception of the sacraments. He established a spiritual rapport with

Fr Cavalli and one of collaboration.^{[3](#)}

He had the opportunity to read Don Bosco's life in the parish priest's library and was fascinated by it. *This was the real beginning of his Salesian vocation.*

In

1900, by now a twenty-year-old, at Fr Cavalli's invitation

Artemides asked to enter the Salesian aspirantate at Bernal, near Buenos Aires.

But

in 1902, when it was time to enter the novitiate, Artemides contracted tuberculosis. Fr Vecchi, in his letter, tells us: "Because of his reliability, the superiors entrusted him with the task of assisting a young priest suffering from tuberculosis. Zatti carried out the work with generosity, but soon afterwards caught the same disease himself."⁴

Seriously

ill, he returned to Bahia Blanca and Fr Cavalli sent him to Viedma, entrusting him to the care of Salesian Fr Evasio Garrone, who was a competent physician thanks to his long experience, and director of the San José hospital founded by Bishop Cagliero.

I

find it very significant to recall that Artemides met Ceferino Namuncurá – today Blessed – in Viedma. He had come from Buenos Aires and had also been affected by tuberculosis. Despite their difference in age, the two had a warm relationship until Ceferino left for Italy in 1904 with Bishop John Cagliero.

After

two years of care in Viedma, though with unsatisfactory results, Fr Garrone sent Artemides to ask to be cured through the intercession of

the Blessed Virgin by making a vow to dedicate his life to caring for the sick. Having made the vow with keen faith, Artemides was cured, and in 1906 he began the novitiate.

Due to the risks associated with his prior health circumstances, Artemides had to renounce his resolve to become a priest and he professed as a coadjutor brother among the Salesians of Don Bosco on 11 January 1908. This meant a huge growth in faith for Artemides.

Indeed, he did not abandon his idea of being a Salesian priest and he continued to think about a priestly vocation in the Salesian Congregation, especially when it seemed his health had improved.

Therefore “it is touching to note his unswerving attachment to his vocation, even when it seemed that sickness had removed any possibility of achieving it. He wrote, for example, to his relatives

on 7 August 1902: ‘I want you to know that it was not only my wish, but also that of my Superiors, that I should receive the cassock; but there is an article of the Holy Rule that says that no

one can receive it who has even the slightest problem about his

health. And so it means that God has

not yet found me worthy to wear the cassock, and so I trust in your

prayers that I may soon get well and see my desire fulfilled.’”⁵

But

in the end, given the circumstances of his illness and also his age

(23-24) the Superiors had to suggest to Zatti that he make his profession as a Salesian brother. It was certain that "it was the total donation of himself to God in Salesian life to which Artemides aspired in the first place."⁶

Even

on this decisive point for his life, Zatti was growing in maturity.

Again, we read in Fr Vecchi's letter: "Priest? Brother?

He himself once said to a confrere: 'you can serve God as a priest or as a brother: before God one is as good as the other provided you live it as a vocation and with love.'"⁷

On

11 February 1911 he professed perpetual vows and the same year,

following Fr Garrone's death, he took his place, first as the one responsible for the pharmacy attached to the San José hospital in Viedma and then – from 1915 – as the one in charge of the hospital itself. Hospital and pharmacy would become

Artemide's field of work.

So,

with enormous energy, sacrifice and professionalism, Zatti was the

soul of the hospital from 1915, for 25 years. But in 1941 it had to

be demolished: the Salesian superiors had decided to use the land

occupied till then by the health facility for the construction of the

bishop's residence. Artemides suffered intensely at the thought

of the demolition, but in a spirit of obedience he accepted the decision and moved the patients to the premises of the Sant'Isidro Agricultural School where he established a new set of arrangements for the care and assistance of the sick and poor.

After further years of intense service, and by then relieved of the responsibilities of health administration, following a fall during some repair work in 1950 clinical examinations revealed a tumour on the liver for which treatment was in vain. He accepted it and knowingly followed the development of the illness. In fact, he prepared his own death certificate for the doctor! His suffering was constant, but he spent his last months in expectation of the final moment he had prepared for when he would meet the Lord. He himself said: "Fifty years ago I came here to die and now the moment has arrived, so what more could I wish for? I have spent all my life preparing for this moment..."⁸

His death occurred on 15 March 1951 and the spread of the news mobilised the population of the whole of Viedma to pay a tribute of gratitude to this Salesian who had dedicated his entire life to the sick, especially the poorest of them. "The whole of Viedma did honour to the *"kinsman*

of the poor",
as he had been known for some time;
the
one who had always been ready to welcome those with particular
maladies and people who came from the distant countryside; the
one
who had been able to enter the poorest of houses at any hour
of the
day or night without causing raised eyebrows; the one who,
though he
was always 'in the red', had maintained a unique
relationship with the city banks, which were always open to
friendship and generous collaboration with those engaged in
the
medical care of the citizens."⁹
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People
came from everywhere for the funeral, confirming the
reputation for
holiness that surrounded Artemides Zatti and that prompted the
opening of the Diocesan Process in Viedma (22 March 1980).
Zatti was
declared Venerable on 7 July 1997 and St John Paul II
proclaimed him
Blessed on 14 April 2002.

God's pedagogy in his saints

To
better understand the figure of Artemides Zatti we have the
valuable
guidance of a richly significant theological principle which
comes
from the pen of Hans Urs von Balthasar:

Only
the picture [of Jesus] the Spirit keeps before the Church has

been
able, down the centuries, to change sinful men into saints.
Any
presentation of Jesus which claims to mediate knowledge of him
must
be subjected to the same criterion: its power to change
lives.^{[10](#)}

Balthasar,
in these words, points out the evidence that has always
accompanied
the history of the Church: the action of the Spirit manifests
itself
as a transforming power in human life, testifying to the
perennial
relevance and vitality of the Gospel. In this way, the good
news of
Jesus continues to live and spread according to the rule of
the
Incarnation and, especially in the flesh and lives of the
saints
because of their profound consent to the Spirit, Easter bursts
forth
in the historical present of the ever new *here*
and *now*
where wonders that confirm the faith of the Church grow.

The
saints, then, are the achievement of the Spirit. In the
simplicity of
their transfigured lives they offer precise features of the
Son that
are given by the Father to this world of toil, in the
relevance of a
time and proximity of places in need of salvation and hope.

If

God guides his Church through the obedient life of his most docile and daring children, reflections of the Gospel must first of all shine through each of their stories that transform *a day-to-day biography into a hagiography*. And then, it is we who must recognise the seeds of Easter that are capable of triggering renewed ecclesial journeys among the people of God.

Artemides

Zatti confirms this rule of holiness: hagiography is the light of the Spirit emanating from the simplicity of his biography, so convincing because it is lived in the fullness of humanity, and so surprising as to make visible “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). Thus, the seeds of Easter, the gift of the life of this Salesian coadjutor brother to the world, transformed places of suffering – the San José and Sant’Isidro hospitals – into extraordinarily radiant seedbeds of Christian hope. “His was an active presence in society, completely animated by the charity of Christ which drove him on!”^{[11](#)}

It is then possible to meditate on the gift that the Spirit gives to the world, the Church, the Salesian Family with Zatti’s holiness, pausing first on the brilliance of his biography, his life story – a fully embodied Gospel of vocation, trust and dedication – to

then go on to consider the paschal power of his apostolate,
building
up in his hospitals the Church that cares for people, is close
to
them, saving them, sharing in the redemption and nourishing
the faith
of the people of God.

If
we want a concise expression of the secret that inspired and
guided
Artemides Zatti's life, the steps he took, his work,
commitments, joy, tears..., then Fr Vecchi's words sum it up
nicely:
*"following
Jesus, with Don Bosco and in Don Bosco's manner, always and
everywhere"*.^{[12](#)}

1. A MAN OF THE GOSPEL

1.1 The Gospel of vocation: "I believed"

The
story of Artemides Zatti strikes one for its vocational
distinctiveness above all. A luminous vocation because it is
purified
by a mysterious pedagogy of God that unfolds in his life
through
different and demanding mediations and situations. Christian
life is
the shared inspiration of Artemide's family, who interpreted
everything in the light of the mystery of God; It would be
Argentina,
their second homeland reached through emigration, that would
demonstrate the Zatti family's rootedness in an uncommon
faith.

Cardinal Cagliero

wrote:

Our

compatriots, even those who belong to the most religious populations

of Italy, seem to change their nature when they arrive here.

Immoderate love of work, the religious indifference prevailing in

these countries, very frequent bad example... brings about an incredible transformation in the spirit and heart of our good peasants and artisans. In exchange for the handful of *scudi* they earn, lose their faith, morality and religion.^{[13](#)}

The

Zatti family would not succumb to the influence of their environment.

On the contrary, they stood out for their fervent, forthright, courageous religious practice, free of human respect; and Artemides

would continue to nurture an intense relationship with God within the

family, substantiated by prayer, hard work, uprightness, so,

everything

leads us to believe... that the religious formation that the Servant

of God received as a child and in his early youth... must have been

privileged and in such a way as to explain the spiritual attitudes

that he maintained throughout his life.^{[14](#)}

Artemides'

experience reflects the luminous discretion of the "high standard of ordinary Christian living" (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*,

31) the fruit of an exclusive rootedness in God, of a faith lived as courageous and radiant obedience because it was free, joyful and fruitful.

When

Salesian Fr Cavalli, Artemide's parish priest and guide on the ways chosen by the Spirit, needed to support him in his choice of

life's ultimate direction, his discernment would be simple and clear: he would see that the call to give himself totally to God as a

priest resonated in the heart of this young man in an integral and

pure way, untainted by self-seeking and self-interest, but ignited by

the desire to serve the Gospel of the Kingdom.

And

because of Artemides' characteristic readiness to give of himself, God did not limit himself to calling him, but was able to

pour into him the incontrovertible sign of his presence: the cross

his Son bore. Thus, at the very heart of the vocational discernment

of this young man eager to become a priest, the seal of God's predilection becomes recognisable: Artemides, accepted in Bernal as

an aspirant, is asked to carry out a risky service, the care of a

priest suffering from tuberculosis – as mentioned earlier. This

unstinting service led Artemides subsequently to contract the disease

that would demand the sacrifice of his vocational dream: Zatti

would
be a Salesian, but not a priest.

Here
we recognise the power of the Gospel unconditionally accepted
in the
lives of the saints; a power that provokes a pure vocational
response
because it is guarded by a heart not only detached from evil –
an essential condition for listening to the voice of God – but
also capable of freedom with respect to good, an essential
condition
of a rock-solid faith in the Absolute that is God.

Walking
in the luminous darkness of faith, Artemides sacrificed the
desire to
serve the Church in the ministerial form of the priesthood,
while
embracing its essence, according to Christ “who through the
eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God” (*Heb*
9:14).

The
characteristics of the gospel of vocation are thus recognised,
indelibly, in the fullness of self-sacrifice that sealed the
beginning of Zatti’s Salesian life well before crowning its
fullness.

And
fidelity to the lay form of Salesian life, embraced out of
pure love
for God, would be full and convinced, far from any regret, and
would
unfold in a convincing and contented existence.

This
is the gospel of vocation, the good news of God’s call

individually reserved for each of his children, a call of which God alone knows the purpose, the reasons, the destination, the concrete unfolding. A call that becomes perceptible only in the pure correspondence of love which, in turn, wants “to rid itself of its most dangerous enemy, its own freedom of choice. Hence, every true love has the inner form of a vow: it binds itself to the beloved – and does so out of motives and in the spirit of love.”¹⁵

The gospel of vocation, in Zatti’s holiness, is the gospel of pure faith: the good news of the healthy breath of the heart that savours freedom in obedience to God’s plan, guardian of the mystery of every life called to be a fruitful branch of the true Vine, entrusted to the wisdom of the “Vine-grower” (Jn 15:1).

Read with the “categories” of our time, Artemides Zatti’s holiness provokes “vocational fear”, fear that clutches the heart in mistrust before the mystery of God. The gospel of vocation announced by the life of this Salesian coadjutor brother saint shows that only by corresponding to God’s dream is it possible, at any age and in any situation, to overcome the paralysis of the ego, with the poverty of its gaze and its measures, and the narrowness of its uncertainty and its fear.

When

Fr Garrone – a Salesian of outstanding virtue in his own right,
in addition to the great medical competence he had gained through his
generous service to the sick – encouraged the tuberculosis-stricken Artemides to ask for the grace of being cured
through the intercession of the Virgin and with a vow to dedicate
himself to the sick for the rest of his life, Zatti's faith gave proof of itself: simple, selfless, unreserved and encapsulated
in the phrase: "I believed!"

"I

believed". That is, when a word or two is enough to speak one's
faith, because faith is pure; and only this faith is vocationally
generous because of the lightness of its purity that "gives wings to the heart and not chains to the feet".

Artemides

Zatti's holiness reaches out to our own vocational journeys, as
tired and dreary as they sometimes are, with the disruptive force of
an "I believed" that never failed: faith's present moment that continues throughout life and makes it credible. His was
a faith of *continuous union with God*.

In the collection of testimonies, Archbishop M. Pérez said:
"The impression I received was that of a man united with the Lord. Prayer was like the breath of his soul, all his behaviour

showed that he lived God's first commandment to the full: he loved him with all his heart, with all his mind and with all his soul."¹⁶

We are called to see the value of Zatti's testimony for renewing the ardour of our vocation ministry and to offer young people the example of a life that the solidity of faith makes complete, simple, courageous by the power of the Spirit and the docility of the one who is called.

1.2 The Gospel of trust: "I promised"

The gospel of vocation which Zatti is testimony to, enlivens the second verb of fundamental importance: promise.

We often experience the weakness of human promises today; we fear their unreliability, their inability to be definitive: hence the vocational 'winters' that are affecting the family, Congregations in many parts of the world, the Church – and that make it urgent to proclaim the Gospel of God's call and the believer's response.

Reflecting on the essence of vocation, which is the result of genuine belief, Von Balthasar writes: "There is no progress in love without at least a modicum of this *attitude*

of self-surrender...

[Love]

wants

to abandon itself, to surrender itself, to entrust itself, to commit

itself to love. As a pledge of love, it wants to lay its freedom once

and for all at the feet of love. As soon as love is truly awakened,

the moment of time *is*

transformed for it into a form of eternity...

timed love, interrupted love is never true love."¹⁷

Even

at a young age and precisely at a moment of great trial, Artemides

Zatti felt the call to the fullness of self-commitment through a

radical and irrevocable promise. When he was much older, testifying

to the gratitude he felt towards Fr Evasio Garrone, his benefactor,

and recalling the beginnings of his own journey of consecration,

Zatti was able to be succinct and to the point in presenting what was

at the heart of his youthful compliance with the Lord's call:

"I believed, I promised."

Zatti's

"*I*

promised"

followed his "*I*

believed"

but it also shaped its radical nature and human and Christian quality. Artemides believed because he promised and not only promised

because he believed: in him we see realised the rule of faith which,
if it cannot count on the readiness to promise, to surrender oneself,
descends into spiritual interest, mere social service and religious
contract.

Zatti

did not wait for guarantees before risking his life. He did not ask
for the right to “a hundredfold here below” as the prior condition before casting his nets; rather did he “readily offer
to assist a priest suffering from consumption and contracted the
disease: he never uttered a word of complaint, accepted the illness
as a gift from God and bore its consequences with fortitude and
serenity.”¹⁸

Thus

Artemides’ generosity was something he paid for even before his
religious profession, and it was a high price: a debilitating illness, a shattered vocational dream, acute suffering, and – above all – total uncertainty. But at the crossroads of faith and promise, the gospel of vocation brought about the wonders of
holiness in this life, right from his youth.

Zatti’s

promise was pure, disinterested, like his faith, and it meant that
the integrity of his abandonment to God’s plan and the generosity of his self-giving and self-commitment shone forth,

showing his genuine theological depth: Artemides made his own the life of the obedient Son who allows himself to be totally dictated to and destined by the Father's love for the salvation of the world.

Zatti's vocational alphabet was as profound as it was simple and clear: "I believed, I promised". Zatti believed and promised as radically as the Gospel because he had already practised the Lord's Passion as the rule for his faith and dedication, as he never tired of saying in his letters to family members: "Our joys are our crosses, our comfort is in suffering, our life is our tears, but with the ever dear and inseparable companion by our side, the hope of reaching beautiful paradise when our pilgrimage on earth is completed."¹⁹

The cross is the rule of faith, and teaches how Christian belief is not a mere knowing something but entrusting oneself to Someone by promising Him not something, but oneself. Formed by the cross, even before undertaking the journey of religious life, Artemides did not *promise* but *promised himself*, did not *make a vow*,

but vowed

himself,

and thus reflected the features of the Son who “came into the world... he said: ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said: “See, God, I have come to do your will, O God” (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)’” (*Heb* 10: 5-7).

And,

still in the school of the Lord Jesus, Zatti learned that the radical

nature of promising oneself is matched by the growing boldness of

faith. Those who give themselves completely to God can abandon themselves to the certainty of receiving everything from Him, and

Artemides never tired of reminding us of this in his letters: “I

recommend that you should not be afraid or ashamed to ask for graces.

Ask, and you shall obtain; and the more you ask, the more you shall

obtain; for the one who asks much, receives much; the who asks little, receives little; and the one who asks nothing, receives

nothing. [...] I will not stand here listing the graces that you must

ask for; you know them well. I only place one before your eyes: that

we may all love and serve God in this world and then enjoy Him in the

next.”²⁰
—

1.3

The Gospel of dedication: “I recovered”

“*I recovered*”

is the verb with which Zatti sealed the event that introduced him to Salesian life.

What does “*I recovered*” mean?

Certainly, the tuberculosis that had undermined his health was overcome by Zatti and in a way that surprised the doctors:

“In the Viedma Process, the court asked whether the recovery was miraculous. As far as we know, it was not instantaneous but, according to the doctors... who knew Zatti well until his death, it was extraordinary due to the scarcity and ineffectiveness of the cures of the time, the continuity of his recovery and the more than normal physical robustness that the Servant of God always enjoyed, despite his life of hardship. Our Lady’s intervention seems undeniable, whether it was a miracle or an extraordinary grace.”^{[21](#)}

The finger of God, however, acted in its own unmistakable style: God did not eradicate the illness by restoring Artemides’ life to its pre-disease condition, nor did he unravel the mystery typical of

every divine design and human existence. Thus, as we know, “while noting the improvements in the Servant of God’s health, the Superiors were not fully persuaded about his future chances. Tuberculosis, in those days, never gave certainty of recovery and definitive cure; the *curriculum* of studies that the Servant of God would have to tackle at his age (23-24), was still long and certainly not suitable for someone who had had tuberculosis; on the other hand, he had already begun to work in the Pharmacy, in an occupation suitable for a layman, and everything leads one to believe he did so with success and mutual satisfaction; perhaps Fr Garrone was exerting some pressure to keep him with him in his work. Given all these circumstances, the Superiors, then, had to put it to the Servant of God – who certainly, from all that appears in his writings, had decided to leave the world and consecrate himself to God – to become a Salesian religious, but as a coadjutor (brother): the solution seemed the most prudent in view of his still uncertain health: material work required less effort than a long period of strict studies.”²²

God’s mystery deepened with his cure, and Artemide’s faith was asked for a purification that was perhaps more severe than the one imposed by his loss of health: to sacrifice the direction his vocation was to take. Thus

Artemides was led to deepen the path of purification that God required of him: deliverance from illness was not a regaining of the strength which allows an enterprising young man to “take hold of life again”. In its own way his recovery became the desert of a new poverty, so that Zatti’s life would be a free space for God in the radical call to a new abandonment.

God cured Artemides of tuberculosis in order to renew in him the miracle of salvation from self-attachment, of detachment even from his own good plans: “It is to be assumed that abandoning the aspiration to the priesthood was a great spiritual suffering for the Servant of God, such was the impetus and spirit of sacrifice with which he had undertaken the journey towards this goal. However, it is marvellous and indicative of extraordinary spiritual strength that there was never a word of complaint or even a word of regret or nostalgia... for this reversal in the perspective of his life.”²³

“I recovered”, then, is the voice of coherence in Zatti’s vocational alphabet. When God calls and his creature responds, the Spirit does not merely repair human precariousness but fulfils God’s dream “See, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). Thus, while sickness inclines the human heart to withdraw into itself, Zatti’s believing and promising, nourished by love for

the Lord Jesus and the Cross, produced true health: greater self-forgetfulness and unconditional submission to God, which led him to be the humble apostle of the poorest, the sick and, among them, to become the apostle of the strangest cases; in short, apostle of the abandoned and discarded of this world.

The Artemides reborn to greater poverty had surrendered himself even further, in full and active trust, to the Father's plan: "*Ex auditu* I can say that [in the life of the Servant of God] there was a general desire for God to be glorified. As I knew him, I can assure you that he lived for the glory of God."^{[24](#)}

The subordination of everything to the glory of God and the sacrifice of one's own views – including one's plans for the good – in order to comply with God's wisdom, which alone realises the fullness of Love, would be essential not only to the spiritual experience of this extraordinary Salesian but also to the *pedagogy of pain* that he would practice due to the specific nature of his mission.

In Zatti's "I recovered" not only a grace but a school was fulfilled, and both were moulded by the finger of God for the

good of his brothers and sisters: free from illness, Artemides would serve the sick for a lifetime, after passing through the *true recovery* that would make him a *true doctor* for the creatures he would bend over.

“He often made the sign of the Cross and had the sick make it; he loved to teach it to children. Faith and medicine formed a symbiosis in him; without faith he did not cure, nor did he cure without medicine. Nor did he see any dichotomy between the soul and the body; the human being was one, and he cured this human being: body and soul.”²⁵

Only because he was led by the hand of God to experience healing as dying to self could Zatti be close to the sick with the medicine of Incarnate and Crucified Love, dispensing comfort, light and hope.

2. AN EASTER WITNESS

If – because of the way he was reached by God’s call – the *Gospel of vocation* shines out in an original and very relevant way in Zatti’s life, his apostolic sowing is fulfilled as the skill of caring in the light of Easter.

Being

consistent with Easter is the rule of fidelity of every Christian

apostolate: the practice of this rule reaches splendour in the saints, bringing the life of God into the labours of human beings,

history, the world, thus building up the Church.

Zatti

practised the fatigue of human suffering with paschal passion and

thus built up the Church as a true field hospital (as Pope Francis

continues to say today), precisely by transforming two hospitals

built "at the end of the world" into living cells of the Church.

The

hospitals, first of all the San José and then the Sant'Isidro, were a valuable and unique health resource for the care of the poor

in Viedma and the Rio Negro region in particular at the turn of the

century (19th, heading into the 20th): Zatti's heroism made them places that radiated God's love and where health care became an experience of salvation.

Zatti

consigned his life to the parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan is Christ, God who is close to us (in his Beloved Son) and

who knows of no indifference or contempt but offers himself, in

advance, to healing even the least of his sons and daughters through

the closeness of love, so that the evils of history will not condemn

any of these little ones to perish outside Jerusalem.

Here

is God's miracle: in that pocket handkerchief piece of Patagonian territory where Zatti's life flowed, a page of the Gospel came to life. The Good Samaritan found a face, hands and

passion, above all for the little ones, the poor, sinners, the least.

Thus a hospital became the Father's Inn, became a sign of a Church that sought to be rich in gifts of humanity and Grace, through

self-giving, service and living the commandment of love of God and

neighbour.

There

are numerous witnesses who allow us to contemplate the experience of

the Church accessible in that field hospital brought to life by

Zatti's heart on fire: by letting them speak, the charm of Artemides concerned with curing those who entrusted themselves to him

emerges once again, both with the remedies of his medical skill, his

presence, sympathy, prayer for all and with all, and with the everyday expression of faith of this humble Salesian. All this certainly proved more effective than many medicines.

2.1.

Easter care and service (*diakonia*) of wounded lives

Where

there is holiness the Church spreads, and where the Church is built

up there is holiness. Those who met Zatti, those who were

welcomed
into his hospital, experienced fraternity and experienced the
Church
in this fraternity.

In
the radical style of the Gospel, Zatti lived the certainty
that
service, the characteristic feature of his vocation – *diakonia*
– makes the face of the Church credible, recognisable,
lovable.
The door that is service attracts the human heart, especially
when it
is tried by life and suffering, and opens to the experience of
meeting Jesus the true Good Samaritan, and Zatti did his best
to live
as a Good Samaritan.

“The
hospital and the houses of the poor, which he visited night
and day
using a bicycle now considered a historical relic in the city
of
Viedma, were the front line of his mission. He lived the total
donation of himself to God and the dedication of all his
strength to
the good of his neighbour.”²⁶

Zatti
was a witness of service, and just as Jesus gave himself up to
the
end, Zatti carried out, to the point of heroism, in the
footsteps of
his Lord, a fully Christian gift of self and *diakonia*.
It is worth emphasising, in the unanimous words of witnesses,
the
extraordinary characteristics of Zatti’s evangelical *diakonia*:
the universality of his dedication, the totality of his self-

giving,
the generosity born of God being at his side, in obedience to
Him,
accomplished in Him and for Him.

That

Zatti's service knew of no favouritism, made no preference of
individuals was visible to all who knew him: "I know that he
visited the prison to look after the sick. He was helpful and
friendly with unbelievers and enemies of the Church. I
remember a
doctor commenting on the title of Father Entraigas' book 'The
Kinsman of All the Poor' saying that it should be corrected to
'Kinsman of everyone' because of the fairness with which
he [Zatti] did not distinguish between all those who sought
him
out."^{[27](#)}

If

there was a preference for someone in Zatti's service and
self-giving, it was the preference taught by the Good
Shepherd,
sensitive above all to the fate of the most injured and lost
sheep:
"It was one of [Zatti's] predilections that he gave
himself totally to God in these humble, defenceless people or
those
with infirmities that were so repulsive that when someone
wanted to
send them to a hospice because they had been in the San José
Hospital for many years, he replied that these true *lightning
rods*
of the Hospital should not be abandoned."^{[28](#)}

Zatti,

then, served with his whole self, consuming himself in
generosity

without measure in the most disparate forms of feverish activity aimed only at meeting the demands of all: "Since his kindness and good will in serving others was known to all, everyone turned to him for the most disparate things... Rectors of houses in the Province wrote to him for medical advice, sent confreres to him for assistance, and entrusted service people who had become incapacitated to his hospital. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were no different from the Salesians in asking for favours. Italian migrants asked for help; those who had been well cared for at the Hospital had people write to Italy, asked for files, as if it were an expression of gratitude, and sent relatives and friends to be cared for because of the respect they had for his care. Civil authorities often had incapacitated people to care for and resorted to Zatti. Seeing he was on good terms with the authorities, prisoners and others recommended that he ask for clemency for them or get their problems solved."²⁹

Zatti's service was continuous and selfless and precisely because of this, unrestrained by touchiness, ingratitude, lack of correspondence or nagging demands: "Concern for his neighbour in the servant of God was extraordinary in his daily work; from morning to night he

lived for his beloved sick. These circumstances increased at night,
when no matter what time they called him, he would rush to them... I
know that he often had to suffer the excessive demands of some patients, their inordinate needs, whims as in the case... of patients
with mental illness. The Servant of God never lost his patience. I
remember seeing him on more than one occasion go out in bad weather,
cold and rain on his bicycle (not the latest model) to care for the
sick among the population, riding along quite impassable roads."³⁰

What
deeply marked Zatti's *diakonia*,
his service to all, was his being in the company of the Lord. No one
missed how competent this generous nurse was, but equally evident was
his being on a mission with Jesus:
"One
very concrete personal item: I was a novice and then a newly-ordained
priest, and I came to Viedma because of some pustules especially on
my neck and face and the Servant of God always welcomed me with a
smile, cured me by cauterising me with a hot tip,
humming
the *Magnificat*
while he worked and then encouraging me to offer these sufferings up
for holy perseverance in my vocation."³¹

Again,
obedience to God and his plan shone out in Zatti as the soul
of
humble and trusting service meant to inspire feelings of
abandonment
to God in the poor and the sick. Everything found inspiration
in God,
and Zatti carried out everything in accordance with God's
command, so that the service of this great Salesian was a
continuous
and fascinating practice of the precept of love:
he
"loved
God above all things. For him all things of this earth were
passing
and secondary. For me, Zatti was constant, unwavering in his
love for
God and in his piety. Not only in acts of piety but in all
service to
his neighbour he always kept the name of God on his lips. He
urged
all those close to him to live prayerfully. Zatti was always
an
example, his piety was above the ordinary."³²

Zatti's
service, however, as is always the case with saints, was a
diakonia,
a service performed certainly in obedience to God, but above
all in
the name of God, lending God his face, his heart, his hands in
the
certainty – a source of great boldness – of being but a
small instrument of his great Power and Providence. Thus Zatti
worked
with extraordinary generosity but with total abandon because
he knew

that it was his Lord who acted in him: “He always hoped and trusted in God. The serenity with which he overcame difficulties was a demonstration of his hope in God. He always said: ‘God will provide’, but he said it with full confidence and hope.”³³

Zatti, believer and true man, was “moved by love for his neighbour, because he saw the suffering Christ in every sick person. Such was the kindness he showed the sick that he did not deny them anything”³⁴;
“For the Servant of God, love was manifested in the charity with which he assisted the ‘other Christs’. With his Gospel notion that whatever his disciples would do for their neighbour they would be doing to Christ himself, the Servant of God habitually behaved charitable towards all, even when dealing with the unbelieving or indifferent.”³⁵

Either by outwardly living a Church of service capable of reaching out to its poor, or by serving those who knocked at the doors of his hospital – first at San José and then at Sant’Isidro – so that they might encounter God’s love there, Zatti gave his whole self to God, becoming a servant of the Lord, an authentic missionary of the Church in the name of the Lord Jesus.

2.2

Easter

fraternity and communion (*koinonia*) in shared life

Zatti’s

holiness brings us to the heart of the Church not only because of the uniqueness of his *diakonia*, but also because of the quality of communion that flourished through his giving of himself to others. What communion was for Zatti is attested as much by the testimonies of those who witnessed its action, as by the way in which he went through the most trying moments that marked his life.

A particularly painful event for him occurred when his superiors opted for the demolition of the San José Hospital to which Artemis had dedicated all his energy; Viedma lacked the premises for the episcopacy, and in order to build a suitable bishop's residence, it was decided to demolish the old hospital, with the burden of transferring all health services to the premises of the Agricultural School of Sant'Isidro, the site of another Salesian work in Viedma.

For Zatti, the demolition was not a simple building operation, it was a raw and crucifying trial: not only did the rubble of an old hospital lie before his eyes, but the doubt that his life might have collapsed with those walls, and that his renunciations and privations, misunderstandings and vigils, headaches and sweat, dedication to others and self-sacrifice

had also ended there. Zatti was not spared this chalice, but remained upright with Christian fortitude and gentleness: “at the time of the demolition of the San José hospital, he had first proposed that the bishop’s palace be built elsewhere and the land be exchanged; then, given the inexorability of the demolition, which... he felt enormously because of his extreme human sensitivity, he did not rebel or protest; on the contrary, he calmed those who tried to make him rebel.”³⁶

As is always the case in the lives of saints, the trial was both a dark crucible and a luminous demonstration: with his serenity of spirit and alacrity in setting up the new health services building, Zatti showed what the foundation of his dedication was: the real hospital he had built could not be reduced to rubble because it was an invention of charity, the charity that “never ends” (1 Cor 13:8), and that expresses the miracle of communion, a reflection of the eternal life of God. Zatti’s true hospital was not an earthly building dedicated to San José or San’Isidro; in those rooms, his professionalism welcomed everyone, through the door of service, so that they might experience the true and full tenderness of God.

Zatti did not preach the catechism of communion, but by his holiness

he embodied it; and his hospital was not an imposing building, but an evident, daily miracle of service and communion. There "The Servant of God directed the staff, which was made up of various people who lived in the hospital, like a superior of a religious community... The staff loved him, revered him and followed his rules to the letter. Nobody ever lacked what was necessary: moral, spiritual or technical for the fulfilment of their duties, and this because of the personal concern of the Servant of God."³⁷

That it was Zatti's spiritual stature that made him the architect of communion is everyone's belief: "During the years I was at school in the College of St Francis de Sales, the Hospital was a dependency of the College and one knew everything that went on here as well as there. I never heard of any quarrels or misunderstandings between Zatti's co-workers that could have any relevance and be the cause of gossip in the village or in the school."³⁸

Christian communion, when it is brought about, does not go unnoticed for its beauty that surprises a world laid low by rancour and division; it is only the saints, however, who know the price of communion at its

fullest, how it is quite foreign to on-the-spot reaction, artificial sympathy or ease without sacrifice. The saints know how much communion costs because they know what its source is: the Lord's wounded side, which performs the work of reconciliation among and with human beings.

Zatti knew that only the Blood of the Lord creates communion, and he chose the path of faithful and daily participation in the sacrifice of the Son with a smile on his face, fortitude in his soul, peace in his heart, his hands pierced by work and fatigue. Making the commitment required by his sacrifice almost imperceptible, Zatti "was a man who radiated peace, [a man] of action, dynamic, who showed no nervousness, was cheerful. It was common for him to joke... to cheer up a sick person... He was a man who did not waver in his religious practices... a sign of his effort to improve himself. Personally, what I noticed most about him was his charity and humility."³⁹

Zatti's humility built up the Church and made the communion of which he himself was the creator a Christian communion; those who do not die to themselves every day, carry with them the heaviness of selfishness that wounds communion. Only humility heals relationships

and overcomes the lure of power, control, seduction, prevarication. Without many words or speeches, Zatti knew that only with humility can one be the builder of *koinonia* which is the result of and condition for effective and unobtrusive *diakonia* that does not create dependence but restores dignity; only humility serves in a generative way, fostering a communion that nurtures bonds and promotes autonomy. Humility is God's virtue because it is the secret of every father, the hope of every son, the spirit of every true life.

Zatti was able to be a servant and creator of communion because of the humility that made him a simple child of God, alive with the life of the Spirit, and father of all: "I believe that in Zatti's relationship with his co-workers there were never any problems because he was like a father to everyone. I remember that everyone missed him a lot when he was away in Rome for the Canonisation of Don

Bosco"⁴⁰;

"Zatti's relationship with the hospital was like that of a father. I know of no misunderstandings or difficulties: if there were any, I believe they were not on his part. From the nurses with

whom I dealt..., I heard nothing but praise and no complaints."⁴¹

2.3

Easter closeness and the *martyria* of life without end

Our

confrere Artemide Zatti truly testified by his life (*martyria*) that the Lord is risen. "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12) the Lord said of himself. The Gospel is Light that seeks to

penetrate people's lives, and Light for the world is the Church, God's living sacrament. Zatti's holiness, nourished by the Jesus's Passover, is also light, and the poor and sick of Viedma in particular experienced this. Zatti welcomed

them through the door of service, kept them within the walls of

communion, but so as to offer them, through his testimony of life,

the light of the Gospel, the splendour of Easter that illuminates the Church.

Believers

and non-believers alike were thunderstruck by Zatti's words and

gestures; his testimony was shadowless, extraordinarily Salesian,

reached everyone and proclaimed two decisive features of the God of

Jesus through two words: Providence and Paradise.

There

is no Church where there is no explicit proclamation of the name of

God, a proclamation paid for with the martyrdom of life, in the sign

of blood or charity; where Zatti's service and communion went, the proclamation of the name of God, of these two names that

are so

Christian and so Salesian, resounded: Providence and Paradise.

Zatti

proclaimed with his life that everything in God is love, but concrete, attentive, boundless and detailed love for each creature:

God's love is Providence. God's Providence, however, is not timeless but eternal, and then comes the second name: Paradise;

Paradise is the proper name for God's desire in history to provide for his creatures in order to have them with him forever, for eternity.

Zatti

was a teacher of this Christian alphabet: "It was his constant desire that the Lord be known and loved. He testified to this by the

joy he expressed when a new patient, who knew nothing of God, became

a devout Christian. His first concern was to look after them in a

caring manner and inspire confidence in divine Providence."⁴²

His

sense of Providence was not the obligatory response to precarious

conditions, a sort of last resort offered to shipwrecked people so

they didn't founder in difficult times. Witnessing to

Providence for Zatti meant teaching them to talk to God, call him by

name with Christian trust, because "he was very much convinced of the Gospel principles and one that was firmly engraved on his

heart and mind was 'strive first for the kingdom of God and

his
righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as
well'

(Mt

6:33). He had learnt in Don Bosco's school – having read
much about his life – never to mistrust God's help,
especially when he is honoured, as he wishes, in each of our
neighbours."⁴³

But

a Providence without Paradise would not allow the proclamation
of

God's name to withstand the impact of history with its burden
of fatigue, suffering and death. Inside and beyond the
hospital,

Zatti inspired a Church that was always visited by pain and
death,

and this demanded a fullness of faith and witness, demanded
that he

proclaim the name of God's only wish for humankind: Paradise.

When he bore witness to Paradise, Zatti showed his certainty
"regarding eternal life and its acquisition by grace and good
works; this he manifested especially in the face of death... I
personally heard him rejoice at being able to give religious
assistance to the sick and exclaim... 'Today we have sent two
or three to heaven'"⁴⁴

With

these two names of God, Zatti evangelised life and death, joy
and

pain, health and illness as true Christian witness, as a
martyr in

the daily martyrdom of charity. Zatti's proclamation and
martyria

did not divulge a Gospel of circumstance or opportunity but
spread

Salt, Light, Yeast, lent face, heart and hands to a Gospel

that asks
for life and pervades it throughout, dissolves conundrums and
conquers anguish with the warmth of Truth:
“From the time I knew him, he always gave more importance to
religious practices than to his work, although he did this
with
perseverance. He often quoted the Scriptures, especially the
Gospels,
to console the sick or encourage virtue... It was very difficult
for
him not to put a spiritual thought into his conversations.
Once,
while talking to him, I mentioned the discovery of some new
medicines
such as penicillin and sulphonamides; the Servant of God
listened to
me and, when I finished speaking, he said: ‘It is true, it is
true, but people will still continue to die’.”^{[45](#)}

The
truth of the Gospel in its entirety enlightened Zatti’s
hospital, as it had enlightened the Oratory in Don Bosco’s
time: that is why in the hospital at Viedma, as within the
walls at
Valdocco, death was not feared, nor were expedients multiplied
to
soften the scandal of death or hide its evidence, deceptions
that are
dangerous to the human heart. Zatti faced death with the
testimony of
the Gospel of life: life with its feet on the ground, and
therefore
industrious and practical, but with its heart in heaven, and
therefore confident and serene: “the only motive of his life
was the expectation of a heavenly reward. He never acted to
gain
money or reputation, but did everything in the hope of future

happiness.”⁴⁶

Albeit

in all simplicity, his commitment to live the Gospel with his heart

rooted in the ultimate prize was to bring the God of Providence and

Paradise into every human wound and death, so that Life and Resurrection might flourish there. This made Zatti's testimony blessed and he invoked its presence when the precious and rare medicines of hope and consolation were indispensable. The whole town

of Viedma knew this, as witnesses have confirmed with astonishing

unanimity: they all called on Zatti, and he would rush to hearten and

console, giving this Christian medicine that he drew upon for his own

life in the Grace of God, from the Spirit himself, the Consoler.

Thus

it became “extraordinary in the Servant of God that he was able

to instil hope in the sick, a fact that contributed almost miraculously to healing by uplifting the soul of the suffering individual.”⁴⁷

Zatti

bears witness, including to the martyrdom of charity, that the Lord

is God of heaven and earth. Zatti bears witness to this with the

passion of the saints which knows no measure: “I remember one patient telling Zatti that he was always preparing him for heaven but

that he needed to prepare him a little for earth. Another fact shows

the atmosphere of the hospital: a nurse once insisted on preparing a patient who was not so sick for death and who is actually still alive.”⁴⁸

2.4

Easter

joy and the liturgy of life redeemed

With his extraordinary fidelity to the central occasions of Christian life, Artemides Zatti was nourished by the Bread of the Word, the Bread of Forgiveness, the Bread of Heaven, and his life was transfigured, ever more intensely, for the benefit of a mission rich in fruits that grew. Thus, the life of Grace, intensely lived by this son of Don Bosco, reached out to all those who met him, without distinction: the sick and co-workers, confreres and authorities, the poor and benefactors, in Zatti they touched the life of the Lord through the power of the sacramental mystery that is shared among people in the communion of the people of God. And so the whole Church, in the sacraments, by the power of the Holy Spirit, celebrates the Paschal Mystery and ensures nourishment for people through the sacraments for the journey and for remedies that heal humanity wounded by evil and death.

This

is the Church: It flourishes and grows where service and fellowship
proclaim the name of God, bear witness to the Word of Jesus,
are
nourished by His Body, healed by His Forgiveness. Zatti did
not
simply do all this, but was all this. Because of his
correspondence
to Grace which made his life holy, we recognise not only the
Lord's
gestures and words in him, but experience his very life: Zatti
was a
"living tabernacle", and his radiant testimony aroused
questions, intentions, conversion, even in those who were far
from
close participation in the mystery of the Lord.

Zatti's
dedication, revealing more than human roots, becomes a
universally
convincing proof of the supernatural power of the sacraments;
his, in
fact, was "a supernatural and extraordinary love of
neighbour... He was willing to make any sacrifice and that is
why the
difficult seemed easy for him. I think the difficult
circumstances of
his charitable work were the shortage of personnel, the demand
for
his assistance at all times, not being affected by bad
weather,
serving all kinds of people. I remember a relative of mine who
was
ill coming to visit on a day when the weather was very bad,
and when
someone asked him, 'Are you going out in this weather, Bro.
Zatti?' he replied: 'I don't have any other kind of

weather!'"⁴⁹

It is a rule of the Christian liturgy to be able to give good proof of itself in the life of the believer through order, harmony, effective and supernatural energy. Zatti was a Christian, a consecrated Salesian layman of Don Bosco. He was a living stone of the Church, a witness to Easter, because the commandment of Love became visible in his works, and that made people recognise God in their neighbour and their neighbour in God. But through his life Zatti also taught that the strength needed to practise that commandment is supernatural and can only come from God, from his sacraments and from prayer and union with Him.

"Zatti practised charity in difficult circumstances due to a lack of financial resources. Also because his activity went beyond the ordinary, due to the amount of hours he dedicated to his commitments without omitting his religious obligations. Knowing him as we did, we wondered how he could sustain such great effort without the rest that is usually considered necessary."⁵⁰

Two episodes are worthy of recall as an example of the liturgy of life which made Zatti was first a disciple and then an apostle of the

Crucified and Risen Lord; firstly, the demolition of the old San José hospital, with the need to transfer the sick to Sant'Isidro: "I have no information that Zatti was notified of an eviction date, and he certainly had not received anything from his provincial, otherwise I would have known... The emotional state into which Zatti fell when the sick had to be removed in case the rubble fell on them, could have been psychologically fatal. He wept bitterly, but after praying before the Blessed Sacrament, he set to work with calm energy";⁵¹
and then there was his service to the dying: "A young man was about to die, and Zatti was conversing with him after giving him communion; at a certain point the young man began shouting 'Zatti, I'm going to die!' and at the same moment got out of bed; looking him in the eyes, Zatti smiled and said: 'How wonderful, you are going to heaven!' and the young man fell back with a smile that copied Zatti's, and which remained etched on his face."⁵²

This is what happens when the Eucharist becomes life and the Paschal Mystery becomes daily practice: human greatness is transformed, by the power of the Spirit, and every action of a believer is performed

in Christ, for Christ and with Christ, making life a liturgy and
transfusing the holy gifts of the liturgy into life.

Our

dear Artemides Zatti, indebted in everything to the Mysteries of the

Lord, knew that everything could only be achieved thanks to Him;

hence his humility: "I remember that, as my brother Salvador was very ill with typhoid fever, the Servant of God went to treat him

several times a day. On one occasion, meeting up with him on his way

to Salvador's house, I was distressed and said to him: 'Bro. Zatti, please save my brother!' He turned and looked me in the eyes, and said sternly: 'Don't be blasphemous, only God

saves!'"⁵³

Artemides

Zatti's was a life of self-gift, communion, and witness to the risen Lord. A life full of graces that led him to a fully Christian

death: "Asked if his pain was constant, strong or otherwise, without answering directly he said to me: 'It is a means of purification and I am happy because I realise that I am completing

the Passion of Christ, something I have inculcated so much in the

sick.'"⁵⁴

And

Zatti's offering as the seal of his liturgy was complete, unobtrusive, serene and joyful. It deserves to be summed up in a

little story in which, behind the veil of sympathy, Zatti gave those

who were looking after him the meaning of his life, which God was able to squeeze out to the full because it was mature and complete. A few months before his death, smiling about his illness – liver cancer that turned his face yellow – Zatti told a nurse that he (Zatti) would soon be coloured, too, with make-up! His, however, would be like it is in lemons, the colour of maturity which means the fruit is ready to be completely squeezed: “You wear make-up? So do I! Within six months I will demonstrate it. The lemon is of no use if it is not yellow.”⁵⁵

3.

INVITATION TO A SPECIAL COMMITMENT

This was the title of the last part of Fr Vecchi’s letter to which I have referred several times, and which I would like to keep and share now. In the previous pages I have attempted to outline the extraordinary figure of our Salesian coadjutor brother Artemides Zatti in a simple but incisive manner. His life’s journey, imbued and filled with God, is more than evident. As is his holiness. Faced with this great figure, we see the need and importance in our Congregation of a special commitment to promote this beautiful vocation today. I make Fr Vecchi’s words my own in asking of every province, every community, and every brother in the coming

years, as of now, “a renewed, extraordinary and specific commitment for the vocation of the Salesian Brother within our vocational pastoral work: in praying for this, in suggesting and proclaiming it, in welcoming it and following it up, in living it personally and together in the community.”⁵⁶

There is no shortage of valuable publications on the figure of the

Salesian coadjutor brother;⁵⁷

Perhaps what we need at this time is to make our commitment more

convincing. I have often said in my visits to the provinces and also

in my letters that we must first of all be men of faith, more than ever abandoned to the Lord today. Many other strategies and

plans can help us, but they will not get us out of a profound difficulty.

Only *trust*

in the Lord and recourse to him will.

The following testimony of a brother confrere has, in my opinion, a

particular force to it: “Today too resounds the call ‘Come and follow me’. And I find it always a source of wonder that even today there are young men who seem to lack nothing they would

need for heading towards the priesthood, and instead they choose to

become consecrated laymen in the Salesian Congregation. And so in our

pastoral work for vocations we must have faith in this

vocation which
is complete in itself, and pass on to others esteem for it as
by
osmosis, without any forced comparisons or distortions in
respect of
the clerical figure. We must be convinced that there are young
men
who do not identify with the priestly model, but are attracted
by
that of the consecrated layman. What are the reasons for this
choice?
All reasons are insufficient: fundamentally it is a mystery of
Grace
and freedom.”⁵⁸

At
this point, I would like to invite you to take a closer look
at
forthcoming publications on both Saint Artemides Zatti and the
vocation of the Salesian coadjutor brother in our Congregation
in the
various regions, and in the proposals of both the Youth
Ministry and
Formation Sectors that will undoubtedly reach us from now on
as a
help to the intercession that the new Salesian saint will
provide for
everyone and, undoubtedly in a very special way for his
Salesian
coadjutor brothers in the world, those who are already here
and those
to come by the Grace of God.

**The
power and beauty of an invitation**

I

believe we should not end our discussion of the life of Artemides

Zatti without evoking, once again, a letter from 1986 from Cardinal

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, today Pope Francis, written to a Salesian,

testifying to a grace received through Zatti's intercession.

The

story is well known: when he was Provincial of the Jesuits in Argentina, Father Bergoglio entrusted to Zatti the request to the

Lord for holy vocations to the lay consecrated life for the Society

of Jesus, and his Province had the grace, within a decade, of twenty-three new religious brother vocations.

The

episode is relevant not only for the main characters in that story –

the Master of the Harvest, a Salesian coadjutor brother saint, the

current Successor of Peter – but for its content: the vocational power of Zatti's testimony.

It

is astonishing that the first Salesian to be canonised, and not

because of blood martyrdom, should be a brother, and a brother who,

in radical obedience to God, renounced the very form of vocation by

which he had been fascinated, that of the priesthood, to be with Don

Bosco, and then carried out a sacrificial service in the world of

sickness and suffering.

However,
the strong beauty of this testimony cannot escape us; in him
shine
the fundamental loves that must enkindle the Salesian's heart:
love for God and his will, love for our neighbour in whose
suffering
limbs we see the Face of Jesus Crucified, love for the Mother
of the
Lord, Mediatrix of all grace, love for Don Bosco who promises
bread,
work and Paradise to every Salesian.

These
loves shine forth in the luminous grandeur of Artemides'
religious life, embraced joyfully and radically and with
generous
resourcefulness.

Our
confrere Artemides Zatti shows us how sensitive the world is
to the
witness of religious life, provided that this witness is true,
credible, authentic: the triumph of his funeral, his
reputation for
holiness, the veneration of his tomb are clear signs of how
much
everyone recognised the finger of God in action in this
generous and
faithful Salesian: "In proportion to the inhabitants of
Viedma,
the number of people who flocked to the funeral was
impressive. From
everywhere came humble people with small bouquets of flowers.
In
addition to the authorities, there were many other people. In
the
days [following the death] people were convinced that a saint

had

died; some went to the grave hoping for miracles: they prayed, brought flowers."⁵⁹

Artemides

Zatti's life woke up a city, and today it touches the whole world

because it spoke of God: he brought the perfume of God's virginal and fruitful love among the poor and the sick, with an

exemplary practice of chastity; he gave everyone the richness of

faith, paying for it with a beloved poverty to the point of giving up

his own room to a sick person or bringing a deceased person there to

remove them from the sight of other patients in a final gesture of

tenderness and pity; he taught true freedom, obeying the will of the

superiors at the cost of bitter tears, recognising them as mediators

of God's plan.

An

exemplary religious, by this testimony he teaches everyone that the

health to be guarded above every other good is that of the soul, our

soul that is so precious because it comes from God and aspires to

him, often unconsciously, in the desire to find eternal Love in his

arms.

May

Zatti's loves kindle our loves; may his witness to the

Absolute that
is God, the greatness of the soul and our true homeland
inspire our
gestures and our pastoral passion for a new apostolic fidelity
and
renewed vocational fruitfulness. May we never lack, as
Artemides
Zatti always sought, the maternal protection of Mary Help of
Christians, and may the devotion to our Mother in every
Salesian
house in the world, and in every corner where the Family of
Don Bosco
is found, be a sure road that helps us to live a holiness like
that
of our confrere.

I
conclude these words by proposing a prayer to the Father
through the
intercession of the new Salesian coadjutor brother saint,
Saint
Artemides Zatti.

***Prayer
of intercession
to
ask for vocations of lay Salesians***

O
God, who in St Artemides Zatti
have
given us a model Salesian coadjutor brother
who,
docile to your call
and
with the compassion of the Good Samaritan
made
himself a neighbour to every human being,

help
us to recognise the gift of this vocation
which
testifies the beauty of consecrated life to the world.
Give
us the courage to propose to young people
this
form of evangelical life
at
the service of the little ones and the poor,
and
make those whom you call to this path
respond
generously to your invitation.
We
ask this through the intercession of Saint Artemides Zatti
and
through the mediation of Christ our Lord.
Amen.

With
true affection and united in the Lord with mutual prayer,

I
am yours sincerely,

Ángel
Fernández Artime, sdb
Rector
Major

[1](#)
J.E. Vecchi, *Beatification*
of Bro. Artemides Zatti: A sensational precedent,
in AGC 376 (2001), 3.

[2](#)
I have decided to draw up a brief and
concise profile. Those who would like to know more about the
life of

Artemides Zatti can find several biographies on the forthcoming saint and also read the biographical profile in Fr Vecchi's letter to which I referred earlier.

[3](#)

Cf. *Positio*,
p.35

[4](#)

Cf. J.E. VECCHI,
OP. CIT., P.
15 AND CF. *POSITIO*,
P. 47.

[5](#)

J.E. VECCHI,
OP. CIT., P.
17 AND *POSITIO*,
P. 79.

[6](#)

J.E. VECCHI, *OP.*
CIT., P. 18.

[7](#)

J.E. VECCHI,
OP. CIT., P.
20 AND *SUMMARIUM*,
P. 310, NO. 1224.

[8](#)

Positio, p. 198

[9](#)

J.E. VECCHI, *OP.*
CIT., P. 25.

[10](#)

H.U.
VON BALTHASAR,
DOES JESUS KNOW US? DO WE KNOW HIM?,
IGNATIUS PRESS, SAN FRANCISCO
1983, 93-94.

[11](#)

J.E. VECCHI, *OP.*
CIT., P. 26.

[12](#)

J.E. VECCHI, *OP.*

CIT., p. 27.

[13](#)

Positio, 31

[14](#)

Positio, 21

[15](#)

H.U.

VON BALTHASAR, *THE*

CHRISTIAN STATE OF LIFE, IGNATIUS

PRESS, SAN FRANCISCO 1977, 39.

[16](#)

Summarium, p.

43, n. 160.

[17](#)

H.U.

VON BALTHASAR, *THE*

CHRISTIAN STATE OF LIFE, 38-39.

[18](#)

Positio, 206

(Spiritual profile of the Servant of God).

[19](#)

Positio super scriptis 12

[20](#)

Letter

to his father,

Viedma 15 June 1908

[21](#)

Positio, 75-76

[22](#)

Positio, 80

[23](#)

Positio, 81

[24](#)

Summarium

15

[25](#)

Summarium

80

[26](#)

J.E. VECCHI, *OP.*

CIT., P. 21.

[27](#)

Testimony
of Carlo Tassara, *Summ.*
126-127

[28](#)

Testimony of Archbishop Carlos Mariano
Pérez, *Summ.*
52

[29](#)

Luigi Fiora, *Biografia,*
Positio
132

[30](#)

Testimony of Archbishop Carlos Mariano
Pérez, *Summ.*
43-47

[31](#)

Testimony of Archbishop Carlos Mariano
Pérez, *Summ.*
43

[32](#)

Testimony of Juan Oscar García,
Summ. 113

[33](#)

Testimony
of Ferdinando Enrique Molinari, *Summ.*
151

[34](#)

Witness Morero Noelia de Tofoni, *Summ* 259

[35](#)

Testimony of Fr Luigi De Roia, *Summ.*
271

[36](#)

Testimony of
Enrico Mario Kossman, *Summ.*
10

[37](#)

Testimony
of
Fr Antonio F. Fernández Prieto, *Summ.*

61

[38](#)

Testimony of Fr
Mario Brizzola, *Summ.*

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[39](#)

Testimony of
Juan Oscar García, *Summ.*

113

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Testimony of Giuseppe Nicola Costanzo, *Summ.* 103

[41](#)

Testimony of Teresa Amalia Giraudini, *Summ.* 117

[42](#)

Testimony of Manuel Linares, *Summ.*

92

[43](#)

Testimony of
Archbishop Carlos Mariano Pérez,
Summ. 36

[44](#)

Testimony
of
Enrico Mario Kossman, *Summ.*

14

[45](#)

Testimony of Fr
Mario Brizzola, *Summ.*

79-80

[46](#)

Testimony
of
Fr Mario Brizzola, *Summ.*

80

[47](#)

Testimony of
Juan Cadorna Guidi, *Summ.* 218

[48](#)

Testimony of
Dr. Pasquale Attilio Guidi, *Summ.*

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Testimony
of
Juan Oscar García, *Summ.*
114.

[50](#)

Testimony of Luigi De Palma, *Summ.*
135

[51](#)

Testimony of Fr
Feliciano López, *Summ.*
178

[52](#)

Testimony of Fr
Feliciano López, *Summ.*
174

[53](#)

Testimony of Pedro
Echay, *Summ.*
211-212

[54](#)

Testimony of Francesco Erasmo Geronazzo, *Summ.* 274

[55](#)

Testimony of Fr
Feliciano López, *Summ.*
193

[56](#)

J.E. VECCHI, *OP.*
CIT., P. 47.

[57](#)

The ones offered by Fr Vecchi are
available in AGC
373 (2000) and in *The vocation of the
Salesian Brother in Salesian pastoral work for vocations*, in
The Salesian Brother.
History, Identity, Vocational Apostolate and Formation,
Editrice SDB, Rome 1989, 133-161.

[58](#)

J.E. VECCHI,
OP. CIT., PP.
49-50.

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115-116