 Reading time: 42 min.

«I BELIEVED, I PROMISED, I RECOVERED!»

Artemides Zatti: Gospel of vocation and a Church that cares

“The mosaic of our saints and blesseds, 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 Zatti[2]

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]

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 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 Peréz, *Summ*. 52

29 Luigi Fiora, *Biografia*, *Positio* 132

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

31 Testimony of Archbishop Carlos Mariano Peréz, *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*. 75

39 Testimony of Juan Oscar García, *Summ*. 113

40 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 Peréz, *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*. 100

49 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.

59 Testimony of Teresa Amalia Giraudini, *Summ.* 115-116