

□ Reading time: 19 min.

*Don Tito Zeman (1915-1969), a Slovak Salesian, lived his priestly vocation with evangelical radicalism right up to his martyrdom. As a child, he experienced the trial of illness and, cured through the intercession of Mary, he matured his decision to consecrate himself to God among the Salesians. Hindered by family and circumstances, he nevertheless entered the congregation and was ordained a priest in 1940. During the communist persecution in Czechoslovakia, he risked his life to clandestinely accompany numerous clerics and priests across the border so that they could continue their formation and receive ordination. Betrayed and arrested in 1951, he suffered torture and 13 years of harsh imprisonment, experiencing pain as an offering of love. His faith revitalised many cellmates and even some persecutors who, repentant, asked for forgiveness. Beatified in 2017, Don Tito leaves a very timely message: freedom is preserved by fidelity to conscience, truth is defended with love, and vocation is realised by giving one's life for others.*

## **1. Brief biographical profile of Fr Titus Zeman**

### **1.1. The entrusted limit: Titus from illness to recovery**

Who is Fr Titus Zeman?

He was born in Vajnory, a small agricultural suburb on the outskirts of Bratislava, on 4 January 1915, the first of ten brothers and sisters. Often ill, he recovered suddenly in the spring of 1925 through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, after entrusting himself to her and asking pilgrims to pray at the Shrine of Our Lady of Sorrows in Šaštín. Titus had promised Mary that, if she healed him, 'he would become her son forever', including in this simple formula a firm intention of consecration. Don Bosco's sons had arrived in Šaštín the year before, and Titus reasoning as a child was 'I was healed by Our Lady venerated in Šaštín. The Salesians live there. So the Mary's house is the house of the Salesians. Then I will also be a Salesian'.

Fr Titus had experienced the limit (of health) and had overcome it by entrusting himself (to Mary).

### **1.2. Beyond the limit enthusiastically: Titus and the conquest of his vocation**

Titus had never hinted at a possible vocation.

Parents and parish priest firmly opposed it and tested him for two years. When an aunt finally accompanied him to Šaštín, she even tried to make an arrangement with the then rector, Fr Josef Bokor, to pressure the young boy into giving in. The

Zemans were very poor, afraid of the huge financial commitment required to study for the priesthood.

Fr Bokor challenged Titus. He reminded him that he would be the youngest there, that the place stood by a swamp and people had to wash with cold water. That is when he felt like crying, there would be no mother to console him. At that time, little Titus was very thin, still a little puny. Perhaps he looked younger than his 12 years. He did not come from Salesian works, he did not know Don Bosco. For Fr Bokor, he was a little boy who had come out of nowhere.

Titus, however, was adamant. To an astonished Fr Bokor he replied: "What are you saying? It is true, I will not have my earthly mother here, but there is the Virgin Mary, the Mother of Mothers": she would be his mother. Finally he said "You can do what you want with me, but take me here!" He went as far as telling his parents "If I had died, surely you would have found the money for my funeral. Please use that money for my studies'. Titus fought, surprised everyone and won: he would be a Salesian priest.

The stages of his formation led him to profess perpetual vows on 7 March 1938 in Rome in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, and to be ordained a priest on 23 June 1940 in Turin in the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians.

Shortly before his perpetual profession, Titus offered a few years of his life to God for his mother, who was very ill at the time and who would go on living after her son's offering, also giving him his last little sister (Františka, born in 1939).

Immediately after his priestly ordination, however, he had to leave Italy and return home because of the drama of the war.

On 2 August 1940, on the occasion of the first Mass in his homeland, some buns were found burnt inside, of a blood-red colour: the event was interpreted as an omen of martyrdom.

First a student and then Fr Titus taught as a science teacher, with degrees in Chemistry and Natural Sciences. In 1946, the communist director of the institute had the symbol of the cross removed from the classrooms. Titus, with two others, re-hung the crucifixes (if necessary asking the Salesians to remove their own): it was an act of love for the Lord, but also of justice for believers, to whom the Constitution at that time formally still guaranteed full expression of religious freedom. He was dismissed, but throughout Slovakia he began to be identified as the 'priest who stood up for the cross of Christ'.

Fr Titus had experienced the limit of opposition and had resolved it by confronting it.

### **1.3. The limit foreseen and circumvented: Titus and crossing the Morava**

Titus was just as ready in 1950, after the Night of the Barbarians (13-14 April), when all the religious in what was then Czechoslovakia were interned in concentration camps; the superiors were separated from their communities; the youngest were sent home or enlisted in the auxiliary technical battalions; those close to the priesthood were prevented from finishing their studies in theology to be ordained. Titus then, with Fr Ernest Macák and Fr František Reves, prepared a courageous undertaking to save vocations. Fr Titus would accompany Salesian clerics and some diocesan priests to the non-Soviet part of Austria, and then go with the theology students as far as Turin.

He then crossed the Morava, which marks the border between Slovakia and Austria:

- between August and September 1950 (the first group crossed);
- autumn 1950 (when he returned alone to his homeland)
- also autumn 1950 (when he accompanied the second group)
- in March/April 1951 (when he returned alone to his homeland, amid great risks and hardships)
- in April 1951 (when he was captured at the border).

In September 1950, Titus meets the then Rector Major Fr Peter Ricaldone in Turin: he recommended caution, but blessed the enterprise that Titus until then - unable to ask for authorisation from his Slovakian superiors locked up in concentration camps - had understood as *presumptive obedience*.

In January 1951, he experienced an intense moment of crisis and conversion, which was to prove decisive.

In April 1951, he was captured - when he could have saved himself by then - because he had decided to slow down to help some tired priests and had stayed with his own, *loving them to the end*, the Good Shepherd who does not flee when the wolf comes, but gives his life.

Fr Titus had sensed the limit and had managed it by anticipating and circumventing it.

#### **1.4. The limit that becomes light and path: the 'vocation within a vocation'**

Worthy of particular relevance, therefore, is the crossing in January 1951, not an 'exterior' one but 'interior' one. At that time Titus was stuck in Austria and knew that the regime was on his trail. A man of action and enterprise, he now found himself at the mercy of situations beyond his control: a winter too harsh to attempt to ford the Morava; a general situation of alertness; a trusted guide, unjustly accused of theft, still in prison; continuous and exasperating delays.

He then wrote an intense and dramatic letter to his friend Michael Lošonský-Želiar. It was 21 January and in the letter Titus expressed disorientation, fear, doubt,

fatigue, the weight of temptation. He even wrote, “and if you ended up in their hands [Titus asks himself], could you ask for God’s help, because three times the plan was changed? Was not the threefold warning enough for you, and did you really want to make a hero of yourself, as you were told by others, and did you think God had his own plans [...]?” Titus here had forgotten even the strength and grace of obedience to the Rector Major; no light shone within him....

A few days later, however, Titus wrote a second letter to Michal. It was completely different. He quoted and commented on some passages from the Liturgy of the Word of the day, which he proclaimed during Holy Mass and which had become an intense experience of conversion: above all the phrases from the Gospel (‘do not be afraid... you are worth more than many sparrows’) and from the First Letter of John about the obligation to commit one’s life for one’s brothers.

Through this particularly painful experience Titus confronted his own limitations (fear, anguish, doubt): he overcame them to the extent that he entrusted them to Another, and let His Word read his life and convert it. The readings of that day become the answer to all of Titus’ questions; the dissolution of his doubts; the “prevailing voice” that imposed itself on so many other voices (including of confreres) according to which Titus was making a mistake. So, during the novena to Don Bosco in 1951, Titus – always strong – had for once felt weak himself: he had understood that ‘limits’ and ‘boundaries’ are never crossed in solitude. Awaiting him soon after: 13 years in harsh prisons; the concrete possibility of the death sentence and then definition as *m.u.k.l.* or ‘man destined for elimination’; almost five final years on parole, always heavily controlled, harassed and finally treated as a guinea pig for experiments.

Fr Titus had crossed over his limits by experiencing them.

### **1.5. The limit defeated from within: 18 years of torture and harassment**

Throughout the middle part of his adult life (i.e. from the age of 36 until 54) Fr Titus was deprived of freedom of movement and initiative. He was imprisoned in Bratislava Castle, Leopoldov, Jáchymov, Mírov, Valdice...

In the terrible ‘Tower of Death’ in Jáchymov he manually ground uranium, which is highly radioactive. He was covered in it. He experienced the terrible reality of solitary confinement. He was humiliated and beaten just because “he was Zeman”. The malnutrition and torture were also ferocious, and for him they were renewed when he was called to testify at the trial of ‘Fr Bokor and his companions’: Fr Bokor himself, the rector who had finally had to accept him when, at the age of 12, Titus made him understand, in Šaštín, that his was a true vocation...

In prison, Titus made a very personal rosary, a simple thread connected small beads

made of breadcrumbs. He made one bead for each period of torture: ending up with 58... In prison, he experienced a profound identification with *Ecce homo*: without Him, Titus admitted, nothing would have been bearable for him. In the meantime, he experienced severe cardiac, neurological and pulmonary impairment, leading to the shortening of his life.

These were 18 years in which Titus, united with his Lord, learned to defeat limitation from within: he won because an Other won *in* him, *with* him and *for* him. St Augustine says of the martyrs: "He who lived in them won in them."

Titus in these years understood that evil can attack the physical side, but not break the soul, adhesion to Christ, dedication to the Church. And so, while his moral and spiritual resistance (which the persecutors tried in vain to defeat, even through some particularly humiliating torture) led the regime to rage even more, he experienced that you can remain free even when everything else tries to enslave you; that nothing is lost, if here and now you love. Thus, he experienced an inner death but gave joy to others.

With some Orthodox and Protestant prisoners he had an intense experience of ecumenism through blood: "not even a Council," these people said, "would ever have managed to bring us together like this." The evil of rampant communism thus reconstituted – in their reconciled hearts – a unity that other evils had torn apart in previous centuries. The fidelity of these friendships would always accompany Titus: he would die in the arms of a Capuchin priest who had fought like him in prison; the evangelical pastor Dr Jozef Juráš would be at his funeral.

Fr Titus had crossed over his limits by inhabiting them.

### **1.6. The limit emptied and reconciled: after Fr Titus' death**

On 8 January 1969, the day of Fr Titus' birth into heaven, there was one last limit to be broken down: the persecutor's acknowledgement of his error. Titus had long since forgiven his persecutors, maintaining a heroic silence towards them even during his parole period. But them? With the 'Prague Spring' now over, the year before with the return of the Soviet armies, it seemed that Fr Titus (and the others) were now doomed to oblivion: the last word on his life was thus written by the persecutor himself.

The course of events, however, becomes surprising at this point.

Still in the midst of communism, in the same year, 1969, a trial recognised some of the errors committed by the court who condemned Titus as a "secret agent/spy of the Vatican" and "traitor": fraud, distortion, exploitation were all admitted. The *odium fidei* was clear. In 1991, after the fall of the regime, the further charge of "illegal border crossing" was finally dropped. Fr Titus was therefore innocent. It was

the same regime that had condemned him, condemning itself – only a few months after Titus' death.

However, a wound remained open between Titus and his persecutors.

The court documents now confirmed the innocence of "Fr Titus and his companions". However, the opposition and hatred of some towards him and the reality (i.e. the Church and especially the ministerial priesthood) for which he had given his life remained.

Two very peculiar facts then happened.

The school principal who had caused Fr Tito's dismissal in 1946 converted before his death, and died assisted by the comfort of the sacraments.

The judge who had sentenced Titus to "25 years of hard prison without parole with loss of civil rights" (though the prosecutor had asked for the death penalty for him, later excluded "so as not to create a martyr") also converted and, later, on his knees in Bratislava, publicly asked for forgiveness for having condemned the innocent: the twenty or so Salesian priests that Titus had led at the risk of their lives.

Even the most obstinate limit to be overcome, hardness of heart, was thus 'emptied from within' – by the power of God and by Titus' sacrifice : it opened up to forgiveness, reconciliation and peace. Fr Titus had overcome the limitation by vanquishing it.

## **2. Relevance of Fr Titus Zeman's message, in connection with Fr Ignaz Stuchlý.**

Fr Titus sacrificed his life in defence of the priesthood. He wanted, as the sources state, to ensure the next apostolic generation of the Church, even in times of persecution.

With his persecuted and mocked life, Fr Titus Zeman seems to be a long way from that joyful and exuberant embodiment of the Salesian charism, typical of the way it is normally presented. This unites Titus with Fr Ignaz Stuchlý, who had often faced difficult conditions and – in his positions of governance – had always experienced the fatigue of serving, literally going so far as to take the bread out of his mouth to feed his children.

Both lived the dynamic of *caetera tolle*, a sacrificial dimension that marked them in the practical dimension of doing and acting, which was so suited to them: Fr Stuchlý saw himself repeatedly *robbed* of the works he had given his life to build; Fr Titus, on the other hand, *saw himself painfully robbed* of the Congregation he loved, and for many years (essentially: from his arrest in 1951 to his release on parole in 1964) he experienced the lacerating sense of guilt of feeling responsible for other

Salesians captured with him as part of the 'third crossing' of the Morava River. These characteristics of their lives – of those *mysteries of pain* that they both experienced in their own flesh – also seem to make them quite distant from the current context which tends to remove the experiences of pain and death and deludes itself into thinking it can rewrite the requirements of a 'worthy' life when it is effective and healthy. Of the new forms of ideology which see the closure of so many works even in the Church's area of activity. What then – together with Fr Stuchlý – can be the message of Blessed Fr Titus Zeman for today?

### **2.1. The fruitfulness of a work is not measured in terms of efficiency, but of effectiveness**

Both Fr Stuchlý and Fr Titus lived in penal circumstances. Obedience called them both to accomplish great things when, by human logic, nothing should reasonably have been undertaken.

Titus Zeman even attempted to undermine the communist regime's plan to dismantle the Church from within.

Ignatius Stuchlý lived and worked in chronically precarious conditions, where the rapid flourishing of Salesian works (due in large part to his unconditional dedication) alternates with the imminent collapse of these works under the pressure of external events. He also, as evidenced by the proceedings of the Cause, knew well in advance – because of 'that light,' as one witness argues, 'which is sometimes kindled in the souls of saints' and which is a pure gift of the Spirit – that the Czech Salesian work would be dispersed and that he would die in solitude. Therefore, not only did he work under extreme conditions, but he worked with undiminished dedication and joy, even knowing that a dramatic end was looming.

Titus and Ignaz teach us that the higher demands of obedience to God and the Church urge one to act *while foreseeing that the outward fruits of such works will be short-lived, or may appear limited and precarious*.

Titus committed himself to the crossings knowing that it would be impossible for him to save *all* or *many* Salesian clerics: but only a *few* (whom he chose on the basis of physical endurance [necessary for a journey on foot, swimming across the Morava, and in the Austrian and Upper Tyrolean Alps amidst freezing temperatures] and aptitude for study).

Fr Stuchlý foresaw that some young men would lack perseverance; and he noted how the numbers of the nascent Salesian Congregation in the Czech Republic remained, although promising in some years, nevertheless low compared to the many needs of the local Church.

Neither Titus nor Fr Stuchlý, however, allowed themselves to be discouraged. For them, the goodness of an endeavour did not coincide with its external impact. Just as Abraham left his country trusting, or the disciples followed Jesus without yet knowing him well, and *only afterwards and in retrospect understood the reason for those seemingly unreasonable gestures*, so did Titus and Stuchlý act at a time of fatigue, obscurity, without full clarity: it is not true that the truth of a quest only appears in times of special light and inner enlightenment. Even Titus, as we have read, received the decisive light in January 1952 (but he had been devoting himself to the crossings since the summer of 1951).

Titus and Stuchlý, like the bride in the Canticle of Canticles (signifying the Church), 'get up' and 'go out' to seek 'the beloved of their hearts' when it is still dark, without waiting for the full light to come, because then *it would be too late*. And is this not a 'preventive' method in the manner of Don Bosco? A preventive 'method' that has a prophetic flavour, as a profound ability to grasp the signs of the times? *Today*, we know that many of the young men accompanied by Titus became good Salesian priests: but at the time they were boys, even a little undisciplined and whom he sometimes had to scold.

*Today* we know that among the young men followed by Ignaz at Perosa Argentina were a future cardinal (Trochta) and other important figures for the Church: but at the time they were young men crowded into a group that did not shine for their example, among whom some who ran away from the Salesian house without warning, and some who even stole offerings in church.

The effectiveness of a work, therefore, does not necessarily correlate with its efficiency or its immediate 'sustainability'.

Titus said something that seems beautiful, but in reality is shocking and terrible: 'My life will not be wasted, *if only one (if at least one)* of the boys I accompany becomes a priest'. Just one: that is, one life, one priest, was worth 18 years of terrible physical, psychic, moral and spiritual torture. And he was worth them in abundance.

Are we – consecrated or lay people in various ways connected to the Salesian Family – capable of this, even amidst the inevitable external conditioning, expectations and fatigue?

## **2.2. Being companions to young people without taking over their effort to make their choices.**

Fr Titus spent most of his adult life away from young people: in prisons, he struggled and suffered with peers. Yet his few years of accompanying young people provide valuable insights into how to accompany them. I will briefly recall some of



them.

– *The ‘young people’ encountered by Tito.*

Fr Titus has been with young people for a few years, but in a variety of contexts:

- as an assistant;
- as a teacher of science subjects;
- as a good sportsman who involved them in games (especially volleyball or table tennis where he was very good);
- as a support figure when the young Salesians were forced into hard labour at the Púchov-Nosice dam;
- in the Morava crossings to save their priesthood;
- as a brother, even though he was on the opposite side of history from them: he, a Salesian priest, *was tortured* in prison *mainly by young or very young agents*;
- as a suffering witness to the faith, in his later years, when in Vajnory he lived in his brother’s house and was forced to work in the factory, meanwhile becoming a ‘second father’ to his grandchildren.

He also met people who were less young statistically, but ‘became young again’ because they were helped to start living again. For example:

- the prisoners, often criminals charged with serious crimes or even murderers, whom he met in prison: to them he brought the first announcement of the Christian faith. They were *young believers* because no one had ever told them about Jesus, but Titus and other priests had the courage to do so, defying the reprisals of the jailers;
- his own persecutors, some of whom experience an intense conversion and were therefore ‘born again from above’, according to the word of the Gospel;
- Finally, all those prisoners whom he helped to approach the sacraments (in the prisons, for example, communion was distributed clandestinely while waiting for a medical examination, and in order to agree on time for confessions they resorted to stratagems such as moving the position of their cap or stopping to tie their shoes); and all those other prisoners to whom he gave what he had earned from of his own work, so they could earn food bonuses—so precious for survival and capable of delaying the decline of their strength.

With respect to each of these categories of people, Titus carried out an intense Salesian-style pastoral care, both as a teacher and priest, and again in prison, when he found himself last among the least, like Don Bosco among the prisoners in Turin. Titus is therefore a father who protected, guarded and nurtured.

– *‘With’ the young, never ‘in the place’ of the young.*

Despite the diversity of young people he encountered, one constant stands out in Titus’s approach: he *put his life on the line* to remain by their side.

Yet never, not even in the most dramatic situations, did Titus take their place. His support as an educator awakened their consciences and trained their freedom. Never, however, did Titus encourage complacent behaviours, nor did he mislead young people with an overly lenient attitude. Titus knew that a person is educated first and foremost by confronting them with the – sometimes dramatic – consequences of their actions.

Thus, as a science teacher, he guided the youngsters in reasoning, but left it to them to find the solution.

As a sportsman, he did not allow them to ‘win easily’, but through the serious side of the game challenged them to learn to be men, to bring out character.

As their support when he joined them at the Púchov-Nosice dam, Titus showed up in plain clothes, evading the vigilance of the guards as they passed through the checkpoints: but he never used his own skill to make them escape.

As the person in charge of the secret crossings over the Morava, Titus did not accept every young man, but only those considered suitable: even if refusing a person meant exposing them to the harshest life under the regime. Furthermore, Titus informed the clerics of the risks they ran – including immediate execution – and imposed on them, individually, to set aside half an hour for prayerful reflection before confirming their participation in the expedition (how nice, if – just as while saying the rosary we remembered those ‘58 grains’ – during the half hour of meditation in the morning, everyone would think that in that time some young men had decided to expose their lives for love of the priesthood and the Church!)

In prison, Titus was the first one ready to help. However, *he renounced* providing support if it meant coming to terms with the regime. For example: he was punished for helping a prisoner to get hold of a pencil (writing in prison was forbidden); but he courageously reaffirmed his dignity as a priest, even if this caused him transfer or retaliation, resulting in his detachment from the people for whom he had become a point of reference.

Fr Titus, making his own the awareness that had been Edith Stein’s, herself a martyr of a totalitarian regime, reminds us that ‘no truth must be accepted that is devoid of love, nor any love that is devoid of truth’. Therefore, he defended the truth even if it meant ceasing to love some people *sensitively*, because he was separated from them by punishment.

When on probation, he refused to shake hands with people colluding with the regime: he did not condemn them, but prevented gestures of apparent friendship to make his disagreement with the risky ambiguity in which they lived clear. To love is not to be nice or condescending at any cost!

Titus, to the extent that he could, always remained with the young and among the

young. However, he never intended to replace them or spoil them in any way. For him, to give his life for the young was first and foremost to help them become responsible protagonists of their own lives. That Titus educated them to the normality of persecution in the history of the Church shows how he loved them without disguising any risk or hardship.

Today, many parents, professors and educators believe they upset young people if they expose them too much, if they question their conscience with radical questions. Fr Titus always knew how to challenge young people: but he also stood by them, so that they would not be discouraged. And the young people – contrary to what many educators today would believe – understood Titus and were grateful to him.

Do you recall the half-hour meditation in which each one, before leaving for Morava, had to make up his or her mind in complete freedom? Well, no one ever gave up. Everyone always chose to stay with Titus....

### **2.3. Having the courage to say no. An empowering vocations pastoral ministry**

Both Fr Titus, martyr for the salvation of vocations, and Fr Stuchlý, formator of the first generation of Czech and Slovak Salesians, were involved in the challenges, beauty and urgencies of pastoral work for vocations.

There is one thing they have in common. They always used discernment and accompanied others in discernment by encouraging

- deeds over words,
- actions over intentions,
- effects over causes

although they have also knew how to

- value the young person's inner feeling,
- be patient with the impatient,
- welcome someone back with open arms when, having made a mistake, they recognised their error.

Titus had met Fr Bokor, a master in helping him immediately to make truth of the hardships, difficulties and risks of 'yes'. Ignaz had been tested by Fr Angel Lubojacký.

Father Ignaz Stuchlý's letters to the young men – taken from the *Documentary Sources* and already commented on – also demonstrate the great firmness of the servant of God in this regard: even a detail that might appear irrelevant to many today – the lack of progress in the Latin performance of an intellectually gifted boy – could become important. Good interpersonal skills, a desire to make the dynamics

of the Oratory his own, and 'love' for Don Bosco became empty words if one neglected a small duty and stopped being an example to one's companions. On the contrary, those who struggled and needed more time were always followed with particular benevolence and love. Witnesses told of the the moving case of Josef Vandík, later a Salesian priest, who was then so poor in Latin that he came to despair of his future. Fr Stuchlý took him to heart and gave him private tuition in his room, until he became one of the best in his class. We find written:

I remember that I had great difficulty understanding the passive of the Latin verb. When he saw my despondency, he took me with him to his little room; he explained everything to me and encouraged me not to lose faith, but to invoke the Holy Spirit instead. I was consoled was a few lessons ahead of my classmates after a month.

Stuchlý was not interested in performance in 'absolute terms' (an evaluation on a purely performance basis was in fact completely alien to him!); but in rectitude of mind, sincerity of heart and constancy of commitment.

So both Titus and Ignaz, paradoxically, accompanied good vocations because they knew how to say 'no' to so many: Titus rejecting them for crossings, Ignaz, for example, sending many back home in the delicate years 1925-1927 in Perosa Argentina.

This is also something to reflect on, in the light of the *Synod on Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment*. Listening to young people is fundamental: however, such listening must not degenerate into passivity. The young person asks to be guided, if necessary with firm words and strong decisions. Only then do they understand that adults are serious, that what they believe in and commit their lives to is worthy of faith...: it is no coincidence that some young men, turned away by the Salesians, were willingly readmitted by Fr Stuchlý *because they had understood the errors of the past*. But it had been necessary to show them these errors with a certain firmness.

#### **2.4. An 'extreme' application of the Preventive System**

Both Titus and Ignaz applied Don Bosco's Preventive System in an 'extreme' way, so to speak. This system consisted in "putting the young person in the very impossibility of sinning" if that were possible. When, at the height of the 20th century, ideologies were themselves a structure of sin, Stuchlý sacrificed his life to bring young people *physically* away from the approaching evil. Fr Stuchlý encouraged fidelity to the charism even when it was mocked and opposed. Both understood that young people – thirsty for answers – cannot live without good role models. "To distance them from evil" then meant "to propose to them a good,

indeed every Good, the highest Good” (to use the words of St Francis): for this they both gave their lives. Titus more quickly, dying at only 54 years of age. Fr Stuchlý by exposing himself to the wear and tear of a long and industrious life in which he was asked to maintain, for the sake of the young, the rhythm of a young man when he was already an old man.

The words with which both are remembered at the time of their death should therefore not come as too much of a surprise.

Fr Ignaz Stuchlý is compared to another St John Mary Vianney and the prophet Elijah, whose spirit is now invoked on the Salesians. At Fr Titus’ funeral, Fr Andrej Dermek said,

*It is possible to say that everything between his first Mass and his funeral was full of priestly, religious and Salesian life! [...] I think I can proclaim on your behalf, dear Titus, that you did not reject this destiny of yours, you were not afraid of it, you were not displeased with it! You accepted it with submission, in peace and joy. Who knows what with your untimely death you redeem us! There is one more thing I have to say in this place and at this time: what you undertook was not an adventure, it was not recklessness nor was it a desire for hype. It was only love for souls. You never betrayed your people, not even when you were judged and condemned. Do not be afraid, dear Titus. Your priesthood does not end today, but continues in the priesthood of those for whom you made it possible to become priests. A few dozen Salesian priests thank you for their priesthood. They are scattered all over the world. And the tree must die out so that the shoots may blossom [...] and that tree was you, Titus.*