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LIFE AND WORKS

Saint Artemides Zatti was born in Boretto (Reggio Emilia) on 12 October 1880. He experienced the harshness of sacrifice at an early age, so much so that at nine years old he was already earning his living as a hired hand. Forced by poverty, early in 1897 (Artemide was then 17 years old) the Zatti family emigrated to Argentina and settled in Bahía Blanca.

Young Artemides immediately started working, first in a hotel and then in a brick factory. He started attending the parish run by the Salesians. The parish priest at the time was Fr Carlo Cavalli, a pious man of extraordinary kindness. Artemis found a spiritual director in him and the parish priest found that Artemides was an excellent co-worker. It did not take long for him to show a leaning to Salesian life. He was 20 years old when he left for the aspirantate in Bernal. Those were very hard years for Artemides, who was ahead of his companions in age but behind them in terms of the few studies he had done. He overcame all difficulties, however, thanks to his tenacious will, keen intelligence and solid piety.

While assisting a young priest with tuberculosis he unfortunately contracted the disease. Fr Cavalli's fatherly interest in him, following him from afar, meant that the Salesian House at Viedma was chosen for him, where there was a more suitable climate and above all a missionary hospital with a good Salesian nurse who in practice acted as the "doctor" there: Father Evasio Garrone. The latter immediately realised the serious state of the young man's health and at the same time sensed his uncommon virtues. He invited Artemides to pray to Mary Help of Christians to be cured, but also suggested making a promise: "If she cures you, you will devote your whole life to these sick people." Artemides willingly made this promise and was mysteriously cured. He accepted the not inconsiderable pain of renouncing the priesthood (because of the illness he had contracted) humbly and docilely. Neither then nor later was any lament for this unattained goal ever voiced by him.

He made his First Profession as a coadjutor brother on 11 January 1908 and his Perpetual Profession on 18 February 1911. In keeping with his promise to Our Lady, he immediately and totally consecrated himself to the hospital, initially taking care of the adjoining pharmacy after he had obtained a "qualified in pharmacy" certificate. When Father Garrone died in 1913, all responsibility for the hospital fell

on his shoulders. In fact, he became its vice-director, administrator, an expert nurse respected by all the sick and by the doctors themselves, who gradually gave him more and more freedom of action. Throughout his life, the hospital was the place where he exercised his virtue, day after day, to a heroic degree.



His service was not limited to the hospital, but extended to the entire city, or rather to the two towns on the banks of the Rio Negro: Viedma and Patagones. He usually went out with his white coat and his bag containing the most common medicines. One hand on the handlebar and the other with the rosary. He preferred poor families, but was also called upon by the rich. In case of need, he moved at all hours of the day and night, whatever the weather. He did not stay in the city centre, but also went to the hovels in the suburbs. He did everything for free, and if he received anything, it went to the hospital.

Saint Artemides Zatti loved his patients in a truly moving way. He saw Jesus himself in them. He was always respectful to the doctors and hospital owners. But the situation was not always easy, both because of the some of their characters and because of the disagreements that could arise between the legal managers and himself. However, he was able to win them all over and his balanced attitude managed to resolve even the most delicate situations. Only a profound self-mastery could make it possible for him to triumph over the stress and easily shifting timetable.

He was an edifying witness of faithfulness to common life. It amazed everyone how this holy religious, while so caught up with his many commitments at the hospital, could at the same time be the exemplary representative of regular life. It was he who rang the bell, it was he who there before all the other confreres for community events. Faithful to the Salesian spirit and to the motto “work and temperance” bequeathed by Don Bosco to his sons, he carried out his prodigious activity with habitual readiness of spirit, a spirit of sacrifice especially during night duty, with absolute detachment from any personal satisfaction, never taking holidays or rest. As a good Salesian, he knew how to make cheerfulness a component of his holiness. He was ever cheerful and smiling: this is how all the photos that have reached us portray him. He could relate easily with people, was clearly empathetic, always happy to entertain lowly individuals. But he was above all a man of God. He radiated it. One of the hospital doctors said, “When I saw Bro. Zatti, my disbelief wavered.”. Another said, “I have believed in God ever since I met

Bro. Zatti.”

In 1950, Bro. Zatti fell from a ladder and it was after this accident that cancer symptoms manifested themselves. He clearly diagnosed them himself. However, he continued to carry out his mission for another year, heroically accepting his sufferings, and passed away on 15 March 1951 still fully conscious, surrounded by the affection and gratitude of a population that from that moment on began to invoke him as an intercessor with God. All the inhabitants of Viedma and Patagones flocked to his funeral in an unprecedented procession.

His reputation for holiness quickly spread and his tomb began to be much venerated. Even today, when people go to the cemetery for funerals, they always pass by to visit Artemides Zatti's tomb. Beatified by St John Paul II on 14 April 2002, Saint Artemide Zatti was the first non-martyr Salesian Brother to be raised to the honours of the altars.

HIS MESSAGE

The House Chronicle at the Salesian College in Viedma recalls that on 15 March 1951 the bell rang in the morning as usual, but announced the flight to heaven of Brother Artemides Zatti. As the Chronicle put it prophetically, “One less brother in the house and one more saint in heaven.”

Artemides' canonisation is a gift of grace that the Lord gives us through this confrere, a Salesian Brother who lived his life in the family spirit typical of the Salesian charism, embodying fraternity towards his confreres and the community, and closeness to the poor and the sick and anyone who crossed his path.

Artemides Zatti's life stages: childhood and early youth in Italy in Boretto; the emigration of the family and residence in Bahía Bianca (Argentina); his Salesian aspirantate in Bernal; his illness and the move to Viedma, which was the home where his heart truly lay; his formation and religious profession as a Salesian Brother; his mission for 40 years first at the San José Hospital and then at the Quinta San Isidro; his final years and death experienced as an encounter with the Lord of life, highlighting his heroic practice of virtue and the purifying and transforming action of the Holy Spirit, the author of all holiness.

Saint Artemides Zatti is a model, intercessor and companion of Christian life, close

to each of us. Indeed, his life presents him to us as someone who experienced the daily toil of existence with its successes and failures. It is enough to recall the separation from his native country to emigrate to Argentina; the tuberculosis that broke in like a hurricane in his young life, shattering every dream and every prospect for the future; seeing the hospital he had built with so many sacrifices and which had become a sanctuary of God's merciful love, later demolished. But Zatti always found the strength in the Lord to get back up and continue on his way.

The testimony of Artemides Zatti enlightens us, attracts us and also challenges us, because he is a word of God incarnated in history and close to us. He transformed life into a gift, working with generosity and intelligence, overcoming difficulties of all kinds with his unwavering trust in divine Providence. The lesson of faith, hope and charity that he leaves us becomes, if properly known and motivated, a courageous work of safeguarding and promoting the most authentic human and Christian values.



What stands out above all in the parable of Artemides Zatti's life is the experience of God's unconditional and gratuitous love. First and foremost, it is not the works he performed, but the amazement of discovering himself loved and his faith in this providential love throughout each stage of his life. It was from this lived certainty that the totality of giving himself to his neighbour for the love of God flowed. The love he received from the Lord was the power that transformed his life, expanded his heart and predisposed him to love. With the same Spirit, the Spirit of holiness, and the love that heals and transforms us, even as a boy he made choices and performed acts of love in every situation and with every brother and sister he met, because he felt loved and had the strength to love:

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

- When he emigrated with his family to Argentina, he knew how to preserve his faith and make it grow, resisting an often immoral and anti-Christian environment and maturing, thanks to the encounter with the Salesians and the spiritual accompaniment of Father Carlo Cavalli, in his aspiration to the priesthood. He was ready to return to the school benches with twelve-year-old boys although he was already twenty;

- he readily offered to assist a priest suffering from tuberculosis and contracted the disease, without uttering a word of complaint or recrimination, but experiencing his illness as a time of trial and purification, bearing its consequences with fortitude and serenity;
- cured in an extraordinary way through the intercession of Mary Help of Christians, and after making a promise to dedicate his life to the sick and the poor, he generously accepted renouncing the priesthood and dedicated himself with all his strength to his new mission as a lay Salesian;
- He lived the ordinary rhythm of his days in an extraordinary way: faithful and edifying practice of religious life in joyful fraternity; sacrificial service at all hours and with all the humblest of services to the sick and the poor; continuous struggle against poverty in the search for resources and benefactors to meet debts, trusting exclusively in Providence; ready availability for all human misfortunes that sought his intervention; resistance to every difficulty and acceptance of every adverse case; self-mastery and joyful and optimistic serenity that communicated itself to all those who approached him.

Seventy-one years of this life before God and before human beings: a life delivered joyfully and faithfully to the end, bearing witness to a holiness that is accessible and within the reach of all, as taught by St Francis de Sales and Don Bosco: not an impassable goal, separated from everyday life, but embodied in everyday life, in the hospital wards, on a bicycle through the streets of Viedma, in the travails of daily life to meet demands and needs of all kinds, doing everyday things in a spirit of service, with love and without spectacle, without claiming anything, with the joy of giving, enthusiastically embracing the vocation of a lay Salesian and becoming a shining reflection of the Lord.