 Reading time: 7 min.

On 22 June 2023, the Holy Father Francis received Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints in audience, and during the Audience the Supreme Pontiff authorised the same Dicastery to promulgate the Decree concerning the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Antônio de Almeida Lustosa, of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco, Archbishop of Fortaleza; born 11 February 1886 in São João del Rei (Brazil) and died 14 August 1974 in Carpina (Brazil).

A life in the light of the Immaculate

Antônio de Almeida Lustosa was born in the city of São João del Rei, in Minas Gerais (Brazil), on 11 February 1886, on the anniversary of the first apparition of the Immaculate at Lourdes, a circumstance that marked him profoundly, giving him a filial devotion to Our Lady, so much so that he was described, by now a priest, as the poet of the Virgin Mary.

He received a good Christian and human upbringing from his parents, João Baptista Pimentel Lustosa and Delphina Eugênia de Almeida Magalhães, exemplary Christians. An intelligent boy with a good and generous disposition, the son of a judge, he showed visible signs of a strong priestly vocation at an early age. That is why at the age of sixteen he entered the Salesian College at Cachoeira do Campo, in Minas Gerais, and three years later he was in Lorraine as a novice and assistant to his companions. After his first religious profession in 1906, he also became a teacher of philosophy, while studying theology.

Perpetual profession took place three years later, while 28 January 1912 marked the date of his priestly ordination.

After a number of assignments within his Religious Congregation, in 1916 he was rector and master of novices at Lavrinhas, in the Colégio São Manoel, to which those from Lorraine had been transferred, and where he had taught the year before. In the five years he spent there, the young Lustosa expressed the best of himself both as a priest and as a Salesian, leaving, according to those who knew him, indelible traces.

Episcopal ministry

After his role as Rector at the Mary Help of Christians secondary school in Bagé and

his appointment as assistant parish priest in the adjoining parish, he was consecrated Bishop of Uberaba on 11 February 1925, the day he chose to commemorate the presence of Our Lady in his life.
In 1928 he was transferred to Corumbá, in Mato Grosso, and in 1931 he was promoted to Archbishop of Belém do Pará, where he remained for 10 years.
On 5 November 1941, he became Archbishop of Fortaleza, capital of the State of Ceará.
Together with an unusually large number of initiatives and activities of a social and charitable nature, he created more than 30 new parishes, 45 schools for the needy, 14 health centres on the outskirts of Fortaleza, the School of Social Services, the São José and Cura d'Ars hospitals, to mention only a few of the most significant works attributed to his episcopate.



Monsignor Lustosa enters the Archdiocese of Belém do Parà (15.12.1931)

His pastoral activity developed particularly in the field of catechesis, education, pastoral visits, an increase in vocations, enhancement of Catholic action,

improvement of the living conditions of the poorest, defence of workers' rights, renewal of the clergy, the establishment of new religious orders in Ceará, not to mention his rich and fruitful activity as a poet and writer.
Even before the Second Vatican Council, Fr Antônio had described catechesis as the primary objective of his pastoral action. To this end, he founded two religious Congregations, the Institute of Cooperators of the Clergy and the Congregation of the Josefinas. Today, the Josefinas are spread throughout Northeast Brazil, as well as in the Diocese of Rio Branco in Acre.
Wherever he went, and wherever he worked, his name and memory were remembered with respect and veneration, as a man of God, a true model of virtue and holiness.
Eleven years after his resignation from the Archdiocese, following which he retired to the Salesian House in Carpina, and confined to a wheelchair due to a disastrous fall that caused him to fracture his femur, he died on 14 August 1974, demonstrating, even during his illness and suffering, an exemplary attitude of complete and unconditional acceptance of God's will.
His body was transported to Fortaleza, where his funeral was celebrated with an incalculable number of faithful and ecclesiastical and civil authorities paying their last respects. His burial became to all intents and purposes a true popular consecration of a life, such as that lived by the Servant of God Bishop Lustosa, entirely devoted to God and the good of his neighbour.

Abandoned to the will of God
A virtuous, ascetic bishop, marked by obedience and a strong desire to do the Father's will, always and in everything, Bishop Lustosa demanded the most total abandonment of himself to the cause of God and neighbour.
His great concern was indeed to live up to God's and the Church's expectations in the exercise of his episcopal ministry.

He travelled in various regions of Brazil, from north to south, always bringing with him the gifts that Divine Providence had reserved for him.
In this fruitful activity he left significant legacies, not only for the material works he accomplished, but especially for the memory of his luminous and evangelising presence.
A humble and simple man, who shunned any ostentation or any quest for public recognition of his pastoral actions in the service of the Church and the society in which he was embedded, he was endowed with an extraordinary charisma, tireless

perseverance, and a rich and fruitful religious and social vision.
He strove to lift the people of the regions in which he served, from the precarious and poor conditions in which they found themselves. The greater the challenge, the greater his dedication to finding alternatives that would at least minimise the suffering of those he came into contact with.



Monsignor Lustosa blesses the foundation stone of the agricultural school (09.02.1932)

He tried to offer and create opportunities for the most disadvantaged people to take care of their families, he worked to provide them with a religious and cultural background, so as to free them from illiteracy and provide them with the tools to gain a place in society.

Pastor with a big heart

For 22 years in the Ceará region, Bishop Lustosa showed the full force of his cultural, religious and social work, anticipating and realising works that would later be incorporated by government authorities, both at state and municipal level.

He made the working classes aware of their value and importance, welcoming those who were on the margins of society, including single mothers, domestic helpers, orphaned and abandoned children, the homeless, those in need of housing, the illiterate, the sick, exalting the rights and duties of each and every person and restoring and/or recognising their dignity.

He placed himself totally at the service of God and humanity, faithfully responded to the divine inspiration that guided his steps and actions towards a society closer to justice, supported by the Church's social doctrine – *sub umbra alarum tuarum*.

He radiated holiness to all those who had the privilege of knowing him and living with him, continuing to this day to spread his radiance over all those who come more or less directly into contact with his figure and works.

With his meritorious pastoral action, he not only guided souls, but also hearts in a harmonious action that led to a true Christian spiritualisation of the immense flock of which he was Pastor.

His work of spiritual guidance was considered and recognised then, and even more so today, as a work of social harmony, and spiritual balm in difficult conflict situations. His personal action worked the miracle of disarming spirits, going beyond the limits of dogmatic, liturgical and theological preaching, succeeding in instilling in people a heightened religious sense and giving them a greater and/or new awareness of the right to freedom and justice.

Bishop Lustosa's work, which exalts the popular soul, ennobles the sense of faith, spreads the feeling of human solidarity and the virtue of brotherhood, crosses geographic borders and asserts itself internationally.

A rich personality



Monsignor Lustosa receives the visit of the Rector Major, don Luigi Ricceri in Carpina (27.06.1970)

The personality of the illustrious Archbishop Antônio de Almeida Lustosa is multifaceted, generated from a very young age and consolidated throughout his earthly life, always guided by the common good and the defence and promotion of Christian principles and values.
Archbishop Antônio left a trail of spirituality, both through the books he published and the catechetical work he took to the most distant and inaccessible regions.
A salient feature of his rich spirituality was his extraordinary spirit of prayer, intimately rooted in him and never flaunted. He was also a man who imposed upon himself mortification, sacrifices and fasts.

Another noble dedication of his spirit was his literary verve, and his work in literature was great, from pastoral letters to articles in newspapers and periodicals

and numerous works, published and unpublished, of a historical, folkloristic, religious, geographical, cultural, anthropological, spiritual and ascetic nature.
He was, like Don Bosco, a prolific writer in various fields, in theology, philosophy, spirituality, hagiography, literature, geology, botany.
His literary works reveal his deep spirituality and the extent of his social concerns in evangelising his flock. With his pen, he brought the Gospel to all.
Archbishop Antônio de Almeida Lustosa was a faithful example of a fully realised vocation. He proved this over his long pastoral activity in the dioceses he led and guided with the hands of a spiritual master.
He was a model bishop of his time, characterised by unshakeable fervour and firmness of mind.
A true man of God, he was always concerned about people's welfare, which is why he was known as "the father and friend of the poor".
Archbishop Lustosa sought to be faithful to the founder of the Salesian Congregation – St John Bosco – by following in his footsteps, embracing his examples, thus implementing the Salesian charism in Brazil, so much so that he was recognised as the Bishop of social justice.
The following words paid tribute to the Servant of God on the 19th anniversary of his death, by the then Postulator General of the Cause, Fr Pasquale Liberatore, and eloquently and effectively summarise the importance and significance of his message in the Church and society of his time, as well as its relevance today: "He was a great ascetic (even from his external appearance: 'an airy shell' was said of his physical person), but with an adamantine will, which belied the fire that burned within him. Thanks to his inner strength he was able to do exceptional work, traces of which remain in the most diverse fields: a passionate seeker of truth, a serious scholar, a writer and poet, the creator of many works: the Cure d'Ars pre-seminary, the Cardinal Frings Institute, the São José Hospital, the shrine of Nossa Senhora de Fátima, the Assunção Cearense radio station, the Casa do Menino Jesus, schools, workers' groups, etc., and above all – he was the founder of a religious congregation.
Both great yet simple, he knew how to combine the Bishop's many commitments with catechism to children and – in the last years of his life – his erudite Latin lessons with the humble collection of stamps. A zealous pastor, he loved his people, never left his flock, felt the urgency of vocations and filled his seminaries with them. In his heart he always remained Salesian. He was said to be "an eternal Salesian". Already Master of Novices as soon as he was ordained a priest, he remained a forger of souls in Salesian style throughout his life.
An ascetic, I said at the beginning. In reality he personified the motto left to us by

Don Bosco: work and temperance.
The secret of his holiness is to be found in his having abhorred all forms of mediocrity. He was an athlete of the spirit – perhaps that is why we like to remember him “always on his feet’” (even though in his later years he was confined to a wheelchair). Always on his feet! Even today. Like one who continues to teach a lesson. The most difficult and most demanding lesson: that of holiness.

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