 Reading time: 15 min.

“Zatti – hospital”
Zatti and the hospital were an inseparable pair. Fr Entraigas remembers that when there was a telephone call the Salesian Brother answered almost instantly: “Zatti-Hospital”. Without realising it he was expressing **the inseparable reality between himself and the hospital**. Having become responsible for the hospital in 1913 after the death of Fr Garrone and after Giacinto Massini left the Congregation, little by little he took over every task, but he was first of all and unmistakably the “nurse” of the *San Jose* hospital. He did not prepare himself casually but tried to perfect what he had learned empirically through personal study. He continued to study throughout his life and gained a high level of experience thanks to 48 years of practice at *San Jose*. Doctor Sussini, who was among those who practised there the longest, after having stated that Zatti cured the sick with “*santa* vocación” adds: “From the time that I met him, as far as I know, being the mature and already prepared man that he was, Bro. Zatti did not neglect his general level of knowledge, nor his knowledge of nursing and pharmacy.”
Fr De Roia spoke of Zatti’s professional development: “Speaking of cultural and professional training, I remember seeing medical books and publications and asking him once when he read them. He replied that he did so at night or while patients were taking a nap, once he had finished his duties in the hospital. He also told me that Dr Sussini sometimes lent him some books and I saw that he often consulted the ‘Vademecum e ricettari’”
Doctor Pietro Echay said that for Zatti “***the Hospital* was a sanctuary**.” Fr Feliciano López describes Zatti’s position at the hospital, after long experience with him: “Zatti was a man of leadership, he knew how to clearly express what he wanted, but he **accompanied this with gentleness, respect and joy**. He never lost his temper, indeed, he would downplay things in a good-natured sort of way, but his example of industriousness was overwhelming and more than being a director without title, he had become a kind of universal worker. Apart from this, he quickly advanced in professional competence, in order to achieve the respect of doctors and even more, his workers. So I never heard it said that peace did not reign in that small world of 60 or 70 patients, in the early days with several Sisters, other women who provided their service and some nurses. And even if there might sometimes be disagreements, as is natural, these did not degenerate thanks to Zatti’s prudence. He was able to remedy these situations.”
The *San José* Hospital was a special sanctuary for human suffering where Artemides embraced and cared for the suffering flesh of Christ in every suffering brother and

sister, and gave meaning and hope to human suffering. Zatti – and with him many men and women of good will – **embodied the parable of the Good Samaritan:** he was close to people, he stretched out his hand to them, uplifted them, and cared for them. For him, every sick person was like a child to love. Men and women, big and small, rich and poor, intelligent and ignorant, all were treated in a respectful and lovable way, without being upset by or rejecting the insolent and unfriendly ones. He used to say: 'Sometimes you can have someone with a nice approach, sometimes an unpleasant one, but before God we are all the same.'

Though the hospital was poor, and though many of those who were hospitalised were poor, given the time, places and situations of all hospitals, including national hospitals at the time, Zatti followed the correct health and hygiene standards. Things then were done a bit more flexibly, but this never meant that Bro. Zatti, as a nurse, lacked either justice or charity towards his patients. He was well educated for his task and had good experience. He knew what he had to do and the limits of his skills. There is no record of any mistake, any neglect or any accusation against him. Dr Sussini said: "In his interventions with the sick, he always respected the legal norms, without exceeding his powers […]. I would like to point out that in all his interventions he consulted some of the doctors who were always at his side to support him. As far as I know, he never attempted any serious operations […]. It is certain that he used the established hygienic prescriptions, although sometimes, given his great faith, he considered them excessive. The socio-economic scenario in which Bro. Zatti mainly carried out his activity was one where the economy was poor, education was poor and the people generally had little education. In his activity within the hospital he put into practice the consolidated knowledge of hygiene and technique that he already had and others that he learned by asking professionals. Outside the hospital, his activity was more difficult because changing the situation around him was very difficult and beyond anything he could do."

Luigi Palma had more to say: "Bro. Zatti's discretion and prudence was commonly spoken of in Viedma, and any abuse in this matter would have been quickly known in a small population such as Viedma, yet nothing of the kind was ever heard. Bro. Zatti never exceeded his competence. I don't think he performed any difficult operations. If there had been any abuse, the doctors would have reported it, but they did nothing but praise Zatti's work […]. Bro. Zatti used the prescribed hygienic precautions. I know this because he treated me on several occasions: injections or small treatments done with all due diligence."

For a man who spent his whole life with enormous sacrifice for the sick, **who was sought by them as a blessing**, who won the respect of all the doctors who collaborated with him and against whom a voice of accusation could never be

raised, it would be unfair to deny some of the freedom that his experience and prudence could allow him in some particular circumstance: the sublime exercise of charity, even in this case, was worth more than the observance of any formal prescription.

With the heart of Don Bosco

In Zatti, what Don Bosco recommended to the first Salesian missionaries leaving for Argentina had been fulfilled: "**Take special care of the sick, of the young, of the old and of the poor, and you will win the blessing of God and the good will of men**." As a Good Samaritan, Zatti took the poor, the sick, and people discarded by society to the inn that was his heart, and to the San José Hospital in Viedma In each of them he saw Christ, looked after Christ, fed Christ, clothed Christ, hosted Christ, honoured Christ. As one doctor at the hospital testified: "The only miracle I have seen in my life is Bro. Zatti, for the extraordinary nature of his character, the ability to serve his neighbour and his extraordinary patience with the sick."

Zatti was able to recognise a gift in every brother, in every sister, in every person, especially the poor and needy, that he encountered: he was able to see the luminous face of Jesus in each of them. How many times he would exclaim when welcoming a poor or sick person: "Jesus is coming! Christ is coming!" This keeping his gaze fixed on Jesus, especially at a time of trial and in the dark night of the soul, would be the strength that would not allow him to fall prey to his own thoughts and fears.

In the exercise of this charity, Zatti showed God's embrace for every human being, especially the lowliest, and by involving heart, soul and all his being, he lived with the poor and for the poor. It was not simply the rendering of services, but a tangible manifestation of God's love, recognising and serving the face of the suffering Christ in the poor and sick with motherly delicacy and tenderness. Living with the poor, he practised charity in a spirit of poverty. He was not an official or bureaucrat, not a service provider, but a true charity worker: and in **seeing, recognising and serving Christ in the poor and the excluded**, he also educated others. When he asked for something, he asked for Jesus: "Give me a suit for an elderly Jesus"; "Give me some clothes for a 12-year-old Jesus!"

It is impossible to forget **his adventures on his bicycle**, his endless trips with his classic white dust coat with knotted ends tied at the waist, greeted with tender affection by those he met on his way. Given the slow progress on his bicycle he had time for everything: an affectionate greeting, a kind word, some measured advice, some therapeutic pointers, spontaneous and disinterested help. His large pockets

were always full of medicines, all of which he distributed to the needy. He personally reached out to those who called on him, generously giving them not only his well-established medical knowledge, but also the trust, optimism, and faith that radiated from his constant, broad, gentle smile and the kindness of his gaze. Any seriously ill person who received a visit from Bro. Zatti would feel the unmeasurable relief that came from this man at their side. Anyone who died with Zatti there did so without anguish. The charity so generously dispensed around Viedma's muddy streets meant that Artemides Zatti was remembered by the city with a street, a hospital and a monument named after him.

He carried out a small apostolate that showed the extent of his charity, but that involved much time, work, difficulty and many little inconveniences. Since everyone knew his goodness and goodwill in serving others, everyone turned to him for all kinds of things. The Salesian rectors of houses in the province wrote for medical advice, sent confreres to be looked after, brought people to his hospital when they were unable to bring themselves. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians sought favours no less than the Salesians. Italian migrants asked for help, had him write to Italy, asked for records. Those who had been well cared for in the hospital sent relatives and friends for him to look after as if it were an expression of gratitude, but it was because of the respect they had for his care. The civil authorities often had people who needed help and resorted to Zatti. Prisoners and other people, seeing how well he got on with the authorities, got him to ask for clemency for them or work on solving their issues.

One event that expresses Zatti's authoritative power to impact the lives of people by his gospel witness and persuasive word is the conversion of Lautaro Montalva. Known as "the Chilean" because of his country of origin, he was a revolutionary, exploited by the usual political agitators. He would disseminate magazines against religion. Finally, when everyone abandoned him, he fell into poverty and was on his deathbed, but with a large family. Only Zatti had the courage to enter his hovel, manage his first reactions of rejection then win him over him with his charity. The revolutionary calmed down and asked to be baptised: his children were also baptised. Zatti admitted him to the hospital. Shortly before his death he asked the parish priest: "Give me the sacraments that a Christian should receive!" Montalva's conversion was a conquest of Zatti's charity and Christian courage.

Zatti made the mission to the sick his own educational space where he embodied Don Bosco's Preventive System daily – reason, religion, loving kindness – in closeness and assistance to the needy, helping them to understand and accept the painful situations of life. He was a living witness to the presence of the Lord.

Zatti the nurse

Artemides Zatti's professional profile, which began with a promise, was rooted in trust in Providence and developed once he recovered from his illness. The phrase "**I believed, I promised, I** recovered", **the motto used at his canonisation**, shows the total dedication that Zatti had for his sick brothers and sisters, the poorest and neediest.

He continued this commitment daily until his death in the hospital in San José, founded by the first Salesians to arrive in Patagonia, and he reiterated it during every home visit, urgent or otherwise, that he made to the sick who needed him. On his bicycle, in his administrator's office, in the operating room, in the courtyard during recess with his poor "relatives", in the hospital departments he visited every day, he **was always a nurse**; a holy nurse dedicated to healing and alleviating, **bringing the best medicine**: the cheerful and optimistic presence of empathy.

A person and a team doing good

It was faith that drove Artemides Zatti to tireless but reasonable activity. His religious consecration had introduced him directly and completely into the care of the poor, the sick and those who need the health and merciful consolation of God. Bro. Zatti worked in the world of healthcare alongside doctors, nurses, healthcare personnel, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and many people who collaborated with him to support the San José hospital, the first in Argentine Patagonia, in Viedma during the first half of the 20th century.

The tuberculosis he contracted at the age of twenty was not an obstacle to persevering in his career choice. **He found in the figure of the Salesian brother the style of commitment to working directly with the poor**. His religious consecration, lived in his profession as a nurse, was the combination of his life dedicated to God and his brothers and sisters. Naturally this manifested itself in a special, unique and unrepeatable personality. **Artemides Zatti was a good person who worked directly with the poor, doing good.**

Direct contact with the poor was aimed at health, that is, soothing pain, enduring suffering, accompanying the final moments of their lives, offering a smile in the face of the irreversible, lending a hand with hope. For this reason, **Zatti became a "medicine-presence"**: he cared directly with his pleasant presence.

His main biographer, Salesian Raul Entraigas, made an original discovery. He identified the summary of Artemide Zatti's life in the phrase of a fellow villager: he seems to be "the kinsman of all the poor". Zatti saw Jesus himself in orphans, the sick and the indigenous people. And he treated them with such closeness,

appreciation and love, **that they looked like they were all family members**.

Training himself to help

Seeing the needs of the village, **Zatti perfected his profession**. Gradually he became responsible for the hospital, studied and gained State credentials when requested. The doctors who worked with Artemides, such as doctors Molinari and Sussini, testify that Zatti possessed great medical knowledge, the result not only of his experience, but also of his studies.

Fr De Roia adds: “Speaking of cultural and professional training, I remember seeing medical books and publications and asking him once when he read them. He replied that he did so at night or while patients were taking a nap, once he had finished his duties in the hospital.”

A document, the “Credencial Profesional”, issued by the Secretary for Public Health of the Nation, qualified him with the “**Matriculaprofesional de Enfermero N. 07253**”. They were the studies he had carried out at the National University of La Plata in 1948, at the age of 67. Added to this is a previous certification, in 1917, as “Eligible” in Pharmacy.

His lifestyle led him to a commitment in which he directly met the poor, the sick, the most needy. For this reason, the nursing profession had an added value: its presence was a testimony to the goodness of God. This simple way of looking at reality can help us better understand Zatti’s life, paying particular attention to the term “directly”.

In this perspective we find what is most genuine in Zatti, which highlights what is defined as “religious life” or “consecration”. This is why Artemides is a Salesian saint. He was a holy nurse. This is the legacy he left everyone. And this is the challenge he issues to everyone and invites them to take up.

1908

Once his health recovered, Zatti entered the Salesian Congregation as a brother. He began taking care of the pharmacy at the San José hospital, the only one in Viedma.

1911

After the death of Fr Evasio Garrone, director of the hospital, Zatti remained in charge of the pharmacy and the hospital, the first in Patagonia. He worked there for forty years.

1917

He obtained the title of “Idóneo (Suitable) in Pharmacy” from the University of La Plata.

1941

The hospital building was demolished. Patients and professionals moved with Zatti to the “San Isidro” agricultural school.

1948

Zatti enrolled in Nursing at the University of La Plata.

Zatti with the doctors: he was a father!

Among Zatti’s main collaborators at *San José Hospital* were the doctors. The relationships were delicate, because a doctor was the director of the hospital from a legal point of view and had professional responsibility for the patients. Zatti had organisational and nursing responsibility and conflicts could arise. After the first years, several doctors came to Viedma, the capital of the Rio Negro, and to Patagones and Zatti had to make use of their specialisations at the hospital without arousing rivalry. He acted in such a way as to win everyone’s respect for his kindness and competence. We find the names of the directors in the documentation such as Dr Riccardo Spurr and Dr Francesco Pietrafraccia; then Antonio Gumersindo Sussini, Ferdinando Molinari, Pietro Echay, Pasquale Attilio Guidi and Giovanni Cadorna Guidi, who would speak about Zatti’s holiness. Finally, there were also Drs Harosteguy, Quaranta and Cessi. There were others, certainly, but temporarily because, after a period of internship, the doctors aspired to more central and developed locations. There was unanimous recognition that Zatti, as a nurse, was subject to the instructions and directions given by the doctors, but he was respected by them all for his kindness and gave them no cause for concern for the assistance he provided to patients in his own house. Dr Sussini, who followed him up until his death, declared: “All the doctors, without exception, showed him affection and respect for his personal virtues, kindness, mercy and his pure, sincere and disinterested faith[i].”

Dr Pasquale Attilio Guidi explained: “Always correct, he followed the doctors’ instructions. I remember that Dr Harosteguy, who was quite difficult, sometimes blamed Bro. Zatti for his problems when I was present during an operation, but at the end of the operation he would shake hands with him and apologise. So we knew there weren’t many complaints against Zatti. Zatti was someone respected by everyone[ii].” Dr Harosteguy’s daughter and Dr Echay confirmed Harosteguy’s strong character and the unjust complaints against Zatti, who won him over him with his resistance to such. Indeed, when Dr Harosteguy fell ill, he would only allow Zatti to visit him, grateful and appreciative for his presence and closeness.

Dr Molinari testified: “Bro. Zatti respected the medical body and strictly followed their instructions. Given the large number of patients who exclusively required his intervention, he had to act spontaneously very often, but always on the basis of his

excellent skills, experience and medical knowledge. He never attempted difficult surgery. He always called for the doctor. We doctors had affection, respect and admiration for Bro. Zatti. This feeling was general […] I would say that the patients 'worshipped' Bro. Zatti and had blind faith in him[iii]."
Dr Echay makes this particular observation: "With all the staff of the Zatti hospital he was a father; even with us younger doctors he was a good adviser[iv]."
Regarding the visits that Zatti made around the city, Dr Guidi says: "The doctors never looked upon this work of Zatti's negatively, but as a collaboration. […]. The patients he helped would raise a monument to him[v]."
Even outsiders always saw close relationships of collaboration and respect between Zatti and the doctors, as witnessed by Fr López: "Bro. Zatti's behaviour towards the doctors was seen by them as warm acceptance. All the doctors I spoke to were, without exception, his admirers[vi]." Fr López once again: "Zatti always had a reputation for kindness towards doctors, tolerance and humanity in the face of the rudeness typical of many doctors; in particular Dr Harosteguy was an abrupt individual and Zatti's virtue in dealing with him can be deduced because he became an admirer of Zatti, even came close to revering him[vii]." Oscar Garcia puts it eloquently: "The doctors collaborated with the hospital in large part because Bro. Zatti was there, attracting people by his charity[viii]." His life shook the religious indifference of some of them: "When I look at Zatti, my unbelief wavers[ix]." In many cases there were conversions and the beginning of Christian life.

Zatti and the nurses: he was everything to us!
The largest group for the hospital service were female collaborators. The *San José*, at certain times had up to 70 beds: naturally, professionally trained nurses, kitchen helpers, laundry and ironing machines, cleaners and other staff were needed. It was not difficult to find staff for the lowliest and ordinary tasks because the population had many poor elements and employment in the hospital seemed particularly desirable and secure. It was more difficult to find nurses, because, perhaps throughout the country and certainly in Patagonia there were no schools to train them. Zatti had to deal with all this himself: choose, train, organise, assist the nurses, find what they needed to work with, think of wages to the point that he began the training of female staff for the hospital.
Providence brought several good but poor young people to the hospital who had themselves been ill and had recovered, and who wanted to do something with their life. Zatti was aware of their goodness and willingness; he showed by his own example and word how beautiful it was to serve the Lord in sick brothers and sisters. And then he made the suggestion that they stay with him and share the

mission at the hospital. The best girls sensed the greatness and joy of this ideal and stayed at *San José*. Zatti took responsibility for preparing them professionally and – as a good religious – took care of their spiritual formation. Thus, as a group they ended up as a kind of congregation without vows, a group of chosen souls who chose to serve the poor. Zatti gave them everything they needed for life, even if he ordinarily did not pay them, and thought of good accommodation if they wanted to leave the service at the hospital. We should not think that the situation at that time required all the guarantees that hospitals require today. For those girls the solution offered by Zatti was an enviable one from the material point of view and just as much from a spiritual point of view. In fact they were happy, and when the *San José Hospital* closed, or before, none of them found it hard to set themselves up. As a group they always expressed their gratitude.
Fr Entraigas recalled 13 names of the female staff who worked at the hospital at different times. Among the documents are reports by the nurses: Noelia Morero, Teodolinda Acosta, Felisa Botte, Andrea Rafaela Morales, Maria Danielis. Noelia Morero tells her story, which was identical to the stories of several other nurses. She arrived at *San José* as a patient: "I was a patient here and then I began to work with the hospital until the end of 1944, when I moved to the National Regional Hospital in Viedma, which opened in 1945 […]. Zatti was much loved and respected by all staff and patients; he was everyone's 'handkerchief to wipe away tears'. I don't remember any complaints against him. When Zatti entered the ward, it seemed that 'God Himself' entered! I don't know how else to put it. He was everything to us. I never knew of any particular difficulties; as a patient I never lacked anything: not food, nor medicine, nor clothes. Bro. Zatti was mainly concerned with the moral training of the staff. I remember that he made us learn by practical lessons, accompanying him when he visited the sick and after one or two times he made us do it, especially with the most serious cases.[x]"

Film seen before the conference

Video of the conference: Zatti the Good Samaritan, for the sick, doctors and nurses
Lecture given by Fr Pierluigi CAMERONI, Postulator General of the Salesian Society of St John Bosco in Valdocco, on 15.11.2023.

[i] Testimony of Dr. Antonio Gumersindo Sussini. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 139, § 561.

[ii] Testimony from Attilio Guidi, pharmacist. He knew Zatti from 1926 to 1951. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 99, § 386.

[iii] Testimony of Dr Ferdinando Molinari. He knew Zatti from 1926 to 1951. He became a doctor *at the San José Hospital* and looked after him during his final illness. He gave the official address on the occasion of the inauguration of the monument to Zatti. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 147, § 600.

[iv] Testimony of Dr Pietro Echay. *Positio – Informatio*,p. 108.

[v] Testimony of Attilio Guidi, pharmacist. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 100, § 391.

[vi] Testimony of Father Feliciano López. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 171, § 694.

[vii] *Ibid*, p. 166, § 676.

[viii] Testimony of Oscar García, police employee. He met Zatti in 1925, but dealt with him mainly after 1935, both as a leader of the former students and as a member of the Workers Club. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 111, § 440.

[ix] Testimony of Father Feliciano López. *Positio – Summarium*, p. 181, § 737.

[x] Testimony of Noelia Morero, nurse. *Positio – Informatio*, p. 112.