 Reading time: 11 min.

The Second Regional Congress of Salesian Coadjutors of the Africa-Madagascar Region was held from 24 to 29 May 2023 in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in the "Our Lady of Africa" Visitation of Equatorial Tropical Africa (ATE). The motto of the Congress: "Walking with Raphael and Tobias, pedalling with Artemis" guided the days of deepening the charism, aiming to promote the vocational identity of the Salesian coadjutor and to offer a vision that helps in ongoing formation. We present the talk by the Regional Councillor, Fr Alphonse Owoudou.

Introduction
General Chapter 28th set us an identity challenge in the form of a question: "What kind of Salesians for the youth of today? This question may come back to us during this Congress of Salesian Brothers: **What Salesian Brothers for the young people of Africa and Madagascar today?** The various reflections that have fuelled these days give us reasons to constantly redraw the portrait of each of our lay consecrated confreres, and this is what we are going to contribute by contemplating a book of the Bible, the book of Tobit, an extremely prophetic, pedagogical and pastoral legend. We will see, through an analogical and slightly hermeneutical perspective, how and to what extent, like Don Bosco and particularly like Saint Artemide Zatti, the Coadjutor is called to become a spiritual parent and a competent companion for young people, not to say a true "sacrament of the Salesian presence".

1. Walking with Raphael and young Tobias
The legend of Raphael and Tobias is a fascinating Bible story about a young man named Tobias and his guardian angel, Raphael. I'd like to sum up Tobith's life by giving him the floor: *"I, Tobith, walked in truth and did what was right. I gave alms to my family and to the Assyrian captives in Nineveh and I often visited Jerusalem for the festivals, bringing offerings and tithes. When I grew up, I married and had a son called Tobias. Deported by Sennacherib, I abstained from eating their food and God granted me mercy before him. Through my nephew Ahikar, I obtained a return to Nineveh where I helped orphans, widows and foreigners according to the law of Moses."*

Accused by one of the citizens, Tobith is unfortunately ruined, and even blinded by a bird's excrement falling on his face. And we remember the quarrel with his wife

(chap 2), who had brought in a sheep, and the blind husband thought she had stolen it, which made his wife angry and insulted her blind husband. Tobith had a son, to whom he had given his own name. The archangel Raphael appeared to this young boy in human form and offered him his help. Raphael accompanies Tobias on a difficult mission, a perilous journey to collect money for his family (chapter 4). During the journey, Raphael helps Tobias defeat a demon that has killed the husbands of his future wives and cures Tobias' blindness. At the end of the journey, Tobias marries Sarra, the daughter of a distant relative, and Raphael reveals his true identity as an angel of God.

The lay Salesian Artemide Zatti was a religious and a man close to his brothers and sisters, especially those who were suffering. He dedicated his life to helping the sick and poor in Argentina. Zatti was a young man from a poor family who began working at the age of four to help his family. He later emigrated to Argentina with his family in search of a better life. Stricken with tuberculosis, he recovered and joined the Salesian order.

Zatti worked as a pharmacist and also ran a hospital, where he was described as being very devoted to the sick and poor. He was also involved in religious activities and was considered a potential candidate for canonisation. Zatti was known for his compassion and dedication to patients, his medical expertise, his work to expand the hospital and his lasting legacy. His bicycle became a symbol of his life dedicated to others, which he used to ride around the city visiting the sick poor. Zatti refused gifts for himself, preferring to continue using his bicycle, which he considered a sufficient means of transport to fulfil his mission of caring for the sick and serving others.

2. Pope Francis' two tweets and a bicycle

1. *Salesian Brother Artemide Zatti, full of gratitude for what he had received, wanted to say "thank you" by taking on the wounds of others: cured of tuberculosis, he devoted his entire life to caring for the sick with love and tenderness.*
2. *The Christian faith always asks us to walk together with others, to step out of ourselves towards God and our brothers and sisters. And to know how to give thanks, overcoming the dissatisfaction and indifference that make our hearts grow ugly.*

Pope Francis, speaking of Zatti, insists on "walking together", i.e. sharing and uniting through love to help those who suffer. Zatti devoted her entire life to serving the most disadvantaged, using her bicycle as a means of transport to go to the poor districts of the city and help the sick. His bicycle thus became a powerful symbol of the values he shared: humility, generosity and simplicity.

Indeed, Zatti showed no particular interest in owning a car or even a moped when his friends wanted to give them one. The bicycle was all he needed to achieve his noble goal: to help those most in need of support. His choice of mode of transport also reflected another intrinsic characteristic of his personality: the unconditional love he distributed without restriction or condition to those who weren't fortunate enough to receive as much simply because their social or financial circumstances didn't allow them to.
Every gesture Zatti made resonated deeply with everyone, inviting everyone to follow his example. Walking together means being available psychologically and physically so that each person can feel supported by those around them, but above all serving others with kindness and compassion as he himself cared for them for so many years. These actions are a concrete reflection of the message outlined by Pope Francis about "walking together": reaching out to those who are suffering in order to collectively envisage an overall improvement in community well-being through a general attitude of greater solidarity and warmth towards others in our daily lives.

3. Our mission of accompaniment and synodality?

This story from the Book of Tobit is an excellent example of the importance and crucial role that accompaniment, synodality and solidarity play in our common mission of service to others.
Raphael accompanied Tobias throughout his journey, including accidents, adapting to each situation and taking the time to answer his questions, assist his companions and help those who were suffering. His role was to encourage, incite and push Tobias to rise to the challenges he faced so that he could reach his destination. But he did more than that: he also gave him practical help in situations where he was powerless against the invisible forces controlling him.



What’s more, Raphael didn’t work alone during the journey; he worked hand in hand with Tobias to find solutions adapted to the circumstances. He understood that to be effective, he had to listen to the young man’s requests, respect his personal leadership style and create a system of cooperation between them to achieve the ultimate goal they shared: to defeat Asmodeus and heal his father. Raphaël and Tobias teach us that to provide real, useful, cost-effective and satisfying coaching, we need to be attentive to the needs of others, step out of our comfort zone if necessary, actively listen to what they have to say, show empathy, but above all work together so that each of us can contribute, according to our specific abilities, to achieving the common goals we all share. This learning is more relevant than ever, because without collaboration between people with common goals, their mission will be compromised.

4. A “medical” and pastoral vocation

Raphael, which means “God heals”, is known as one of the archangels of the Bible, often associated with healing and protection. Similarly, Zatti was considered a healer and protector of the sick and poor in his community. But this therapy took

place on several levels. Zatti's love of poverty, his detachment from material things and his willingness to accept and even beg for what he thought was necessary for the well-being of his patients, are some of the traits that make him resemble Jesus – who was in reality a lay rabbi and healer. He was always available at all times of the day and night and in all weathers, and would travel in the old wooden carts of peasants if they met him on his way to a patient's home. He was also humble and had a low opinion of himself, despite the efforts of his benefactors to elevate him in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world. The holy Coadjutor's strong interior life, filled with love for God and total trust in the goodness of divine providence, his regular confession and his love for the Blessed Sacrament made him resemble Don Bosco. He often read passages from the lives of the saints to the sick and, at the end of the day, gave them a little note for the evening. Zatti's good humour was also based on the solid foundations of his spiritual and consecrated life, and he always showed cheerfulness and goodwill in fulfilling his duties towards the sick and the unfortunate. He was also a peacemaker, helping to resolve conflicts between members of his staff and the doctors of Viedma and Patagonia. These characteristics of our holy Coadjutor are highlighted here because they are also a powerful antidote against the enemies of our three vows, against indifference and pastoral laziness, against the current distancing between the recipients and ourselves, and the royal road that leads us away from the careerism that disguises itself as clericalism in the religious world.

At the school of the angel Raphael and Zatti, we discover that for us, Salesians of Don Bosco, we too are bearers of the Good News, which often consists, as Jesus announced in the synagogue (Luke 4), in healing and restoring. This "medical" function is an important part of our mission to serve young people and the poor. And if "sickness", like poverty, can take on different faces, we Salesians in general, and the Coadjutor Salesians in particular, are known for our various struggles against ills and various forms of precariousness, hence our immense work in schools, orphanages, hospitals, oratories and the workshops and laboratories of our vocational training centres and technical colleges. And in our Region, as in the Congregation, several provinces, works and members of the Salesian Family are also involved in activities directly related to health, including hospitals, clinics and care centres for the elderly. Health is seen as an important aspect of the well-being of young people and the poor, and we try, with Don Variara, with Zatti and others, to meet their needs in a total, holistic way.

Today, we need a generation of Salesians who are sufficiently rooted in heaven, like Raphael, and deeply attached to the challenges of earth, like Azarias, to concern themselves with reconciling the temporal good with that of eternity, fighting for all

forms of illness and health, especially those that affect the most vulnerable in our society. We need angels and companions who can alleviate our physical, mental and emotional illnesses, as well as health problems linked to poverty, such as malnutrition and limited access to healthcare. We continue to work to meet these needs effectively and holistically, providing quality healthcare and working to improve the lives of the most vulnerable.

5. Metaphor of the educational and pastoral relationship

Azarias, the nickname of the angel Raphael, illustrates the perfect educational relationship between the Salesian coadjutor and the Tobias or young people of today. Especially when we know that the nickname Azarias actually means assistant, auxiliary, coadjutor. So, in the same way that an angel accompanied a young boy towards maturity, the Coadjutor can and must encourage young people to grow and mature in their relationships with their peers, in what are known as equal relationships, but also in their relationships and duties towards their family and parents, and the adult world in general, in what are known as asymmetrical relationships. I encourage us to reread this wonderful story from the Book of Tobit, and to make our own the wise advice of old Tobith to his son, and the lesson in life and religion that Azarias gives to the reconciled family, before going back to God – to the one who sent him. This is an important detail: going back and forth to God, the one who sent us, like those comings and goings on Jacob's ladder, where the angels shuttle back and forth between heaven and earth, as if to teach today's angels union with God and predilection for the poor of the earth.

Saint Artemide Zatti shows us how we can perfectly assimilate this role in our daily lives: dedicating his life to helping the youngest and poorest, he did much more than simply dispense moral teachings. He guided young people towards personal growth, recognising their inner capacities and showing them how to express them. He also set an example by showing compassion for the sick and the poor; demonstrating through his actions that it is possible to change the world around us through love, self-giving and sacrifice.

The Salesian Brother may be a minority statistically (in Africa 9% in the richest provinces). And yet they are in a privileged position to grasp this admirable model by flying to the outskirts of the mission with and like the guardian angel, walking the paths of the earthly and secular dimensions of life, and "cycling" with Zatti to the bedside of the needy, in all humility and without the arrogance of the big means and arsenal of some of today's pastors. In this way, they can imitate the heavenly Guide provided by God in the story of Tobias: motivating gentle obedience towards his aged and blind father, initiating him in the face of the adversities of the journey,

as well as courageously taking an important decision for his future, trust in God in decisive moments, in a word impressive courage and deep empathy that will allow the boy harmonious growth leading towards thoughtful autonomy, even though his parents, anticipating in their anxiety the parable of the prodigal son, waited for him every day with worry. But the text says that young Tobias knew his father's heart and his mother's worried tenderness.

Conclusion

"I am Raphael, one of the seven angels present before the glory of the Lord. Do not be afraid! Peace be with you and bless God for ever. Do not be afraid of what you have seen, for it was only an appearance. Bless the Lord, celebrate him and write down what has happened to you."

At the end of the story, Raphael defines himself as a sacrament of God's presence with Tobias. Exactly what Jesus did and was, what our founder Don Bosco illustrated, and what the Rector Major recommends to us in the third priority of this sexennium. To be a sign of elsewhere, "as if we too could see the invisible". The invisible in environments that are nonetheless very visible, in schools, in catechesis, in workshops, or, as Don Rinaldi used to say, in agriculture, where certain Brothers know how to cultivate and bring to fruition the earth and creation. The Salesian coadjutor is one of the two forms of the Salesian consecrated vocation, the other being the Salesian priest. According to GC21, it is not just individuals who spread Don Bosco's message, but his communities made up of priests and lay people, fraternally and deeply united among themselves, called to "live and work together" (C 49).



The significant and complementary presence of Salesian clerics and lay people in the community is an essential element of its physiognomy and apostolic fullness. We are well placed this year, in the light of the Strenna of the Rector Major, to reiterate that the Salesian coadjutor is not a lay person like the other lay faithful of the Church. He is a consecrated religious. Of course, his vocation fortunately retains a real connection with the concept of secularity and only exalts it in its most beautiful expressions. In this sense, this second Regional Congress can legitimately consider each of our Salesian Brothers as that angel, that archangel described in the book Tobit, who stands ceaselessly before the face of God, and who travels the roads of the world, flying to the aid of those in need or on the way, and leading them to praise and thanksgiving. Each Brother is thus invited to contemplate Raphael who, in an admirable kenosis, renounces his angelic rank, and descends to tread the dusty roads to accompany Tobias on the path of initiation to adulthood. This metaphor invites the Salesian Brother to accompany the young people of today towards full citizenship as citizens and believers, as our founder wanted: love of parents (Raphael urges Tobias to obey his father), social commitment (Raphael helps Tobias and supervises miraculous operations for the sick, chastity and love to

marry Sarra, and loyalty to become heir to both his father and his father-in-law Raguel) and divine service (Raphael proclaims himself to be sent directly by God and gives advice on honouring and praising God, and loving one's neighbour).
Like the biblical messengers (angels) and apostles in the history of the Church, Salesian Brothers are called to be available, to serve Salesian unity and identity and apostolic fullness by participating actively in the life and government of the Congregation. Alongside their deacon and priest confreres, they accompany young people – and other confreres – in their consecration and in their educational commitments, integrating and celebrating diversity within the Salesian community. The Brothers, well gifted, trained and identified, are pillars for the young people in their often complicated and difficult life paths, just as the Archangel Raphael, alias Azarias, was a pillar, a social and spiritual reference for Tobias, who was thus able to fulfil his mission as a son and future father. The long journey of initiation of our young people from Africa to adulthood is already fruitful and will be even more so if they are accompanied by significant figures and trustworthy people like Azarias, true guardian angels, companions of Emmaus, capable – as in our houses of formation and in our institutions – of educating, forming and accompanying. As well as serving unity, Salesian identity and apostolic fullness within the Salesian congregation with all their talents, Salesian Brothers play a very important role as guides and mentors for young people who are still seeking their place in the world – a figure similar to Zatti or Raphael who can be seen as a spiritual parent.