

Saturday, October 15, 2022
Province Celebration of Anniversaries of Religious Profession and Ordination

The pilgrims to the canonization of Brother Artemide Zatti came back last night, very tired but full of enthusiasm for what they experienced. Highlights included the day before the canonization, when the Salesian Family celebrated Mass with the Rector Major in Paul VI Hall, followed by the audience with the Pope. What an honor for us all to have Bro. Sal greet his Holiness in person and present to him a small wooden Cross which Bro. Sal had made. The pilgrims also spoke favorably about their visits to the Salesian holy sites in Rome, especially the Basilica of the Sacred Heart, which had a special Zatti exhibit, and in Turin, especially the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians. The pilgrims also shared about their encounters with other Salesians from all over the world—members of the General Council, Cardinals, classmates, past pupils—a wonderful experience of the family spirit of Don Bosco. For us who followed the canonization from home, we too could sense enthusiasm and joy, pride and gratitude. One of our own, Brother Zatti, is now declared a saint. He enjoys what St. Paul writes about in the first reading, “what are the riches of glory in his inheritance among the holy ones.”

Still early in the Letter to the Ephesians, Paul offers a prayer, in part a prayer of thanksgiving and in part a creed. For the Ephesians, it must have been a great encouragement to know Paul was praying for them, in fact, giving thanks to God for them. He reminds them of their calling in Jesus and the great hope that moves them from being called toward sharing one day in God’s glory, a hope which is assured because it is based on God’s mighty power. As if unable to contain himself because of the mighty works God has made manifest, Paul goes on to focus on Christ’s resurrection and glorification. The mysteries of God’s plan have been made clear in subjecting all things, including death, to Christ. So the Ephesians have good reason to hope in sharing in God’s glory: they have been called in Christ, they are part of Christ’s body, they are even now sharing his victory.

I doubt Brother Zatti would have expressed his hope in the same way St. Paul does to the Ephesians. He probably would have used simpler words to express his thanksgiving and his faith. Still, his life points to the truths that Paul expounds upon in his prayer; both St. Artemide and St. Paul were centered on the Pascal Mystery, the new life in Christ. Fr. Ángel gives us insight into the spiritual life of the new saint, connecting him to Easter. Zatti’s service to the sick was “Easter care;” his ability to foster community and help people feel loved was “Easter fraternity;” his extraordinary faith that helped others feel the presence of God was “Easter closeness;” the offering of himself with Jesus for the glory of God and the salvation of others was “Easter joy.”

I see in our jubilarians a similar witness to Easter, to the new life in Christ. Amongst those celebrating their anniversary of religious profession and ordination, we have confreres who show particular care for the sick and elder confreres. We have personalities among this group who can strike up a conversation, tell a joke or prepare a meal that makes everyone feel right at home. Some of our jubilarians spend hours each day in prayer, and when they say they will pray for you, they actually do it. They remind us of the closeness of God. We see among our brothers here men who spend themselves for the Salesian mission, with a smile on their face, because they know they are serving the Lord. Like St. Paul, we have plenty of reasons to give thanks to God for our jubilarians.

Paul starts his prayer by giving thanks for the believers in Ephesus, he affirms them in their hope, and he concludes by reminding them of their current relationship with Jesus. Jesus is the Head of the Church, they are members of his Body. How beautifully, yet simply, Brother Zatti understood this and lived it. The Rector Major comments that Zatti lent “God his face, his heart, his hands in the certainty – a source of great boldness – of being but a small instrument of his great Power and Providence.” He was a member of Christ’s Body, the apostolic Church, serving others, especially the sick, and sharing with them the Good News. He was a member of Christ’s Body, the mystical Church, joining his own physical and emotional sufferings, his fatigue and disappointments with the offering of Christ in the Eucharist. He was a member of Christ’s Body, the Communion of believers, recognizing the presence of Christ in those he served, and reminding his colleagues to treat the sick as they would treat Christ. Full of hope for what awaited him in Heaven, when he could share in God’s glory, he lived in service, communion and witness as a member of Christ’s Body, the Church, here on Earth.

Our confreres celebrating their anniversaries this year also give us example of how to live as members of Christ’s Body, in service, communion and witness. Some began answering the call to be a Salesian as an aspirant, others after obtaining their degree, working for a few years or going to the Coast Guard. We are honored to have among the jubilarians several missionaries. Whether teaching in a classroom, as a school administrator, in parish ministry, vocation animation, supporting the vocation to marriage, as a formator, in province leadership, on the basketball court or line dancing, the example of our jubilarians encourages us to offer our gifts and talents for the building up of the Body of Christ. We too have been called to live in hope, witnessing to the Paschal Mystery, active members of Church.

Besides lingering in the joy of the canonization of Brother Zatti and honoring our jubilarians today, it is also the memorial of St. Teresa of Jesus (St. Teresa of Avila), one of the patronesses of the FMA. She was often quoted by St. Francis de Sales. Let’s conclude with a prayer attributed to St. Teresa, renewing our hope in the glory God has in store for those he called, and who live their vocation to be authentic disciples and credible witnesses of the Gospel. Who knows, one day we may be able to celebrate the canonization of these men.

Christ has no other body now but yours. He has no hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks at this world with compassion.
Yours are the feet with which he goes about doing good.
Yours are the hand with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes.
You are his body. Christ has no other body now but yours.