

Zatti!

A BIOGRAPHY



Peter Lappin

Put yourselves at the disposal of the Church and work together according to the call you have received from Jesus Christ. Follow Jesus Christ! Put your lives in his service. . . The Church needs you in many places, above all in the priesthood and in religious orders. You are the future of the Church. You yourselves are responsible for making the Church and keeping her young.

POPE JOHN PAUL II
to youth at Einseideln, Switzerland
June 15, 1984

Zatti was now pressing down on the pedals and listening to the creaking of his well-used bicycle, as he bent over the handlebars to lessen resistance to the wind and to avoid as much of the downpour as possible. He kept his head down, for he did not have to raise it to find what he was looking for. Viedma was as familiar to him as the palm of his hand. By now his hat, his overcoat and his white duster were drenched, and he could feel the knees of his pants cold and clammy against his skin. The front wheel dipped into a puddle, but he quickly righted the bicycle and went on.

"Zatti!"

Although he heard the call he did not look up. He merely waved a hand in greeting.

"Don Zatti!" another voice hailed.

"There they go again with their *Don!*"

This time he did not even raise his hand. He had no liking to be called Don Zatti. Don was used only to address the upper class. He did not belong to the upper class. He was one of the people.

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Peter Lappin

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PETER LAPPIN
Marian Shrine
West Haverstraw, New York

The Call

Put yourselves at the disposal of the Church and work together according to the call you have received from Jesus Christ. Follow Jesus Christ! Put your lives in his service. . . The Church needs you in many places, above all in the priesthood and in religious orders. You are the future of the Church. You yourselves are responsible for making the Church and keeping her young.

POPE JOHN PAUL II
to youth at
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Today many young men and women have grown tired or disillusioned with the drug scene, the immorality, the "God is dead" philosophy and all the rest. These are attitudes or poses, they have concluded, which only lead up a blind alley when they do not lead to destruction or even death.

Our finest youth believe that there is more to life than what these things have to offer. They are looking for something that will make their lives worthwhile.

Among these young people there are some who will receive a call. This call can be on one of several levels, but each call will be suited to the talents, dedication and generosity of spirit of the person called.

Those who receive a call on the first level will be inspired to go to places where their strength, enthusiasm and initiative will be most needed. They will go to the inner cities, the depressed areas, the slums. They will help to make the lives of the poor and the underprivileged a little better.

Another kind of young man or woman will receive a call on another level. These young people will possess a higher degree of courage and a spirit of self-sacrifice. Gifted also with a spirit of adventure and daring, they will volunteer for such excellent movements as the Peace Corps or the Lay Mission Volunteers. They will sacrifice the comfort and security of their homeland to suffer hardship and fatigue in faraway places, in order to raise up their downtrodden and disadvantaged brothers and sisters of the Third World.

Yet another level of call will be offered to another kind of young man or woman. Although in some ways similar to the other calls, this call is very different. This is a call given by the Master; it will be heard only

by those whom he wishes to keep close to himself. These will assist him in the work nearest to his heart, namely, the salvation of souls.

This call is far more demanding than the other two. It requires a lifelong commitment. It is a call to the priesthood or to the religious life.

Finally, there is the call of calls. This is the most demanding of all. At the same time, since it is the most precious in the sight of God, it is also the most rewarding. It is the call to serve him as a missionary, and it stems from the command Jesus gave to his first missionaries, the apostles: "Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations. . ." (Mt 28:19)

Following the example of the Master and strengthened and inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostles, with utter disregard for themselves and with a total dedication to the cause, left their hiding place and sallied forth to conquer the world for Christ.

Those words of Jesus still inspire young men and women who hear and obey this call of calls. For what can be higher or nobler, and what can possibly compare with working for the salvation of souls?

Those who feel that they have received any of these calls should act right away. A call is a special favor from heaven and is not likely to be repeated. The crown of laurels intended for one brow may grace, instead, the brow of someone else. "There is a tide in the affairs of men, when, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune." (*Julius Caesar* IV, iii, 217)

While we are young we think that life will last forever. It will not. Time passes quickly. When, toward the end, we reflect on how we have spent our lives, we will ask ourselves: What have I to show for all those years? What have I accomplished that is of permanent value? When I go to meet my Maker, what can I show him so that he will say to me: "Well done, good and faithful servant. . ." (Mt 25:21)

Artemis Zatti was one young man who received a call, who asked himself those questions. He was free to choose a different path. Thousands of other young immigrants like him had done so; many of these lived their lives in humdrum circumstances.

Unlike them, however, Zatti was prepared to give up his dreams in order to follow Christ, expecting nothing in return except the satisfaction of knowing that he was doing something for mankind. God chose to reward his generosity of spirit by granting him the hundredfold even in this life. "And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over. . ." (Mt 19:29)

Yet the reward Zatti received for his generosity in this life cannot compare with the reward he would receive in the life to come. Then Jesus welcomed him with the words: "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world." (Mt 25:34)

1

Courageous Decision

When the *SS Victoria* of the La Veloce Steamship Company docked on February 9, 1897 at the *Puerto de Nuestra Señora de los Buenos Aires*, a tall, mustachioed young man of eighteen walked down the gangway, followed by his father and mother, three brothers and four sisters. He was the third eldest child of the family, but to the rest of the world he was merely a name on the passenger list. That name was Artemis Gioachino Desiderio Zatti.

Artemis was born in Boretto, Italy, on October 12, 1880, to Louis Zatti and Albina Vecchi, and was baptized on the same day by Father Gines Righi in the Church of Saint Mark. His full name was never used in public. Born after Hildegarda and Eliseo, he was followed by Pompeo, Theresa, Erminio, Florinda and Delfina.

Artemis did not have any distinguishing characteristics as a baby, unless it was a liveliness which once made him jump out of his mother's arms and bump his head on the ground. The bump grew to such an extent that his mother, afraid to let her husband see it, tried to cover it with a beret. But when the father noticed the bump he ordered her to take care of it.

On another occasion his mother brought him to the fields and handed him over to the care of Hildegarda while she herself went to work. When he began to cry, Hildegarda tried everything to make him stop, but to no avail. Finally she guessed that he might be hungry. Since there was no other source of food at hand, she carried him to the nearest cow, sat

him under the cow and inserted one of the swollen teats in his mouth. This succeeded both in stifling his crying and in satisfying his hunger.

At only four years of age, Artemis was already in the fields among the tall grass—which stood higher than he did—gleaning what was left over as fodder for the animals. It also happened to be the time for gathering the grapes. One day he saw the workers climbing up the ladders to get to the topmost branches of the vine, and he thought he would like to share in the fun. However, his father had told him never to go near the ladders because they were too shaky and dangerous.

Nevertheless, while the workers were having lunch in a corner of the field, Artemis quietly approached the vines by a roundabout way. Standing at the bottom of one of the ladders and gazing upwards, he wondered what it would be like to see life from the top. Finally it came to him that there was only one way to find out. Rung by rung, his short, sturdy legs carried him up the ladder until he reached the top. Once there he felt rewarded for his efforts. Never before had he seen such a sight! People and carts and cows had become so small and funny-looking that they looked just like his toys. After enjoying this exciting scene for a while, he decided that it was time to return to earth. Since he had never been up so high before, when he looked straight down the sight of the ground so far below frightened him. He had no idea how he was going to get back safely. All he knew was that if he dared lift one foot off the ladder he would go tumbling to the ground. At this thought he froze. Stiff with fright, he began to yell for help.

Hearing him yell, his father came running. He understood at once that his son was in real danger, but he could not climb the ladder to get him, for it was too weak to support the weight of both. To get the child down safely he would need all the tact at his command. Speaking slowly and calmly, he first assured his son that there was no danger, no danger whatsoever. All he had to do was to listen carefully and do what Daddy told him.

“Lift your left foot and put it down very, very slowly on the rung below,” his father called out. Slowly, ever so slowly, the child did so.

“Now raise your right hand and put it lower down on the ladder.” The child did this too.

“Very good! Very good! Now lift your right foot the same way you lifted your left foot and place it very slowly on the same rung as your left foot. Now raise your left hand and put it lower down on the ladder. Bravo! Now lift ...”

Rung by rung he guided his son down the ladder to the ground. When Artemis did reach the ground, a great cheer went up from the workers. But not from his father.

“Now you come with me, young lad,” he said, as he fingered his belt. “You and I have something to talk about.”

The next important step in Artemis's career was going to school. However, he was allowed to stay only until the age of nine, when he finished the fourth grade. His father then told him that, like the others, he would have to work to help support the family.

When Artemis started to work, his earnings for the entire year were the paltry sum of twenty lire. For this he had to rise at three in the morning, winter and summer, and gulp down a breakfast of *polenta*; he usually had nothing more to eat until evening.

One farmer for whom he worked had an orchard filled with plum, peach and damson trees. The farmer told him that he could eat as much fruit as he wanted from the trees, since there was plenty. However, there was one plum tree he could not touch. This was the farmer's pride and joy, since it bore excellent fruit which the farmer was proud to serve to his friends when they came to dinner.

Precisely because of this prohibition, the tree held a special attraction for Artemis. The more he looked at that tree the more he wanted to taste its fruit, until it reached the point where he decided that he would have to ignore the farmer's prohibition and taste that forbidden fruit.

One day, while the farmer was enjoying his siesta, Artemis led a few friends to the foot of the plum tree.

"You wait below," he told them, "while I climb the tree, pluck the fruit and throw it down for you to catch."

Climbing the tree presented no difficulty, and in a matter of moments he was up and ready to pluck the plums. In his eagerness to do so, however, he stepped on a branch too weak to hold his weight. The branch gave way and he went tumbling to the ground. He was knocked unconscious. Seeing this, his companions took to their heels and left him to face the music.

The noise of the fall wakened the farmer, and he ran out to see what had happened. At first he was horrified to discover what he thought was Artemis lying dead at the foot of his favorite plum tree. But seeing that he was merely knocked out, he picked him up, carried him to the house and revived him with a sip of potent *grappa*.

Even this harrowing experience did not cure Artemis of his hunger for forbidden fruit. On another occasion a farmer had hidden a golden melon which he intended to serve at the dinner he was giving for a cousin who was to celebrate his First Mass. When the time came for him to pick up his melon he discovered that someone had gotten there before him. That someone was Artemis, who, having found out about the melon, had taken it from its hiding place and shared it with his friends.

Sometimes he did succeed in curbing his appetite, however. Another of his employers who could not pay him enough in lire would make up the difference by giving him a box of cookies each week. Artemis always

fought off the temptation to open the box until he arrived home and was able to share its contents with his family.

He was also learning to master his other weaknesses. When he began to suffer from chilblains in his feet, he chose a Spartan method of curing them. To relieve the burning sensation, he would remove his socks and shoes in the dead of winter and run up and down in the snow!

Artemis had lived his life up until now in Boretto, a small town of four thousand inhabitants, situated on the right bank of the Po, twenty miles north of Parma. Like all the towns in Italy, large, or small, it possessed a church, a piazza and a cemetery. Its history dated back to Roman times. Marcus Aemilius Lepidus, one of the triumvirate formed by Octavian and Mark Anthony after the assassination of Julius Caesar, made Boretto a Roman colony. Later the territory passed from one conqueror to another, while the population made its living by tilling the soil, tending vines, raising cattle or dairying. Its most recent claim to fame lies in its nearness to the birthplace (in Parma) of Arturo Toscanini and Giuseppe Verdi.

After the unification of Italy in 1870, Italians hoped for a long period of peace and prosperity, fruit of their newfound freedom. They were disappointed. What followed was a long period of even greater unrest, fomented mainly by socialists and anarchists and by a disastrous attempt at colonization in North Africa. Conditions became desperate enough to cause bread riots in Milan, during which martial law was imposed and many were killed.

For those Italians who found themselves hard-pressed, close to starvation and an easy prey to malaria, pellagra and cholera, an avenue of hope was opened up by the rediscovery of America as a land of opportunity.

If events had gone their usual way, Artemis, like a hundred other young men of his age and condition in Boretto, would have lived and died in the humblest of circumstances.

One day, however, the routine of the Zatti family was interrupted by the arrival of a relative from South America. He was John Zatti, brother of Louis. At that time the theaters of Italy were filled with melodramas in which *lo zio dall'America*, the uncle from America, would always arrive just in time to save the family fortunes.

Uncle John made this astonishing proposal to his brother's family: that the parents and all eight children should pack up and leave with him for Argentina! He assured them that he had already prepared a home for them and would find work for the family.

A man of initiative, John had made his way in Argentina, and if he had not become a millionaire, he had succeeded in obtaining a good position in the municipality of Bahia Blanca, a town lying south of Buenos Aires. Because of the recent opening up of the vast resources of the pampas, Bahia Blanca, he pointed out, had become a boom town. To allay

their fears at being asked to go into the unknown, he added that during the last decade thousands of families and individuals had left for the Americas.

This was true. The number of Italian immigrants slowly increased in 1869; great waves of them began to arrive in 1875, and by the end of World War II they numbered over fifteen million. Today, intermarriage confounds attempts to measure the extent of Italian ancestry among the twenty-eight million Argentines. "Argentines," the saying goes, "are Italians who speak Spanish with an Italian accent." They certainly had succeeded in setting themselves up in Argentina. Would the Zattis have the courage to follow them?

It was not a proposal which could be accepted or rejected on the spur of the moment. Much thought and prayer would have to go into making the decision. The Zattis, after all, had deep roots in the soil, and their entire lives had been lived in these places and among these people. Despite the assurances of the uncle, there was also the uncertainty of life in such a faraway land. Yes, many others, some of them from the same area, had left their homeland to seek their fortunes in America. But how many had been heard from again? What had happened to them? Even if the Zattis did decide to go, who would be able to handle ten people arriving all at once? On the other hand, if they stayed, what had Boretto to offer either them or their children? Nothing but the same drudgery, the same uncertainty, with little or no hope of betterment. After a great deal of soul-searching and doubt, they finally came to a decision: Yes, they would accept Uncle John's offer and leave for Argentina as soon as he could arrange their passage.

In making this decision, they were doing no more than following in the footsteps and in the tradition of their Italian ancestors, one of whom had discovered the great land-mass called the New World, while another had given it his name. In the intervening years, however, people had forgotten the excitement this discovery had caused in the Old World, and it was not until both Spain and Portugal had been dispossessed and the land opened up to all comers that the great wave of immigration began. It was, after all, only a rediscovery of the New World on the part of the people who had first discovered it.

The journey across the Atlantic took nearly a month, was always uncomfortable and, more often than not, painful and distressing. The Zattis travelled steerage, the way of the immigrant, where it was dark, filthy and evil-smelling, and where privacy was unknown. Once the family had consumed the food they had brought with them, they had to depend on what was provided by the ship, which they found abominable. In rough weather, conditions became unbearable, for the crew closed the hatches, leaving the steerage compartments in darkness and without a breath of

fresh air. Besides, it became terribly hot as they approached Argentina, since it was summer in that region.

When the voyage was over, they still had to have their papers checked and pass the medical examinations. They knew that if the examiners discovered in one of them a trace of tuberculosis or any other communicable disease, that person would be ordered back to Italy. Because of this, suicides among new immigrants were not uncommon. Luckily, the Zattis were a healthy family and quickly passed inspection.

Once cleared by the authorities, they were met by Uncle John, who had already purchased their tickets to Bahia Blanca, thus preventing them from being cheated by confidence men who made their fortunes selling bogus tickets and reservations to the unwary. Far too frequently, immigrants were lured into parting with their savings on the promise of a home and a job, only to find that they had entrusted their money to tricksters whom they would never see again.

Even though the authorities saw in these immigrants a much-needed labor force for a developing country, the Argentines resented their presence. Nevertheless, the immigrants still found themselves far better off than their fellow-immigrants to the north. Here they at least shared a common religion, a common culture, and, if not a common language, one which was at least similar to their own.

On their arrival in Bahia Blanca, the Zattis discovered that there was indeed a home waiting for them. The home which Uncle John had spoken of stood at 327 Lavalle Street. Actually, that address was the number on a door which opened into an enclosure about the size of a city block, surrounded by a high wall. Inside stood six or seven houses, each home for a family of first or second generation Italians and each standing on its own patch of ground which was made to yield its tiny harvest of vegetables and flowers. Naturally, the arrival of an Italian family, in some way related to the others, was the occasion for a celebration. All this made everything easier for the Zattis, especially for Mama, who would have to take care of the family when the father and the sons were at work. It augured a good beginning for the new arrivals.

Once they had settled down, the next thing was to find work for those who could work. Uncle John quickly placed Louis at work in the local market and Artemis in one of the hotels. Evidently Artemis did not like this job; for some reason he soon left it without even going to the trouble of collecting his wages. Later he began working in a tile factory and found this more to his liking.

While those who could work were at work and those who should be at school were at school, Mama took care of the house. Albina Zatti was a strong and resourceful woman who dressed in black and always covered her head when she left the house. She also held definite views on dis-

cipline and religion. Her sons and daughters, even after they had grown up and married, would always be to her "the children." She remained the dominant figure in the family. She was also a devout woman who loved and practiced her faith. At Boretto she had been a frequent visitor to the church, which she considered an extension of the home; it was nearby and its steeple could be seen from any point of the compass. In Bahia Blanca, there was not a single church steeple in sight.

The only church with a steeple lay outside the town limits. Nevertheless, Mama soon fell into the habit of visiting this church just to admire the steeple. Sometimes the desire to look at the steeple would be strong but for some reason the journey was out of the question. When that happened, Mama would retire to her room, take out the little package of postcards of the church at Boretto she had brought with her, admire its lovely steeple for a moment or two, and shed a tear.

Artemis, after he had become accustomed to his new way of life, considered the local church sufficient for his needs. During a visit to this church he made the acquaintance of the pastor, Father Charles Cavalli. He found Father to be happy, talkative, humble and apostolic; Father found him to be sincere and religious. They soon became friends, and Artemis began to spend his free time helping out in the church and in the parish. His greatest satisfaction was to visit the sick.

At eighteen, Artemis was tall and broad-shouldered, with noticeably large hands and feet. He was always smiling, with a smile that was enhanced by a Manchu-style mustache, then called an *imperial* and considered very masculine. His hair was dark and brushed down flat. His preference in dress was a suit—the pants invariably unpressed—with collar and tie, although with regard to clothes he showed a countryman's indifference. While his approach to people was always warm and friendly, the steady gaze from his blue eyes could be disconcerting, as if the owner of the eyes were sizing one up. The voice was deep, strong and musical, and was often heard in the church choir. Artemis had a characteristic way of standing with his legs slightly apart, arms crossed and head inclined forward to the left. The broad chest, steady gaze and determined chin gave the impression of a young man of set purpose, possessing a deep reserve of energy. He would go far along whatever road he chose to travel.

2

New Horizons

While Artemis was at the rectory he began to read the life of Don Bosco. He also met several other Salesians. One of these was Father Michael Borghino, who told him something of the history of Bahia Blanca and of the beginnings of the parish.

Bahia Blanca, or "White Bay," a small seaport on the edge of the pampas, had the reputation of being one of the most vice-ridden towns in Argentina. Murders were common, illegitimate births even more so, and irregular marriages a way of life. A current of anticlericalism, although not as strong as before, still ran deep. This had its roots in Italian, not Argentinean history, having taken hold in Italy during the period of reunification. Anticlericals had portrayed the pope as being opposed to the attempts of the patriots to free the country from Austria.

Father Borghino told Artemis: "I came to Bahia Blanca in 1885, and because it was a holy day, rang the little church bell for Mass. Do you know how many came? Two! When a famous Jesuit preacher appeared to preach a mission, do you know how many came? Not a single one! When the archbishop himself arrived to see what he could do, the people booed him and would not let him speak. They even stoned his carriage! After a mission lasting eight days only eight people received Holy Communion.

"The priest in charge finally threw up his hands and left. Still, when the parish was offered to Father John Cagliero, our superior, he saw it as a challenge, borrowed the money to build a church and sent yours

truly to take over. He told the people that one day Bahia Blanca would become a great seaport and railroad center for the pampas trade. This is exactly what we now see happening.

“Of course, all this didn’t take place overnight,” he went on. “In the meantime we had to face the anticlericals who attacked us in ways you wouldn’t believe. The papers printed some awful stuff about us and the sisters. But we kept plugging away and four years later had succeeded to the extent that we could invite Father Cagliero to come and bless a new church and a new school. Slowly things began to turn in our favor. To begin with, the people and the press took up Father Cagliero’s challenge about making Bahia Blanca a great seaport and railroad center. Gradually our relations with the people improved so much that President Saenz Peña came down to congratulate us for what we had done for Bahia Blanca. And when the archbishop returned in 1895, he was received by no fewer than 20,000 people who, instead of stoning his carriage, showered him with flowers.”

As time went on, Father Cavalli found out more about Artemis from ordinary conversation, but more so from the confessional, where Artemis bared his soul to him. He soon became aware that he was dealing with a young man who seemed to possess all the qualities which went into the making of a priest. When he broached the subject with Artemis he found him not merely receptive but even enthusiastic about the idea. Before coming to any decision, however, they had more than one long, earnest discussion on the subject.

The day came when Father Cavalli thought he would have a talk with Artemis’s parents. Artemis was now nineteen years of age, he said to them, and wasn’t it time that he came to some decision about his future? He pointed out that from what he knew of him, Artemis had the makings of a good priest. What did the parents think?

It was the mother who responded. After consulting for a few moments with her husband, she turned to the priest. “If you think it is the will of God,” she said, “then it’s up to him to try to obey God’s will, but we’d like to be a little more certain that he has a vocation. We wouldn’t like him to come back here after . . .”

“There’s no need to worry,” interrupted Father Cavalli. “If he goes at all, he’ll stay there for as long as it takes. That’s the kind of young man I think he is.”

It was agreed that Artemis would leave for Bernal, where the Salesians had their seminary, and once this was decided it was all the parents could do to keep him from going off at once. The work he was doing at the tile factory no longer interested him. He did not even want to stay for his sister Hildegarda’s wedding. When his brothers invited him to attend the carnival celebrations of that year, he told them to go ahead and he

would follow. However, once he discovered that the events did not conform to his new state in life, he took out his rosary instead and recited it undistracted by the noisy celebrations.

He left that April for Bernal, a small town fifteen miles west of Buenos Aires and 450 miles north of Bahia Blanca. His mother, unable to let go of her son so easily, accompanied him. They arrived on April 18, 1900, and were met by the director, Father Bartholomew Molinari.

"Here is my son," Mama said to the astonished priest. "He's a fairly good boy and I think he'll be an obedient one. If he isn't, give him a good beating!"

The priest took one look at Artemis, now a robust young man of twenty, and decided that if anyone started beating anyone it would probably be the other way around!

"Very well, Madam," he replied. "But I don't think that will be necessary. He looks to me to be a fine young man."

Artemis now entered the seminary of Bernal, a house of study and formation for two hundred postulants, the great majority of them far younger than he and far more advanced in studies. He had left school ten years before; now he had once again to take up his elementary studies and several other subjects, including Latin. Given his age, height and maturity, he was soon entrusted with so many housekeeping tasks that in a short time he became something of a jack-of-all-trades. All this he took in stride, while he looked forward to a happy life in pursuit of his vocation.

In 1900, the Salesians of Argentina had gathered all the aspirants to the priesthood at Bernal. Although it was destined to play an important part in their future, it was still a house of formation and as such had few sources of income. Consequently, life was conducted along Spartan lines. They did not have enough money even to provide new copybooks, but had to rely on used ones or make new ones from the old. Food, too, was primitive and not always plentiful, nor were the kitchen or the sanitary conditions what they might have been. It was a pioneer life geared to form pioneer priests.

Since the students had to supply their own clothes, in one of his earliest letters Artemis asked his parents to send him "one pair of pants, one shirt, one pair of underpants, one handkerchief, two pairs of shoes, two pairs of sheets and three pesos." And in another, "one handkerchief, nine sheets of letter-paper and nine envelopes."

Having been a country boy all his life, Artemis took drawbacks in stride, sharing wholeheartedly in the seminary activities and making a name for himself in the school. Although he gave himself unreservedly to his new way of life, he did not by any means cut off communication with his family. Apart from the fact that his mother would not have stood for it, he considered it his duty to keep in contact with them by correspondence. On

this he held an apostolic viewpoint, since his letters always contained some good counsel or religious instruction and, when he thought it necessary, even a recall to duty.

His first letter, dated April 23, 1900, was written when he had been no more than five days at Bernal; it was a poor specimen both of Italian and of penmanship. He told his family that the school, among other wonders, possessed a dynamo which could provide the church with electric light both day and night. He also told them not to include jokes in their letters, since they took up too much space and served no useful purpose. He wrote another letter on June 17 to wish his father well for the feast of Saint Aloysius. In this letter he supposed Mama to be still angry with him for not having waited to leave for Bernal until after his sister's wedding. He included a pious thought to the effect that all things are temporal, and even reminded his father that life on earth is nothing more than a pilgrimage—religious sentiments which can be put down to first fervor.

In September Father Cavalli paid Artemis a visit and brought him money to have a photograph taken of himself for his mother. She also let him know, through the priest, that his letters should be more frequent and much longer. He replied that he didn't know what to put in them and asked her to tell the Tissets (the people from the tile company he had worked for) that they were wasting their time if they thought he was coming back. This letter also concluded with a pious thought.

At the beginning of 1901 he sent his father a book on the life of Don Bosco in Spanish; his father wrote back to say how delighted he was with the book and that Artemis should send him more books of that kind. Since neither father nor mother understood Spanish, the children, who by now had learned it in school, translated the books for them. Mama next wrote to give him news of the construction of their new parish church, and included more money for his personal needs.

When Artemis had been two years at Bernal, had succeeded in his studies and fulfilled all the other requirements, he was told to prepare for the novitiate. This was the first important step on the road to the priesthood.

While he was studying and carrying out his duties as assistant to the administrator, he was given a special assignment. The boy who had been attending a young priest with tuberculosis had himself contracted the disease, and Artemis was asked to take his place. Despite the care that Artemis lavished on the young priest, he passed away on January 2, 1902. At that time tuberculosis was the most feared of all communicable diseases.

Not long after this Artemis began to suffer from a cough which became persistent enough to oblige him to see the doctor. When the doctor had

examined him, he looked very serious, but when Artemis asked him why, he would not say. He did, however, confide to the director that Artemis, because of his close contact with the sick priest, had contracted tuberculosis.

When the director in turn informed Artemis, he was shocked. On the morning when his companions went as novices to receive their cassocks, Artemis lay in bed. What a terrible blow to all his hopes and aspirations—to come so close to taking the first definite step to ordination and then to have this happen! It also presented a problem for his superiors. As far as they were concerned, they had no direct responsibility for Artemis's health. In fact, some of them saw in this a sign that he was not intended for their way of life; in other words, he did not have a vocation to the Salesian Congregation. Nor, with such a disease, would any other congregation accept him.

After consultation with the provincial, however, they decided that they should first try sending him to some other Salesian house where he might recuperate. Since in those days there were not many places to choose from, they decided on Junin de Los Andes. Junin, they reasoned, possessed the pure air and open country most likely to restore Artemis's lungs.

The director then gave him the money he needed to go to Junin or, if he preferred, to return home. Artemis decided that he would first return home. He had just reached the station at Bernal, however, when he was seized by a fit of coughing, during which he spat up so much blood on the platform that he horrified the other travellers. Then he fainted, but was given some cordial by a sympathetic bystander, which restored him enough for him to take his place on the train.

Although the journey to Bahia Blanca caused him a great deal of pain, what most upset him was not the gravity of his condition but what this departure from Bernal meant to his dream of reaching the priesthood.

3

The Test of Time

Artemis reached home in such a state of exhaustion that when his mother saw him she stepped back in horror. "My God!" she cried, "What have they done to my son?"

The others, too, crowded around trying to find out what had happened to him, but his mother insisted that they should first give him some nourishing food and get him to bed. Once restored by the food and after a good, long sleep, he awoke to find himself expected to answer some difficult questions.

"What do you intend to do now?" his mother asked him.

"Go on to Junin, of course."

"And where is this Junin?"

"Somewhere in the Cordilleras of the Andes."

"*Dio mio!* Somewhere in the Andes? Let me find out more about this!"

Leaving her son as comfortable as she could make him, she went off at once to see Father Charles. When he heard that Artemis had come home a very sick young man, he returned with her immediately. On seeing Artemis, he too was upset. After one or two questions to find out how Artemis felt, he turned to the mother.

"In my opinion," he concluded, "to send Artemis off like that to Junin would be barbarous. Junin isn't next door. To get there he'd have to take the train for two days, then the *galera*, then God knows what else. It's unthinkable."

"But I want to go to a Salesian house," insisted Artemis. "I must follow my vocation."

"Even so," said Father Charles, "you can't go to Junin, where you'll only leave your bones!"

"If he's going to die," added Mama firmly, "I want him to die at home."

"He could go instead to Viedma," continued Father Charles.

"Viedma?" echoed Mama. "Where is Viedma?"

"That's where our Salesian mission is, and where Bishop Cagliero has his residence," explained Father Charles. "We have another small seminary there, and the climate is beautiful. Besides, it's only 200 miles or a full day's journey by *galera*."

Further discussion followed until Mama called for silence. "Before he goes off to the end of the world at Junin," she announced, "I think he should try Viedma."

"Since you're agreed on that," said Father Charles, "I'll gladly arrange for him to go to Viedma and even pay the sixty pesos for the *galera* to help him follow his vocation."

With that the family conference broke up and Artemis retired. He spent the next week building up the strength he would need to withstand the rigors of the trip to Viedma by *galera*.

Travel at that time was primitive. The only way to travel south from Bahia Blanca was by horseback, by coach or by *galera*. The latter was the cheapest and least uncomfortable means of travelling distances such as that which separated Bahia Blanca from Viedma.

The *galera* was a long, four-wheeled wagon drawn by twelve horses; it could carry twenty-four passengers and about a ton of luggage and merchandise. It also carried government mail. The horses were changed frequently along the route, which lay across pampas, swampland and salt lakes treacherous enough at times to cause loss of life.

The *mayoral*, or driver of the *galera*, while assisting Artemis in placing his bag and in seating him inside, looked at the emaciated figure and shook his head, wondering if anyone that sick should attempt the trip. This *mayoral*, Artemis noted in his turn, was a romantic-looking figure in his tall, conical straw hat, wide pants tucked into high boots of rawhide, and leather jacket. Artemis also noted that at his side hung a heavy-caliber revolver and wondered what use he ever made of it, unless it was to settle disputes among the passengers, in particular those who had drunk too much *aguardiente*, or native whiskey, to help them withstand the rigors of the journey. The *mayoral* had as complete control and authority over his *galera* and its passengers as any captain had over his ship.

After a few hours of travel, what the *mayoral* had suspected would happen, did happen. The rocking and the shaking and the hot air inside

the *galera* had become too much for Artemis, and he began to feel sick. He had no difficulty in persuading the *mayoral* to let him sit on the high outside seat beside him, where he could at least breathe fresh air. The colorful language the *mayoral* employed to make his horses run faster did not bother Artemis, and after a while he found the man's company highly entertaining because of the stories he had to tell of his many trips across the pampas.

More than once along the way, Artemis and the rest of the passengers had to get down from the *galera* to allow it to negotiate a difficult stretch of terrain. Before the journey ended they even had to spend a whole night in the open, due to the fact that, despite his long experience, the *mayoral* lost his way. The fault did not lie with him, however; because of recent rains and wind, the tracks he followed had been covered with sand and mud.

"I arrived yesterday in Viedma after the trip by *galera*," Artemis wrote home, "which went well enough since we had neither too many passengers nor too much luggage. We should have reached Viedma on Monday evening, but for the fact that we lost our way and had to sleep out in the open for one night, so that we arrived on Tuesday morning, when I was delighted to meet the Salesians.

"Regarding my health, I have to tell you that I met Father Evasio Garrone, the doctor. He assured me that with the blessing of Mary Help of Christians and of Don Bosco I would regain my health. In any case, I hope to stay well. Pray for me as I pray for you . . ."

Despite the insistence in that letter that her son was all right, Mama Zatti's shrewd eyes saw from the very handwriting that he was far from well.

Regarding the assurances of Father Garrone that he would get well, there was more to it than Artemis had revealed in the letter to his family.

When he had arrived in Viedma and had approached Father Garrone, the latter had conducted him to the altar of Mary Help of Christians and made him promise that if, indeed, he were cured, he would dedicate the rest of his life to taking care of the sick poor. As far as Artemis was concerned, nothing would please him more. Consequently, he had no hesitation in making such a promise to Our Lady.

"In one month," Father told him, "you'll begin to get better."

On his part, Father Garrone knew that he was working for his own praiseworthy ends. He had seen in Artemis a valuable helper for his work among the sick and was determined to have him by his side at the pharmacy and at the hospital. Thus was a pact of considerable advantage to both parties sealed at the altar of Mary Help of Christians.

Not long after this, Artemis received a letter from home complaining

that they had been told that at Viedma they were using him as nothing more than a doorkeeper.

"If I am a doorkeeper," he replied indignantly, "and if I am not studying at this moment, it is because of the kindness of my superiors, who are concerned about my health and do not wish me to tire myself." He concluded, as was now his custom, with a little sermon to the effect that if God has called him to the religious state He will give him the necessary health and strength to meet its obligations. With the blessing of Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians, he felt sure that he would succeed in his intent.

In a letter dated April 8, he again spoke of this "miracle" of a cure. "I wish to tell you that the prophecy of Father Garrone is already being fulfilled. From day to day, thanks to Our Lady and the Good Lord, I am improving and am recovering the strength I lost because of the cough. Rest assured that my present state of health is quite good, and I hope yours is too. There is something more. I have also been cured of my laziness!"

Despite his claims of good health, he was still too weak to walk from the school to a summer house the brothers had built by the river, less than a mile away. After each trip he had to rest, and although he continued to improve and to regain his former strength, he could not get rid of a persistent cough.

Meanwhile, those at home kept asking him when he would put on the cassock, that is, enter the novitiate. Since he was evidently not considered by the superiors to be ready, he tried to put his family off with a few humorous remarks.

But the cough persisted through the winter months of July, August and September, and he tried to ease the concern of his parents by asking them to accept the will of God in his regard. He does not seem to have succeeded, for they ended up insisting that he should leave Viedma and come home. To this suggestion he replied that as far as his health was concerned he was a thousand times better off in Viedma, where the climate was far milder and drier than that of Bahia Blanca.¹

¹ It may be worth mentioning that during the years 1902 to 1904 Artemis lived in the same Salesian house with Zepherin Namuncurà, son of the last *Gran Canique*, or Great Chief of all the Indians. Bishop John Cagliero took Zepherin with him to Rome to study for the priesthood. His cause for canonization is being studied at Rome; he has already been declared venerable. During the year 1904, also, at Junin de los Andes, the place where Artemis was supposed to go after leaving Bernal, a young Chilean girl, Laura Vicuña, died at the age of thirteen. Her cause for canonization is also making satisfactory progress in Rome. The lives of both Zepherin and Laura have been written by the author and may be obtained from Don Bosco Publications, 475 North Avenue, New Rochelle, NY 10802.

Artemis repeated that he was ninety percent better and that his only worry was that he could not get rid of the cough. Aware that his mother did not believe him, he told her to ask Bishop John Cagliero, when she sees him in Bahia Blanca, if he is telling the truth.

In this way a year passed which Artemis bore not only with patience but even with a smile. The truth was that despite the gravity of his illness he was convinced the prophecy of Father Garrone would be fulfilled, and that he would be completely cured.

The first letter of 1903 came in the beginning of February from his father. He complained that Artemis was making them wait too long for news of himself. The reason for this delay was that during the summer months the director had sent him and some other confreres to take sea baths for their health near the mouth of the Rio Negro. This meant that he had no way of writing to them. They had concluded, however, that he must be hiding something from them about the state of his health. Artemis replied to reassure them, his mother in particular, that there was absolutely no need for them to be concerned.

But in April the fever again appeared and, in order not to seem to be hiding the truth, he told them exactly how matters stood with regard to his health.

This so disturbed his mother that it called for another letter from Artemis to point out that there was no need to be alarmed, since it was a temporary thing which could have been caused by his staying near the sea; besides, it had now disappeared. "My health is going along well *in nomine Domini*," he wrote back.

Thinking that this Latin phrase was a cover-up of something serious, his mother wrote back demanding at once a clear explanation of the Latin! Artemis patiently pointed out that the phrase had no hidden meaning and once again assured her that his health was indeed improving. His mother in return asked him at least to pay a visit to his family in Bahia Blanca, but he replied that he would go when it was pleasing to God, and in any case only when he was dressed in black, that is, when he had put on the cassock.

His brother Eliseo now entered the picture. Seeing his mother's concern over the state of Artemis's health, he wanted to set the matter at rest; or else, which is more likely, his mother had insisted that he write to find out the truth. She evidently felt that all was not well, and that to spare her Artemis was keeping the truth from her. In very blunt terms Eliseo called on Artemis to tell his family the truth, since they would rather know the truth, however hard it might be to accept, than be deceived.

In reply Artemis confessed that he himself could not understand why his cough still persisted. This was the only thing, he assured Eliseo, which prevented him from enjoying good health. "I never wrote regarding this,"

he says, “for I was certain that by now you had grasped the fact that I had been suffering from tuberculosis. It was because of this that my superiors had allowed me to go to Viedma, where, thanks to their care and to that of the doctor and of the sisters, I have been able to treat this terrible disease in time. Despite the cough, the doctor assures me that I am improving steadily and that for this I can sing the praises of Our Lady.” In a follow-up letter he chided them for not believing what he told them and blamed it all on his mother’s advancing years. “I am very happy here,” he concluded, “where I eat, drink, sleep, and do a little work to keep me busy.”

The sad truth was that by now, because of the nature of his illness, he had begun to admit to himself that he might never be allowed to wear the cassock. But he felt that it was not yet time to disillusion his mother, who had set her heart on seeing him a priest.

There is something of a mystery in the workings of divine providence regarding the vocation of Artemis.

According to the relative archives he was registered in 1902 on the list of Salesians as a novice, although his name was spelled *Artemido*. By 1905 his name had disappeared from that list. In 1907 he was again entered as a novice, but while his companions took their triennial vows, he did not. According to his own testimony, however, he did take his vows later in the year. From 1907 to 1910 his name was correctly spelled and he was entered as a triennially-professed cleric, that is, a student for the priesthood.

Apart from everything else, this means that he had to wait no fewer than eight years before he could become a member of the Salesian Congregation.

Several Salesian historians have suggested explanations for this. One is that because he had been infected with tuberculosis, the superiors hesitated to accept him until they were certain that he had been completely cured. Another is that since he had proved himself to be a man of exceptional ability, his services were always in demand, with the result that he was never able to take the time required for his religious training. Yet another explanation blames the delay on the fact that in those days all male Italians—even those who had entered religion—were still obliged by law to do their military service. This applied also to those Italians who had emigrated to Argentina. These men were not anxious to reveal their whereabouts to the authorities. A final explanation lays the blame on those who printed the lists of the Salesians at their headquarters in Italy. Because of the distance involved and the uncertainty of the mails, they could not keep their records straight.

One thing is clear: when Father Garrone declared Artemis completely

cured, the superiors immediately admitted him, on August 1, 1908, to his first profession; that is, to the vows taken for a period of three years. They admitted him, moreover, without requiring him to make a formal novitiate. His long trial had given proof enough of his religious nature and strength of character. He took his final or perpetual vows three years later, a cause for great rejoicing on the part of one who had waited so long for this consolation. He was now a full-fledged member of the congregation.

At thirty-one years of age, with his record of precarious health, Artemis knew that he could not be accepted as a candidate for the priesthood. He would never have been able to sustain the long years of rigorous training and study required for ordination.

Divine providence had other things in mind for Artemis Zatti.

4

Steady Course in Rough Seas

In 1904 Artemis's letters were written on stationery which bears a strange letterhead, namely, *Botica de San Francisco de Sales*. He had been assigned to work in the *botica*, or pharmacy, conducted by Father Garrone. He told his family that he had no news for them for the present, but instead will write them a little sermon. Again he reassured them that his health continued to improve. When he learned that his brother Pompeo had been stricken with paralysis, in accordance with his new position in the pharmacy he went so far as to suggest a remedy: the prudent use of electricity and hot plasters.

Before he had been assigned to the pharmacy, however, Artemis had acted as a purveyor for the Salesian houses, one in Viedma and the other in Patagones, the town across the river; he had also helped take care of the sick in the prison. From now on his letters will become shorter and fewer, since his work at the pharmacy will take up most of his time. While he had been acting as purveyor for the house at Patagones, he had made the acquaintance of Father Louis Pedemonte, the Master of Novices. It was a friendship which was to prove invaluable.

When Father John Cagliero was appointed bishop of the newly-created vicariate apostolic, which is the equivalent of a missionary diocese, Viedma

was only a small town on the coast of the Atlantic. Then it was made the capital of a new province in the pampas, called the Province of Rio Negro. Just declaring it the capital of a province, however, did not effect any great or immediate changes.

But changes had to come, and the bishop, with the Salesians, provided Viedma with more than their share of innovations. These included producing the first supply of running water, the first telephone, the first radio antenna, the first theater, the first brass band, the first social club for workers, and, for what it was worth, the first soccer team. To further their work of evangelization, they also opened the first and only pharmacy in Viedma; once that was firmly established, the next logical step would be to open a First Aid Center or hospital where those who needed it could receive proper medical care. To do this they would also have to be the first to introduce surgical instruments to Viedma.

This was very much on the mind of the bishop while he was walking one day with the director of the school.

“Should we open a hospital?” he asked.

“That would be a good idea,” agreed the other. “But with what?” He rubbed finger and thumb together to indicate a lack of the necessary funds.

“With prayer,” said Bishop Cagliero with a smile.

While they were praying, providence entered the picture in the unlikely person of a drunken painter named James Sananja. He was a bitter anticlerical who was leading a dissolute life and had already spent all his means in riotous living. One day he fell sick and eventually found himself without money, without friends, and without even the strength to take care of himself. Finally, obliged to seek the help of the very people he had railed against for so many years, he appealed to the missionaries.

There was no doubt whatsoever in their minds that they should help the man. In fact, they saw in this a clear indication of the wishes of providence. The only question was where to put him. They decided at last on an old stable which had previously housed the horses belonging to the police. An army of Salesians and their boys descended on the stable carrying pails, scrubbing brushes, brooms, paint and paintbrushes. When they had finished cleaning and painting the stable, the final touches were added by the sisters, who went about with scented herbs clearing the air of the fumes left by the workers and, of course, by the stable’s former occupants. Sister Eugenia Galli was chosen to take care of the hospital’s first patient, and she was understandably nervous as she awaited his arrival.

Sananja arrived on the night of April 11, 1889, borne by four brothers and preceded by altar boys bearing torches. Such solemnity was fitting, since it marked the opening of the first hospital in the whole of Patagonia.

This first attempt at curing the sick was highly successful, for one month later Sananja walked out of the hospital completely cured and eternally grateful to the Salesians.

Father Evasio Garrone was appointed director of the hospital and the pharmacy, both dedicated to Saint Joseph, and from that moment on their success was assured. Because of the need for such an institution, more beds were added and more buildings constructed. In 1893 a novice named Jacinth Massini arrived and was given charge of the pharmacy, leaving Father Garrone free to meet the increasing demands being made on him by the hospital.

Father Garrone was a Salesian whose vocation, like his hospital, had an unusual beginning. When he was a boy at the Oratory of Don Bosco, he once told the saint that he felt confused about what direction his life should take.

“Let me clear that confusion up for you,” said Don Bosco. With that he began a recital of what the future held for Evasio. With his whole future laid out before him, Evasio confessed that he no longer felt confused but astonished, not only by what Don Bosco already knew of him but even more by the manner in which Don Bosco had foretold his future.

That was not all. He had often served the saint’s Mass and would never forget the morning when he was holding the edge of the chasuble during the elevation (as was the custom in those days) when Don Bosco rose from the floor to such a height that he could no longer hold on to the chasuble!

At breakfast he could scarcely contain himself and hurried to the table where Don Bosco was having coffee.

“Don Bosco!” he said excitedly, “you went up so high this morning I couldn’t hold on to the chasuble!”

For a moment Don Bosco did not answer. Then he raised his eyes and looked severely at Evasio. “Here,” was all he said, as he handed him a cup of coffee. “Drink this and keep quiet!”

Evasio understood, and even though the same thing was to occur on two other occasions, he never breathed a word of it then to anyone. More than once after that, Don Bosco foretold what would happen to him, and the prophecies were all fulfilled. When Evasio had to go to military service, for instance, Don Bosco outlined his career for him, and it came out exactly as he had foretold.

During his military service, Evasio was sent to work in a hospital, where he was trained as an infirmarian. When he returned to the Salesians, he was made infirmarian at the school, and when he arrived in Patagonia in 1888 he assisted the local pharmacist. Once Bishop Cagliero had decided to open the pharmacy and the hospital in Viedma, the logical choice to run them was Father Garrone.

Through practice and study he became an expert and won for himself the title of "Padre Dotor." Indefatigable in caring for people, he would ride great distances to assist the sick and stay there for as long as he was needed. He even obtained permission from the Holy See to practice surgery—a rare privilege for a priest in those days. It was not that he wished to take the place of a qualified doctor. There were no qualified doctors anywhere in the region. Besides, medicine was still in a rather primitive state even in more advanced communities. As far as Father Garrone was concerned, he felt convinced that in doing all this he was merely carrying out the recommendations Don Bosco had made to his missionaries.

"Take special care," he had told them, "of the sick, the children, the aged and the poor, and you will gain for yourselves the blessing of God and the good will of all."

Despite Father Garrone's good intentions, opposition was not long in coming. As early as one year later, the Salesians were accused by the anticlericals of illegal practice in opening the hospital, and they asked the governor to close it. Backed by a campaign organized by the people in favor of the Salesians, the governor refused. The people went a step further and persuaded him to request full medical status for Father Garrone, since he had already proved his expertise in medicine.

With the growth of Viedma and the increase in the population, more doctors came to attend to their needs. Unfortunately, these doctors for the most part were ultra-liberal and atheist; they began to look on Father Garrone as the competition and to seek ways of destroying both him and his work. While they refused to assist those poor people who could not pay for their services, they still resented Father Garrone and the missionaries for taking care of them. "Medicine man" and "witch doctor" were some of the milder terms they would pay local hooligans to cast at Father Garrone and his helpers, and they were not above ambushes and muggings in the streets, in their attempts to intimidate him. This obliged him to go about his business armed with a stout cane.

Undaunted, Father Garrone continued to minister to the sick and to the other needs of the community, once risking his life to save a boy from drowning during an overflow of the Rio Negro. All this did not go either unnoticed or unrewarded. The population would later show their gratitude by erecting a statue of him and naming a street of the town in his honor.

The policy of the missionaries in this turmoil was to carry on the good work they were doing for the souls and bodies of the people.

As time went on Massini became the right arm of Father Garrone, who, besides being in charge of the hospital, also had the responsibility of outpatient care and the visits to those who could not come to the

hospital. When Artemis—or Zatti, as they now began to call him—was assigned to the pharmacy, Massini introduced him to the mysteries of medicine and the preparation of prescriptions. Because of the constant harassment on the part of those who were opposed to the hospital and the pharmacy simply because they were in the hands of the missionaries, Massini was obliged to go to Buenos Aires to study for his diploma in pharmacy. He left Zatti in charge.

Since Zatti was intelligent and observant, possessing a natural bent for study, he soon became a practiced pharmacist and a capable infirmarian. The absence of Massini and the occupations of Father Garrone began to place increasing responsibility on his shoulders, and he proved worthy of this trust and confidence.

Despite the opposition, all was going well when suddenly, in 1911, Father Garrone was stricken and died. This left the operation of the hospital and the pharmacy in jeopardy. Just when Zatti was preparing to pay a visit to his family, Father Pedemonte cancelled the visit and put him in charge of administering the hospital. Next he called in Doctor Richard Spurr to be in charge in front of the authorities, thus circumventing those who accused the Salesians of operating the hospital illegally.

The opposition, nevertheless, could count one important victory. Massini was discouraged by the attacks of the anticlericals and of those who were jealous of the success of the pharmacy and the hospital, and attracted by the advantages of opening his own pharmacy in Viedma. He decided to leave the congregation and do just that.

With the death of Father Garrone and the departure of Massini, although before the authorities Doctor Spurr was officially in charge, the day-to-day administration of both the hospital and the pharmacy fell on Zatti's shoulders. He became the *de facto* director, since he acted for the hospital and the pharmacy as administrator, doctor, lawyer, accountant and, in time of need, beggar. As time went on, begging became an all-important function of Zatti's administration, for the hospital was not conducted on a profit basis but as a service to the community, especially its poorest element.

As Viedma developed, so did the hospital. In 1913 Father Pedemonte, as the new provincial, gave Zatti the plans for a new hospital pavillion with a frontage of thirty-five feet, and Zatti had it built in a very short time. Further additions would come later.

Zatti was actively administering the hospital and the pharmacy when an event occurred which—before it was over—would involve not only the hospital but Zatti, the Salesians, the authorities and the whole of Viedma. It also threatened the existence of the hospital and the pharmacy.

It began when a patient named Patrick Cabrera was brought in from the local jail for treatment, because the jailers were not able to take care

of him. Cabrera was not long in the hospital when he decided that he preferred his freedom, and one night he disappeared. When this was discovered, the police were immediately informed. Given the atmosphere of that time, however, the police, instead of going after Cabrera, went after the Salesians, accusing them of criminal negligence in allowing the prisoner to escape while in their custody.

Behind the accusation lay the desire of the liberals and the anticlericals to get even with Father Guadenzio Manachino, director of the school. As editor of *Flores de Campo*, the diocesan newspaper, he had written a series of articles in which he had exposed misdeeds on the part of several officials and had even accused them of corrupt practices. Enraged at this exposure, they hoped to take revenge on Father Manachino and at the same time hurt the mission.

Aware of what was going on, Zatti stepped forward and assumed full responsibility for the incident. The result was that on August 20, 1915, the people of Viedma beheld an amazing spectacle: their beloved Zatti being taken out of the hospital and marched off to the local jail by two policemen armed with Mausers, pistols and machetes! Once news of this strange happening got around, it sent the town into an uproar. While the people were wondering how to help Zatti in his hour of need, the police were interrogating him. After two hours of questioning, he was put in a cell and locked up for the night.

As for Zatti, he felt at ease. In fact, as he was later to confess, in the past ten years he had never enjoyed the luxury of so much as a day off. Now he had plenty of time in which to recite his favorite prayer—the rosary.

He was not to be allowed to enjoy such peace for long. The very next day the visits began. At first there were individuals who wished to sympathize with him and to cheer him up. Later, people arrived from the various organizations of Viedma and Patagones. But the most dramatic moment came when above the chatter and conversation was heard the roll of drums and the blare of trumpets. As the sound reached full crescendo, it stopped directly outside the police station. The school band had come to serenade the prisoner! Because of their enthusiasm, not to mention the influence of some of the prisoner's friends, the police finally gave permission for Zatti to leave his prison cell and greet the members of the band and his fellow Salesians.

Two days later, according to law, Zatti was brought before the magistrate. This was the occasion for another procession composed of armed guards, a cheering crowd, and Zatti smiling and waving to his friends. After the arraignment he was led back to the prison cell.

It was time, however, to end what had turned into something of a comic opera. Father Pedemonte took it upon himself to point out to the authori-

ties that neither Zatti nor anyone else at the hospital was trained to undertake the custody of prisoners; they were trained to take care of the sick. If they had never before been expected to guard any prisoners who had been brought to the hospital for medical attention, why should they be expected to do so now?

Finally, Father Manachino went to plead Zatti's cause before the magistrate. Since he was a doctor of both canon and civil law, he knew far more about law than the magistrate. During his presentation for the defense, he gave the magistrate no fewer than twelve reasons why the arrest and imprisonment of Zatti contravened the law, with the result that the magistrate felt that he could do nothing else but set the prisoner free. He dismissed the case and declared that Zatti was leaving the court "without damage to his fame or to his honor."

When word of this got around, the people of the town once again gathered at the police station, this time to accompany Zatti back to the hospital. The school band also reappeared to render the occasion as festive as possible. Zatti repeated his comment that his short stay in prison was the only vacation he had had in ten years.

As a footnote to all this and as an indication of the attitude and mentality of the anticlericals, it might be added that they tried to have Zatti put back in the cell. The charge this time? He had left the hospital unattended while he was in prison!

Although Zatti had been with the Salesians for many years, he had received little in the way of formal education. Before then he had even less, having been obliged to leave school after the fourth grade. This does not mean that he was not intelligent. On the contrary, the manner in which he had learned the apothecary's art and the quick way he had acquired his considerable medical skills show that he possessed more than average intelligence. Nevertheless, he still did not hold a diploma in either pharmacy or medicine, so that when Massini left the pharmacy he also left the hospital without a registered pharmacist. This did not sit well with the authorities.

To remedy this, in 1910 Zatti decided to enroll in a correspondence course which would award him the degree of Bachelor of Arts. He sent his application to the Austerlitz Institute conducted by Professor A.C. Dufour in Buenos Aires. He was accepted, and after paying the monthly fee he received in return the written lessons which he studied with all the diligence at his command. This went on for a year, at the end of which the lessons suddenly stopped coming, even though he had kept up his monthly payments. Since, despite all his efforts, he could not even contact Professor Dufour, he asked a Salesian brother in Buenos Aires to find out what the matter was. At the institute, the brother was curtly informed

that it was not the practice of the institute to correspond with the students! Zatti wrote to his provincial in Buenos Aires, but even that produced no results. In the end, Zatti wrote everything off as a loss.

After the prison incident, he became more convinced than ever that he should stand before the authorities (who, at that particular period in the history of Patagonia, were less than favorable to the missionaries) armed with a certificate for competence. A few years later he tried again, this time for the diploma in pharmacy at the government institute in La Plata, and was successful. After obtaining high marks in the examinations he was duly awarded, on May 28, 1917, the diploma of *Idoneo en Farmacia*, which enabled him to practice his profession under the protection of the law.

5

From the Rising of the Sun

Zatti, for heaven's sake, why do you insist on going out in this kind of weather?"

"Because at this moment I haven't any other kind of weather."

"Zatti, why do you go out to them?"

"If I don't go out, do you think that any of the doctors will?"

"Zatti, I'm very sorry we had to call you out on a night like this."

"It's your duty to call me and it's my duty to go."

No matter what the weather or the hour and no matter how far the distance, if Zatti considered the call serious enough—and it often turned out not to be—he would wheel out his bicycle, mount it and, bending his body against the wind and rain, pedal off into the night. It did not matter whether the call came from the rich or the poor, the high or the low, the young or the old. All he saw was that someone needed his help and it was his duty to provide that help.

Payment for his services or for the medicine he supplied was never his concern. Where he thought it was called for, he would not only provide the medicine free of charge but would often leave money to meet the immediate needs of family members of the sick person. His concern

extended even to covering their backs with clothes so that they could face the world decently attired. When it became clear to him that medicines were not what was needed, but that the illness was due to lack of nourishment, he would bring the patient into the consulting room and set him or her down to a solid meal.

Tired out though he would be at the end of a long day, if there was not another bed available he would let the patient use his own bed while he himself slept on a chair, a table or a blanket stretched out on the floor.

In one particular instance he had to insist before he could perform this act of charity. An Indian was brought into the hospital in an emergency when not a bed or cot was at hand. Zatti brought him to his own room and was preparing the bed for him when the Indian took one of the blankets, spread it out on the floor, and lay down on it. He much preferred to sleep on the floor than in a bed. Zatti, however, insisted that he should sleep on the bed, not only for the sake of his health but also to learn how to live with the white man's customs. To settle the argument, he lifted the Indian off the floor and laid him down bodily on the bed. Once on the bed, the Indian looked up at him, smiled, and fell asleep.

Zatti was now pressing down on the pedals and listening to the creaking of his well-used bicycle, as he bent over the handlebars to lessen resistance to the wind and to avoid as much of the downpour as possible. The heavy rain had churned the dirt road into a sea of mud through which he ploughed, slithering now to the right, now to the left, and always finding progress difficult. Despite the discomfort of travelling in that kind of weather, he could not find it in his heart to complain. It had not rained for months, and people looked on this downpour as a godsend, for it would save the harvest, and the welfare of these people depended a great deal on the success of the harvest.

"If only *He* had held it off until I had made this call." This was as much of a complaint as he would allow himself.

He kept his head down, for he did not have to raise it to find what he was looking for. Viedma was as familiar to him as the palm of his hand. By now his hat, his overcoat and his white duster were drenched, and he could feel the knees of his pants cold and clammy against his skin. The front wheel dipped into a puddle, but he quickly righted the bicycle and went on.

"Zatti!"

Although he heard the call he did not look up. He merely waved a hand in greeting.

"Don Zatti!" another voice hailed.

There they go again with their *Don!* This time he did not even raise

his hand. He had no liking to be called Don Zatti. *Don* was used only to address the upper class. He did not belong to the upper class. He was one of the people.

As the rain continued to beat down on him, he was tempted to think that this might be one of those times when he could use a car. But a car would create too much of gap between him and the people. Take now, for instance. The people he was calling on lived on the outskirts of town and on the fringe of society. How could he drive up in a car and hope to be accepted as one of them? And even if, out of their need, they did accept him, he would have humiliated them, he would have hurt them.

The houses ended, and he was now riding through open country where there were no street lamps, but he pressed on against the wind and rain until he saw a single lamp waving to direct him. Heading toward the light, which he saw was held by a man, he came up to what was nothing more than a large hut with a roof made of strips of corrugated iron and flattened kerosene cans. A boy came forward to take his bicycle, and the man guided him into the house, where he helped him take off his drenched overcoat and hat.

A glance around the inside of the hut revealed two large rooms, one of which served as the bedroom and the other as part bedroom and part kitchen. Several children were gazing in awe at the man who had come to save their mother's life.

Smiling and humming to himself, Zatti patted each one on the head. "Look at all these wonderful children!" he said. "And where's Mama?"

The man led him to the bedroom. When the sick woman saw him she half raised herself on the bed, and reaching out took Zatti's hand and kissed it. "God bless you, Don Zatti," she murmured, "for coming out to a poor woman on a night like this! I was afraid that . . ."

"Hush, now," said Zatti. "A drop of rain never killed anyone. My mother used to tell me when I wouldn't go out in the rain, 'You're not made of sugar and you won't melt!'—What's the trouble?"

After a short consultation, Zatti gave her instructions on what she had to do and took a little bottle of pills out of his pocket. "Take one of these in the morning and one at night," he said. "Get a lot of rest, some good food and . . ." Here he stopped, suddenly aware that he was asking the impossible. When he came out of the bedroom he turned to the children. "And you kids, let your mother get some rest. If I hear that anyone of you is giving her trouble—I won't tell you what I'll do to him!"

The man took his coat and helped him into it. When he pressed something into Zatti's hand, Zatti opened his hand and looked for a moment at the money.

"Try to bribe me, eh?" he said.

"I know it's too little . . ." the man began, but Zatti stopped him. Dig-

ging his free hand into his pocket, he drew out some pesos. "Take these," he said, "You need them more than I do." To make sure that the man could not refuse the money, he closed the other's fingers tightly over it.

"God bless you, Don Zatti!" Tears began to well up in the man's eyes.

"Thank you, Don Zatti!" chorused the children as he made for the door.

"No, no, no!" Zatti objected. "Dont say *Don Zatti*. Just Zatti. When you say *Don Zatti* it means . . ."

"Thank you, Don Zatti!" the children chorused once again.

Shaking his head resignedly, he took his bicycle from the boy and throwing his leg over the seat started back on the long road to the hospital.

"Such poverty!" he thought to himself as once again he pedalled through the mud and rain. "Yet there's money in this town. If only the people with the money would let some of it go! As long as I live I'll never understand the rich. Many of them hold on so tightly to their money they won't spend it even on themselves! But why? Money of itself is useless. It has to be put to good use; otherwise, it's as if it didn't exist!"

It was still raining heavily when he reached the one-story yellow building near the center of town. Dismounting, he pulled the knob at the door; he heard a jingle and a shuffling of feet, and the door opened.

"Anything happen while I was away, Joseph?" he asked as he passed through.

"Armando seems worse. Maybe not last the night."

"Let's take a look at him." Without waiting to shed his wet clothes, he set the bicycle against the wall, turned right and entered the men's ward, which held two rows of twenty beds each. At the far end, in the corner bed, as if segregated from the others, lay the dying man. By the light of a handlamp Zatti examined his hands and face, took his pulse and touched his brow.

"Yes," he said. "He does seem to . . ." He did not finish the sentence. "We'll get the doctor to see him in the morning. He was already in bad shape when he came in. I had him anointed and given the Last Rites."

Back in his room, Zatti took off the clothes which had clung cold and damp to his body for the past several hours and laid them over a couple of chairs. Next he jotted down a few notes in the logbook of the hospital and prepared for bed. He had just turned down the sheets when he heard a knock on the door.

"*Ya voy!*" was his immediate and habitual reaction to all such calls. "Coming!"

"Zatti." It was Joseph. "Armando's calling for you. He's going fast."

Without a word, Zatti pulled on his wet pants and coat and followed Joseph, who was leading the way with a lamp. When they reached the bedside of the dying man, Armando turned to Zatti, both eyes half-closed in pain.

“What’s up?” asked Zatti.

Armando’s whispered answer was inaudible.

Zatti took his hand and began to feel for his pulse. When he found it, it was so feeble that he had difficulty registering it. Even as he held the hand, the pulse began to flutter and fade, flutter, fade—and stop. It started up again only to flutter and fade. Then it stopped again, and this time no matter how Zatti searched for it he could not find it. It had stopped forever.

Since the man had never taken his eyes off Zatti, they still remained open. Zatti pressed them closed, began the *De Profundis* for the repose of the dead man’s soul, and drew the sheet over his head. He was well aware that the other men in the ward had their gaze fixed in his direction. Since some of them were seriously ill, they already possessed a natural fear of death, but besides this they also had a superstitious dread of the Dark Angel, and to them a dead body told of his presence in the ward.

“*Buenas noches!*” Zatti called out to them as he left. No one answered.

Zatti returned to his room and once again prepared for bed. He began to feel slightly dizzy and wondered if the dizziness was the result of having overworked himself or of having forgotten to eat his supper. He knelt down by the side of his bed to say a few prayers, but had scarcely rested his elbows on the bed when he heard another knock on the door.

“Zatti!” Joseph again.

“Come in.”

Zatti rose wearily and stood listening to the strange tale Joseph was telling him. The men in the ward could not sleep because of the noises coming from, and the apparitions surrounding, the body of Armando.

“What apparitions and what noises?” asked Zatti impatiently.

Joseph began a recital of what the men said they had seen and heard, but when Zatti protested he told him that they were simply afraid to sleep with the dead man lying beside them.

Zatti thought for a moment. “Very well,” he said. “The morgue is full but even so we’ll remove the body.”

Once again he stood by the side of the dead man. Before making a move, however, he turned to the men who now pretended to be sleeping. “You are Christians, are you not?” he said. “Then how can you be so superstitious and afraid of death?”

Having said this, he wrapped the sheet around Armando’s body, lifted it and threw it over his shoulder. Then he nodded to Joseph to guide him back to his room. Once there, Joseph prepared the spare bed kept for emergencies, and when it was readied Zatti laid the body on top of it and covered it with the sheet.

"Here I shall sleep a temporary sleep," he mused, "while he will sleep the eternal sleep."

"Are you not afraid to have a dead man in your room during the night?" Joseph asked.

"Why should I be afraid of the dead?" he answered. "It's the living I should be afraid of! The dead don't even snore!"

Finally, he bade good night to Joseph and settled himself in bed. It was now two-thirty, and he would have to rise at five o'clock to prepare the altar for Mass. Before he fell asleep, however, his mind wandered briefly over the events of the day.

The shrill ringing of the alarm pierced his sleep as, half in slumber, he stretched out his arm to silence it.

He rose, slid his feet into his boots and switched on the light on the table by his bed. A glance at the clock told him what he already knew, that it was five o'clock. He washed, dressed, donned his white duster and left the room to begin his daily routine. On the way out he scratched his right leg to relieve the itching from eczema which had bothered him for years.

His first chore was to light the fires against the chill and dampness of the ward; he did this on his way to meditation and Mass. At Mass he lit the candles and made sure that everything was in order for the priest, and that there was someone to serve. If there was no one, he took it on himself to serve. When the Mass was over, he began his rounds of the wards.

"Everybody happy to be alive and breathing?" he called out.

"*Si, si*, Don Zatti! Everybody happy to be alive and breathing!"

Again with that *Don*! But at least everybody, as they said, was alive and breathing. This day last week it had not been so, and he had to remove another body from the women's ward. As usual, he had done this by throwing the body over his shoulder and, with its legs dangling behind him, had carried it to the morgue.

After finding out what medicine was needed, he left for the community dining room for breakfast. Here his one exception to the common life was his use of an extra large mug and spoon. He needed these because of his custom of breaking bread into his coffee and eating it with the spoon.

After breakfast he opened up the dispensary to fill the prescriptions. That done, he went to the hall where he had left his bicycle, wheeled it out, and after a glance up at the sky, threw his leg over the crossbar and took off on his daily visits.

Noon found him back at the hospital for lunch, after which he indulged in his one recreation—a game of *boccie*. Here he was never inclined to

be merciful, but would smash into an opponent's *boccie* with gusto. If his calls allowed, he enjoyed forty winks in a chair before setting out on his bicycle for another round of visits. At four he returned for *merienda*, a cup of tea and a crust of bread. The rest of the afternoon was taken up with another look in at the wards and an inspection of the hospital to see if anything had to be corrected or needed repairs.

Spiritual reading for the patients followed, accompanied by a thought on an event of the day or an incident from the life of a saint. He was very familiar with the lives of the saints. After that, for the patients it was supper and retirement for the night; for him, time to attend to his correspondence or to his study of medicine. At eight he had supper with the community and then paid a final visit to the wards. He gave the rest of the day to spiritual reading. Around twelve it was off to bed for a well-earned rest, unless . . .

6

Eternal Optimist

Unfailing good humor and serenity of spirit were characteristic of Zatti. The doctor was about to give an injection to a patient when he pointed to the liquid in the syringe. "That contains millions of tiny dead bodies in suspension," he told Zatti to impress him.

"May they rest in peace!" was Zatti's comment.

While he was bidding goodbye to a patient who had spent some time in the hospital, the patient turned to him.

"Señor Zatti," he said, "thank you for your great kindness. My only regret is that while I was in the hospital I could not meet your wife."

"Neither could I," said Zatti without blinking.

He always kept two clocks in the operating room. One of them told the right time, while the other was an hour slow. A visiting doctor pointed this out to Zatti. "They're telling different times," he remarked.

"Do you think that I'd keep them," was the response, "if they both told the same time?"

Once a year he organized an outing for the hospital staff. He would fill a truck with good things to eat and drink, and they would leave for a spot along the banks of the river. The day was given over to singing and eating and playing *boccie*, and Zatti joined wholeheartedly in every activity. He would also organize pilgrimages to the shrine of Zepherin Namuncurà at nearby Fortin Mercedes. To allow as many as possible of the patients to attend, he would seek the help of all who had transportation

of any kind. He provided food and refreshments for these too, so that while they were doing a little good to their souls, as he put it, they would not lack a little comfort for their bodies.

Those near him observed that he was smiling when the subsidies which solved many of his financial problems arrived on time; and he smiled just the same when they did not. When debts began to pile up he smiled, and when help which had been promised never came, he still managed to smile.

This serenity manifested itself when he had to give orders, some of which were not easy to obey. He never raised his voice, but gave them in a calm and low tone. His demeanor served him well when he had to assist some of the more temperamental doctors in the operating room. Often it was the doctors who were nervous and Zatti who provided a calming influence. He also had his own way of handling those doctors who were given to outbursts of temper.

Once when he left the door of the operating room open, the doctor performing the operation turned on him.

"For the love of God, Zatti," he cried, "close that damned door!"

Zatti closed the door, came back and looked at the doctor. "Doctor," he said with a smile, "if I hadn't left that door open you wouldn't have invoked the holy name of God!"

His composure enabled him to look upon some of the more repulsive cases with equanimity. Even when dealing with dangerously contagious patients, he never showed alarm.

"Aren't you afraid of coming into contact with all those germs?" he was asked.

"Why should I?" he retorted. "My germs are stronger than theirs!"

This tranquility of spirit was invaluable when he had to prepare some of his patients for their last moments on earth. He never concealed the gravity of the situation from the patient. When aides brought in a young man who, in a street fight, had received a fatal stab wound in the groin, Zatti took one look at the wound and shook his head.

"There's no hope of fixing up that one," he concluded. He did what he could to bind up the wound, then set about preparing the young man for death.

When he paid a visit to a woman who was about to die from tuberculosis, he smiled at her.

"Keep up your spirits, Maria," he told her. "When you get to heaven, you lucky girl, pray for all of us. Don't forget a single one!"

When one of his patients complained, "Zatti, I'm in such pain!" he whispered, "Pray that God may lessen it." To another, not overly religious, he said, "Even the birds pray!" To a third: "Listen to the birds in the eucalyptus trees; they're singing the praises of the Lord!"

Once a little boy was brought into the hospital from the interior. Since he had not yet received his First Communion, Zatti began to teach him the necessary catechism. He also gave him the white smock worn by boys on such occasion. Next he brought him to church so that he could receive his First Communion. When the boy returned to the hospital, he complained that he felt very ill.

“Don Zatti,” he said, “I think I’m going to die.”

Accustomed to such situations, Zatti merely nodded. “Very well,” he said. “If you think so, then make the sign of the cross, join your hands, and get ready as, happy and content, you go to heaven. But remember: keep smiling.”

When Zatti said the words, “Keep smiling,” the boy did begin to smile. Precisely at that moment his life left him.

Zatti felt so happy about this that when the doctor arrived he went up to him. “Do you remember that little boy who was sick?” he asked.

“I do,” said the doctor. “What about him?”

“He died with a smile on his lips. Come have a look.”

They went to the bedside of the boy, and the doctor saw that he had indeed died with a smile on his lips.

“I would like to emphasize the inalterable character of Zatti,” a priest wrote. “I have known him for over twenty-five years and have always seen him in good humor and full of good will in performing his duties toward the sick and the unfortunate . . . I had to leave Viedma for several years, and when I came back many things had changed . . . but Zatti continued to be the same Zatti I had known before leaving; that is, always spreading good cheer among the sick, who were now housed in a new and larger building, with operating room and all the conveniences one could expect at that time.”

The source of Zatti’s good humor did not lie merely in a natural disposition to see the cheerful side of things; it was also based on the solid foundation of his religious life.

Early morning—never later than five-thirty—found him at Mass, for which he had already prepared the altar, lit the candles, filled the cruets, and so on.

At Mass his posture was one of reverence. He knelt with his eyes closed, his hands joined before his breast and his head slightly inclined to the left. He assisted at all the practices of piety, to which he added his strong baritone voice, whether in singing, reciting the prayers or reading to the community. Regular confession was a serious matter for him, and he loved to assist at Benediction. “Without the Blessed Sacrament,” was his frequent comment, “what’s left?” Once while he was undergoing tests in a sanatorium in Bahia Blanca, he received a visit from his brother. While they were talking, the bell rang for Benediction. Zatti immediately cut

short the conversation and left his brother in the parlor while he attended the service.

He often read to the sick from the lives of the saints, and at the end of the day he would give them a short talk. All this provides evidence of the strong interior life he led, filled with the love of God and with complete trust in the goodness of divine providence. Whenever he took out his bicycle he would drape the rosary either around his neck or over the handlebars, so that he could say it on his way to the sick. If he did not say the rosary, then he would sing hymns to Our Lady, and he always stopped whatever he was doing when it came time to say the *Angelus*. On arriving at the home of the sick, he would call out, "*Ave Maria, Purissima,*" and during the day he would keep humming to himself hymns to Our Lady. These he invariably sang in his *Reggiano* dialect; his favorite hymn was the one to Our Lady of Lourdes.

A doctor who professed himself an atheist was once assisting at the hospital. Even he was impressed by the sincerity of Zatti's faith. "In front of Zatti," he confessed, "I sometimes find my own disbelief a little shaken. If there are such things as saints on earth, then Zatti is one of them. When I perform an operation and see him holding his rosary, I feel as if the room were suddenly filled with something supernatural."

His love for poverty was a further source of spiritual strength. It kept him detached from material things and helped him see beyond them to what was truly important. It enabled him to be of assistance to the people who surrounded him and who looked to him for guidance and support.

Despite the attempts to offer him gifts, he would accept nothing for himself. On the other hand, he would accept and even beg for what he thought was necessary for the welfare of his patients.

Since he was on call at all hours of the day and night and in all kinds of weather, some influential friends thought they would be doing him a great service if they bought him a car. They had often seen him pedalling his old bicycle held together with bits of wire. Against his better judgment, they succeeded in persuading him to accept a second-hand Dodge. Apart from the trouble the car gave him, what concerned him more was the realization that every time he was driven to the *barrios* of the poor he would see on their faces a mixture of distrust and fear. They were putting him on a level with the rich and did not want to have anything to do with him. That was enough for Zatti. He raffled off the car for the benefit of the hospital.

For the same reason, only with great reluctance would he ride in the car of another doctor. Yet he had no hesitation in accepting rides in the old wood-burning wagons of farmers if they met him walking out to the home of a patient. In his later years, his benefactors tried to force on him another smaller car, but to no avail. Then they tried to persuade him to

accept a motorbike and finally a small motor to attach to his bicycle. The result was the same. Zatti always went back to the bicycle as being more in keeping with the poor man's way of life.

"My bicycle," he often remarked, "never needs gas and never stalls. What more do I want?"

Linked to his love of poverty was his love of humility. It helped him to preserve a humble opinion of himself, against the efforts of well-wishers to build him up both in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world. Once when he had attended a function given in his honor by the town notables, he did not speak except to say a word of thanks, and when it was over he went straight to the hospital kitchen to help with the dishes. Whenever he saw that a room needed cleaning, he would take up the broom and start sweeping. He would not yield the broom to anyone who thought that such a task was beneath Don Zatti.

The purity of his heart was attested to by doctors who were used to the weaknesses of human nature. "Zatti is pure," was their summing up. He never wanted to stay outside the community at night, even when he was visiting his family in Bahia Blanca. While he was entrusted with the most delicate of tasks, in all those years never once was the slightest breath of suspicion raised against him. Despite the fact that he constantly had to treat those to whom coarse language was a habit, his own language never descended to the vulgar.

He always showed great deference toward his superiors. When a newly-ordained priest came to say Mass at the hospital, the attention Zatti paid him was a lesson to the patients. To those who were inclined to criticize priests, he would suggest, "Of priests either speak well or say nothing."

7

Charity is Patient

Zatti's patience with difficult characters was unlimited. Sometimes it was rewarded with success and sometimes not. The following episodes will illustrate this.

There was a woman living at the hospital who had arrived there the year before he did. As an illegitimate child, she had been abandoned by her family. Father Peter Bonacina, "father of the poor," had brought her to Viedma and taken care of her. As the result of a fall, she had been rendered completely mute; the nickname they gave her was *La Muda*. She was now nearly fifty years old, but still a child in thought and behavior. Before Father Bonacina had taken her in, she had wandered so long among the sheep that she had begun to walk like them on all fours; the first thing they had to teach her was to walk upright. In the beginning she refused to dress like the other women, but they finally persuaded her to do so. She loved bright colors, and this often landed her in trouble. Once she ripped the colored borders off several dresses the sisters had made and hid them under an empty kerosene drum she used to sit on.

"Beat her!" suggested one, when she was discovered.

"Tie her up!" suggested another.

Advice like this scandalized Zatti. "Why on earth do you want me to beat the poor creature?" he demanded. "Why should I tie her up? What does she understand of all this?"

When she got too troublesome, his remedy was to put her in the

morgue. This was not a punishment, for she would often retreat to the morgue to find peace away from people who annoyed her.

One day she went to the morgue in time to observe a family preparing a body for burial, and watched as they placed a lovely pair of shoes on the corpse's feet. She waited until the people had gone, then quietly approached the corpse and removed the shoes.

When Zatti entered the morgue he noticed at once that the corpse had no shoes. "Where are the shoes?" he asked the infirmarian.

The infirmarian said he knew nothing about the shoes.

Zatti decided to investigate, but it did not take him long to come to a conclusion. He went off in search of *La Muda* and found her in one of her hiding places just as she was trying on the shoes.

On another occasion, they were missing a pair of brightly-colored rosary beads. Since by now *La Muda's* hiding places were well known to Zatti, he went at once to a barrel of water, at the bottom of which he found the beads. She had waited in the morgue while a man had placed the beads in the hands of his dead wife. He had no sooner gone than *La Muda* had crept in, detached the beads and made off with them.

To those who again insisted that he should punish her, he had one answer. "She has suffered so much already. Why make her suffer more?"

His kindness to *La Muda* was rewarded in a moving and unexpected way.

When Don Bosco, by special disposition of his great admirer, Pope Pius XI, was to be canonized on Easter Sunday, 1934, Zatti was chosen to represent the brothers of Southern Argentina at the canonization.

Massini generously offered to take care of the pharmacy, and Sister Severina volunteered to take over his duties at the hospital. The Workers Social Club elected him as their representative at the canonization of the saint who had shown himself to be a loyal friend of the workers. This organization and other groups and friends saw to it that Zatti got a good send-off.

After a sixteen-day trip he arrived in Italy. He went first to Turin to pray at the tomb of Don Bosco. While in Turin, he made a special trip to the Cottolengo Institute, since his own work was a reflection of the great good that was being done at this haven for the afflicted.

April 1 found him in Saint Peter's Square attending the canonization; on April 2 he was at the reception given by the Holy Father for the Salesians. Zatti wrote to his friends in Viedma to tell them all about it. After a round of festivities, his next visit was to Boretto, his home town. By April 28 he was on board the S.S. Oceania bound for Viedma. Some days later he was home.

When Zatti reached the porch of the hospital, *La Muda* saw him. She ran toward him with her arms outstretched and embraced him. Visibly

struggling to say something, she finally uttered a single sound: "Atti!" It was as close as she could come to pronouncing his name, and all she could do to show him how much she loved him.

Lautaro Montalva had been an officer in the Chilean army, but had turned into a fiery revolutionary whose favorite dress was a pair of greasy, blue overalls. He was tall and thin, and his eyes shot fire. He had fought in the wars against Peru and Bolivia and loved the smell of gunpowder.

One year the town fathers gave Lautaro the task of doing something special to celebrate May 25, National Independence Day. Since it had to be something warlike, he thought that he had the ideal solution. He found an old cannon, readied it for firing and called in a retired sergeant to act as his gunner. With cannon and gunner in tow, he paraded through the town and every now and then stopped in the middle of the street and shouted, "Fire!" Only too happy to do so, the sergeant fired the cannon with a roar which not only scared the people half to death but shattered every window in the neighborhood!

Lautaro had a natural gift for oratory and held the attention of his audience while he railed against every form of authority, including the rich, the government and the Church.

When fortune turned against him, instead of looking for work he grew despondent and began to spend most of his time and all of his money at the local tavern. One evening, while returning home drunk, he fell into a well and broke his leg. Things went from bad to worse until finally he found himself without money, without influence and without friends, but with a large family to provide for.

When Zatti heard of this he went at once to see him. He offered his help, but the anticlerical Lautaro would not hear of it. Zatti persisted, however, paying no attention to the fire which shot from Lautaro's eyes. First he examined the Chilean, and when he had learned what the matter was he went off and returned with the necessary medicines. Next he took care of the man's family.

While Zatti was doing all this, Lautaro had time to think over what was happening. When his former friends and associates—anticlericals all—saw that he was in trouble, they had quickly deserted him. In their stead had appeared Zatti, who had come not only to treat his wounds but even to care for his children. He had never before experienced such generosity, such concern or such sincerity. It was an eye-opener for the old warrior and enemy of the Church. From that moment on he accepted Zatti into his home, and some time later he agreed to take instructions in the faith from him. He told Zatti, however, that before he received baptism he had a duty to perform.

Calling together his former associates—that is, every anarchist, Marxist

and anticlerical in town—with all the power of eloquence still at his command, he astonished them by declaring that he had renounced his old errors and had, instead, embraced Christianity. It was all due, he confessed, to the way he had been treated by Don Zatti. He added that his wife and children would be following him into the Church.

Shortly after baptism, Lautaro was taken to Zatti's hospital in serious condition. Before he passed away, he turned to those around him. "Now that I have been baptized," he told them, "you've no idea how much I want to die."

Sometimes, it must be admitted, Zatti's trust was misplaced. This happened, for instance, when he gave a young man he had befriended fifty pesos to buy a set of inner tubes for his bicycle.

"That's the last you'll see either of him or your money," commented Sister Mary Mendez.

"We shouldn't always think the worst of people," was Zatti's answer.

As the hours went by sister became exultant. "I told you so!" she said. "You'll never see him or your money again."

"We must always hope for the best," said Zatti.

At seven o'clock in the evening, sister and Zatti heard a noise and went to the door of the hospital. They opened it to find the young man standing there, swaying to and fro. "Hi, Zatti!" he said. "Hi, Sister!" He gave each of them a broad smile.

Totally disregarding the comments of sister and the others, Zatti took the young man by the arm and led him to his own room where he put him in his bed. When he returned to the group he was advised to use the same remedies they had suggested for *La Muda*.

"Beat him!"

"Teach him a lesson!"

"Tie him up!"

"Can't you see that all that would be a waste of time?" said Zatti. Meanwhile, he searched the young man's pockets and found only a few of the original fifty pesos.

Next day when the young man had sobered up, Zatti went to see him. "So you put one over on me!" was all he said. "But did you at least buy the tubes?"

The young man shook his head. He was truly sorry, he said, that he had failed Don Zatti. He could only hope that Don Zatti would forgive him.

Zatti's reaction was to take the boy's head in both hands and press it to his heart.

The requests made on Zatti's time, money and good nature were without number and of endless variety, and seemed calculated to make him lose his patience. An immigrant wants him to get his family over

from Italy. He is asked to act as go-between in a family quarrel. He is requested to be a match-maker between a couple who are separated by the Atlantic Ocean. He is asked to accept patients from the Lord-knows-where just because someone in Viedma has recommended them. He is expected to write letters for patients and people who can neither read nor write. A careless servant blows up the boiler and Zatti is expected to smile through it all. He is supposed to exercise the patience of Job with those who are convinced that he is obliged to wait on them hand and foot twenty-four hours a day. He is asked to stand guarantor to the tune of 2,000 pesos for someone who wants to get a job with the postal authorities. Finally, he is even asked to find a pedigreed pig to mate with another pedigreed pig, and to make sure that this pig is of a particular breed with red skin!

Another of his outside tasks was to act as peacemaker, first of all in settling the frequent disputes which arose among the members of his staff, some of whom were extremely sensitive about their status. Since he was also involved in the activities of the Workers Social Club, he was often called in to settle their disagreements as well.

In later years, Zatti was instrumental in resolving a serious dispute between the doctors of Viedma and those of Patagones. This he did by inviting them to an excellent dinner in the dining room of the Salesian school, which, for the record, ended with a photograph of rows of doctors' smiling faces.

Zatti's charity and patience were well demonstrated in his dealings with everyone. They were particularly evident in his relationship with the members of his family. In this he was merely following the example of his model, Don Bosco.

While Don Bosco was studying at the seminary in Turin, he paid regular visits to his mother and brothers in Becchi, twenty miles away. He would start off on foot from Turin early in the morning, stay a few hours with them and then leave for Turin in the afternoon. When he was about to make two of the most important decisions in his life, that is, whether to enter the seminary, and (before he was ordained) whether to join a religious congregation or become a secular priest, he consulted his mother. Great woman that she was, she freed him completely from any obligation he might have to look after her, and when he was established in Turin he invited her to come and work with him. She accepted the offer and passed the last ten years of her life at his side.

Zatti regularly kept in touch by letter with his family, from the day he entered the seminary at Bernal. He remembered their birthdays and name days, and whenever disaster struck he would drop what he was doing at the hospital and hasten to help them. He had just returned from his visit to Rome when he was told that his brother Eliseo was dying. He

decided that it was his duty to assist him and at once made preparations to leave for Bahia Blanca.

Informed that there was no regular train at that time, he took a freight train hauling sheep, and had to travel in a wagon with the shepherds during a trek which took all of Saturday and most of Sunday. Along the way the train was derailed, ninety sheep were killed and Zatti's finger got crushed in the door of the wagon. He arrived in Bahia Blanca just in time for Mass and then hurried in to see his brother. Eliseo went to his Maker, but not before Zatti had prepared him for the journey. After his brother had passed away, he did not wait for the funeral. He felt that his other brothers and sisters at the hospital now had more need of him.

Zatti's mother fell ill in 1946. As soon as he heard the news he sent prescriptions for her, and when told that she wanted some quinces but could not get them in Bahia Blanca, he searched all Viedma until he found some. When his mother's time came to die, he was at her side.

He remembered to send his father greetings, both on his birthday and on the feast of Saint Aloysius, his saint's day. In 1947 the family got together to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their arrival in Argentina, and Zatti insisted that they should begin the celebration with a Mass of Thanksgiving.

His family noted that although he did visit them from time to time, he was always anxious to get back to his patients. Once his duty to his family had been fulfilled, he felt he had to fulfill his other duty to his patients. He was always very pleased when he heard that someone among his relatives wanted to become a religious, priest, nun or doctor. He never interfered in family disputes. He was convinced that rather than help, his intervention could only cause harm. At the very least, he would be expected to take sides.

One hundred of Zatti's letters were addressed to his family, and the rest to various other parties. The total number of letters preserved is well over two hundred, and the fact that we have them is due to his sister Hildegarda, who was careful to collect them. The lengthy gaps in the dates are an indication that many were lost.

Zatti began his practice of letter-writing at Bernal because of the insistence of his family, in particular his mother, that he keep them informed of his progress. Since his level of education was that of a fourth grader, for the first ten years his letters were written in poor Italian, with faulty punctuation, spelling, grammar and syntax. Then he tried his hand at writing in Spanish and later wrote only in that language, with the exception of the letters to his family. Despite the fact that he never mastered either his native Italian or his adopted Spanish, he could be considered a fairly prolific letter-writer.

His handwriting, as in the letters from Bernal, is at first close and small. Later, as if to parallel the development of his character, it changes to a generous and assured hand. In content, the letters are encouraging and cheerful, even when things are not going well; they begin with greetings and always end with a word of advice or counsel, and sometimes even a sermon.

As the years went by, these letters came to be valued so highly that those who loaned them were careful to insist that they be returned.

8

“I Have Compassion on the Multitude”

At fifty years of age, Zatti presented the appearance of a person who paid no more attention to his clothes than was absolutely necessary. His suit was of an inconspicuous color, the jacket unpressed and the pants baggy at the knees. Across the vest he wore a chain to which a large pocket-watch was attached. In later years he wore a pair of elastic-sided boots to make walking easier on his feet, and—for reading purposes only—a pair of glasses perched on the bridge of his nose.

He always seemed to be wearing old clothes. Judging from the way they hung on him, they usually looked as if they had belonged to someone else. On one occasion he put on the suit of a dead man; it was so old and smelly that people complained to him about it. What they were smelling, he told them, was the “odor of sanctity!”

The two items of apparel which seemed to play a permanent part in his life were the full-length white duster he wore while at work, which was most of the day, and a brown felt hat given to him by a dying patient. If it rained while he was riding his bicycle, he would turn the hat around with the brim up to let the rain run off the back. Since the hat fit him, more or less, he always wore it on those occasions when a hat was called

for. That is to say, he wore it whenever he had to go to the bank to borrow money. He said that it gave him an air of respectability in the eyes of the bankers and made him look less of a security risk. Although during his life a great deal of money passed through his hands, no one ever accused him of spending too much on clothes.

As often as not he bore evidence that he had been in the pharmacy—a powder stain on his jacket; or else had been visiting the sick—a strong odor of antiseptics. Because of his large, boney frame and his habit while walking of leaning his head slightly forward and to the left, he seemed taller than his five feet, ten inches. The dark and thinning hair was brushed flat and forward, since that way it required less care.

It was his face, however, which held one's attention; it completely belied the impression created by his clothes. His face possessed good bone structure, with a prominent forehead and deep, penetrating blue eyes; the nose was distinctly Roman, large and aquiline; the upper lip was adorned with a thick, trimmed, dark mustache; the lips were creased in a permanent smile and the entire mouth encircled by a deep furrow.

After conversing with him for a while, one forgot the prosaic impression given by his general appearance. When he spoke his eyes lit up, and as he made some point with a touch of humor, his smile became warm and friendly. After listening attentively to what one had to say, he would raise his head, look directly at the speaker, and in slow, measured terms give his answer or reaction. But whether he spoke or not he left no doubt that he was genuinely concerned about the speaker's problem or at least appreciative of his or her point of view.

Over the years, the facilities at the hospital were considerably expanded. In 1922 several rooms were added and two new floors were raised over the first pavillion. In 1933 an entirely new pavillion was built to house female patients.

It would be unfair to Zatti to describe his knowledge of the art of medicine as being limited to what was required for a diploma. He had studied the practices and methods of the doctors at the hospital for several decades, during which he stored up a wealth of medical knowledge. There were times when the doctors, having given a patient up for lost, would hand him over to Zatti. More than once, Zatti, with his practical know-how, would effect a cure to the amazement of the doctors. It was because of this that the people would often trust Zatti more than they would the doctors.

This did not mean that Zatti would attempt to take the place of the doctors. That happened only in those rare instances where someone would come to him complaining that he had no money and that the doctor had refused to give a prescription unless he could pay for it. Only then would

Zatti supply both the prescription and the medicine. Sad to say, many doctors of that period cared little for the poor; they left that to Zatti. Even when it was clear to him that a doctor had botched an operation, either through carelessness or ineptitude, Zatti neither blamed the doctor nor mentioned it to anyone.

His influence with the sick was noted by a doctor whom he often assisted at operations. This doctor was convinced that Zatti possessed the gift of healing. During his long years of practice at the hospital, he had noticed that when Zatti was present during an operation and was able to play some part in attending to the patient, he or she recovered more quickly. When he brought this up to Zatti, the latter brushed it off, saying that he merely made use of the oldest and surest remedies in the world: *Aria de cantina y sopa de cocina*; that is, good wine and good food!

He never feared contagion. When one considers the fact that for years without number he treated the most infectious diseases, it is remarkable that not once was he infected. Because of this apparent immunity he often went into the operating room or approached patients with contagious diseases without the proper protection. He explained that if he took all the precautions which the doctors had to take, he would not be able to serve half the number of patients who needed his attention.

He was careful, however, never to step outside the bounds of his competence. He rarely performed operations, except for such things as pulling a tooth or lancing a boil, which he did by the hundreds. If he did perform an operation, it was only when a patient was in such poor condition that the doctor would pronounce him beyond hope and turn him over to Zatti, or if it was impossible to get a doctor. Then Zatti would take the responsibility of doing whatever he thought necessary to save the patient's life.

Once, for example, a man was brought into the hospital whose body had been so badly burned that the doctor who examined him shook his head. Then he turned to Zatti. "Do what you like with him," he said. He knew that Zatti always held out hope even after the doctors had given up.

Zatti took him into the hospital, prepared a special salve and covered his body with a thick layer of it. Next he bound him completely in bandages and left him in bed to rest. Ten days later the man's body began to emit a sickening odor.

"I suggest you take off those bandages," the doctor advised.

"Can we wait a little longer?" said Zatti. The doctor did not object. In his dealings with Zatti over the years, he had learned to respect his opinion.

Five days later they did take off the bandages, and the old man's skin came away with them. In its place was a new skin as tender and fresh as a baby's.

“Chalk another up for Zatti!” said the doctor.

Another patient whom the doctors had given up on was a man who had received a severe dagger wound. The doctor who had been called in stuffed the wound with cotton; a second doctor diagnosed the case as hopeless and sent the patient off to Zatti.

When the man was brought in, Zatti stopped the hemorrhage and bound up the wound, first placing a medal of Don Bosco between the bandages; he also saw to it that the man received the Last Rites. A week later one of the doctors visited the hospital and asked how the man had fared, expecting to hear that he had died.

“No, doctor,” said Zatti. “He did not die. We’re still taking care of him.”

“Let’s take a look.”

When they reached the patient, the doctor unwound the bandages and, to his astonishment, saw maggots wriggling about inside the wound. Zatti had put them there. When they were removed the wound was perfectly clean, and a week later the man went home cured.

When one of the sisters had a tooth which was causing her great pain, the superior asked her if she wanted to see a dentist.

“Dentist, nothing!” was the answer. “I want to see Zatti.”

Zatti was called in, and when he had examined the tooth they asked him if he wanted to take her to the infirmary.

“No need.”

“Shall we bring you a chair?”

“No need.”

The others insisted, but before they could even bring up the chair, Zatti had deftly extracted the tooth and relieved sister of her pain.

He had what is called a “clinical eye”; various incidents attest to this. One day a woman came to visit him at the hospital. After the visit she was preparing to leave when Zatti suggested that she remain at the hospital overnight. The woman looked at him in surprise, but when he insisted she agreed to remain. Not long after that she was seized by a severe attack of *angina pectoris*, and a few hours later she passed away. Zatti had read the signs and wanted to be near her when she suffered the attack.

Once the superior of the girls’ school asked Zatti to examine one of the girls because she complained of feeling slightly indisposed. Zatti took one look at her and shook his head.

“This is serious, Sister,” he said. “This swelling points to an infection; she should be sent to the hospital at once.” At the hospital the doctor confirmed that Zatti’s on-the-spot diagnosis had been correct.

On another occasion, a youth was brought in suffering from such great suppurating sores in the hips that Zatti felt he could sink his fist in them.

“I don’t want to die!” he kept screaming. “I don’t want to die!”

Seeing at a glance that, despite the young man’s wish to live, there

was little hope of saving his life, Zatti concentrated on saving his soul. First he prepared him for confession and brought him to church where he received his First Communion. Then, step by step he prepared him for death. When death did come, the young man had so changed his attitude that in his last moments he looked up gratefully at Zatti.

"I'm going to heaven!" he cried, joy written on his face. "I'm going to heaven!"

Zatti was once asked to examine a boy who was thought to be wasting away from tuberculosis. "Bring him to the hospital," Zatti said after a cursory examination. "I think I know what's wrong with him."

When the boy arrived, Zatti set him down to a good meal. "Hunger is your trouble," was his diagnosis. "All you need is one or two injections of soup, meat, vegetables and potatoes." After a few days of this treatment the boy was cured of his wasting disease and returned to his work on the farm.

Father Zacharias Genghini's toes had been infected with gangrene as a result of an advanced case of diabetes. The toes would have to be amputated, but the doctor could not bring himself to do this and kept putting off the operation. One day, while Zatti was visiting Father Genghini and inspecting his feet, one of the toes came away in his hand.

"Why don't you tell me some of your adventures while you were up in the Cordilleras?" he suggested. The priest then began to recount what had happened to him during his missionary labors in the Andes. He was so engrossed in this that he did not notice how Zatti, one by one, had detached the toes from his feet.

When the doctor came to visit his patient, he noticed what Zatti had done. "That Zatti!" he exclaimed. "He has operated like a pro on my patient!"

Doctor Anthony Sussini, who had worked with Zatti for many years and knew him intimately, declared that Zatti was a man who never became accustomed to another's pain. "I have seen him," he said, "laughing and joking in front of the sick in order to cheer them up. But once he found himself alone he would burst into tears. He was extremely sensitive."

"When Zatti saw that he could not help someone who was seriously ill and in pain," said another, "he would weep."

"Don Zatti considered death the logical and natural end of man," said a Salesian who had known him. "Because of this, when he could no longer make use of medical science and when one of his patients came to die, he was not dismayed. This did not prevent him, however, from feeling a deep sorrow; I have seen him weep over some deaths. His sorrow was especially deep when the one who passed away was a fellow Salesian, or when it was one of those good people whose illness had been of the more painful kind."

Zatti's love was even more evident in the way in which he dealt with those who were infected with the more repulsive diseases which afflict the human body.

On one occasion he spent a whole hour washing and disinfecting a man who had been brought in from the hills, his entire body covered with maggots. On seeing the revulsion of the others, Zatti, without the slightest hesitation, took it on himself to perform this act of charity for the unfortunate man. When Zatti had finished cleaning the worms from his body, the man turned to him and in a weak voice thanked him for his kindness. Then he added, "Now my body seems much lighter!"

Patients with gangrenous sores, boils, or wounds with pus were usually left to Zatti, because he had informed the others that he considered these "his predilection."

Those patients who suffered from shameful diseases he treated in private; the hospital staff had orders to send such patients to him. "Now that I have taken care of the outside," he would tell them after treatment, "why don't you go to the priest and he will take care of the inside? Then you'll enjoy perfect health!"

As time went on, Zatti's hospital came to resemble a miniature Cotolengo. In it were collected, especially during the later years, what could be described as the rejects of the other hospitals. They were the very poor, the pariahs of the medical world, whom, for one reason or another, the other places would not or could not accept. In Zatti's hospital charity reigned, not bureaucracy. Moreover, at the hospital, according to the patients themselves, they were treated far better than they were treated elsewhere. Even the food Zatti provided for them was better and more nourishing, since Zatti could rely on supplies of milk, meat and vegetables from the Salesians at the nearby farm. These facts were testified to in letters Zatti received from patients who had spent time in hospitals in Bahia Blanca and Buenos Aires.

His faith shone brightest when he was confronted with those poor patients who were so sick and so far gone that the other hospitals considered it a waste of time to accept them. To him they were all children of the one Father. Zatti accepted them in a way which must have made them love Him.

"Do we have room for the Good Lord who has come to bless our hospital?" he would ask the infirmarian.

The "Good Lord" who would be "blessing the hospital" was some poor and abandoned sick creature who had come to beg for help.

"Do we have a coat or a pair of pants for our Divine Savior?" he would ask another time. "Our Divine Savior" would be represented in the person of some starving, half-naked Indian who had never in his life possessed a decent coat or pair of pants.

For those who suggested that he should not accept every individual who asked for help, he had only one response. "If the Lord sends them to us, how can we send them away? Besides," he would add, "these people bring down the blessings of God on our work."

One of the shortest and most moving passages in the gospel says that "Jesus wept . . ." (Jn 11:35) Elsewhere Jesus says, "I feel sorry for all these people . . ." (Mk 8:2) Saint Vincent de Paul declares, "Be compassionate and you will become a saint." Compassion can be defined as having a feeling of pity for those who suffer. But it is a feeling that must lead to action on behalf of the suffering.

All through his life, Zatti experienced compassion for the unfortunate and for those who suffered, and in this, also, his heart vibrated in harmony with the heart of Jesus.

9

Other-world Economics

Whenever the people at the hospital saw Zatti lay aside his duster, put on his hat and take out his bicycle, they would say, "Zatti has money trouble. He's off to the bank again." This was true. Zatti, for most of his long life, had money troubles. One did not keep such a large institution as the hospital functioning without having to think about money. This was especially so with Zatti, who depended for support mainly on the kindness of people and on the assistance of divine providence. In time, Zatti's debts became proverbial to the people of Viedma.

One of these debts must have caused him more than ordinary anxiety; friends observed him almost in tears trying to extract one more loan from the bank or at least one more extension of credit in order to keep his hospital going. They went immediately to describe his plight to the bishop.

"Zatti will always be Zatti," said the bishop, shaking his head. "Nevertheless, we must do something to help him."

He turned to his vicar. "What funds do we have available?" he asked.

"Only the money we received for subscriptions to the *Review*."

"Take it at once to Zatti. We have to save him."

When he was short of cash, Zatti would sometimes go to his provincial. "Father," he would begin, "why don't you lend some money to God?"

"To God? What do you mean?"

Zatti would then try to persuade him that when he was lending money to him for his charitable purposes he was lending it to God.

He made no bones about requesting loans or offerings from all kinds of people. Neither their religion nor their lack of it nor their condition in life mattered. If he needed help and he thought that someone could help, he had no hesitation in asking. Following the example of Don Bosco, he believed that he was doing the wealthy a favor when he offered them the chance to perform an act of charity. He was also capable of using a little inventiveness at times to obtain what he needed.

On one occasion Zatti needed a certain sum of money to meet an immediate debt, and he knew that the bishop had that much on hand. He also knew that the bishop was not exactly anxious to “lend” him that money. However, he went to the bishop and told him of his shortage of cash. He also mentioned, as if in passing, that he had decided to approach a wealthy but notorious anticlerical for the loan.

“No, no!” objected the bishop. “We cannot allow you to have any dealings with that man. I myself will lend you the money.” With that he handed Zatti a check for the amount.

Someone objected that a sum of money he had just received from a certain party was “tainted.” “Don’t worry,” replied Zatti, “I’ll make very sure that it gets cleaned. Charity is the crucible that will purify it.”

The superiors themselves were often amazed at his ability to extract himself from debts.

“My dear Zatti,” his provincial once wrote to him, “I received your latest letter which is in much the same tenor as the previous one. You amaze me by the way you solve your financial difficulties! Who could ever handle debts the way you can? It is clear that divine providence takes special care of you and of the hospital . . .”

One day his niece met him as he was returning to the hospital without his duster but with his hat on his head. This, she knew, could mean only one thing; he had been out looking for money. He had a happy look on his face.

“What’s new, Uncle?” she asked.

“I’m so full of joy I can hardly talk,” Zatti said.

“What happened?”

“I went out this morning,” he continued, “in the hope of finding someone who’d help me pay off a pressing debt of no less than six thousand pesos. I went to the station with nothing particular in mind, just hoping that something might turn up and, of course, praying that it would. There I met a friend who was as happy as a lark because he was about to leave for Europe on a long vacation. I wished him *bon voyage*, but at the same time I dropped a hint about the trouble I was in. Without another word

he opened up his billfold and handed me . . . six thousand pesos. Look at them!" A delighted Zatti held them up for inspection.

God appeared to be on Zatti's side in other ways. He had taken a certain salesman into the hospital, and when the time came for the salesman to leave, Zatti, aware that he could well afford it, asked him to pay a bill amounting to three hundred pesos. The salesman, aware on his part that the bill came nowhere near covering the expenses of his stay, nevertheless curtly refused and left without offering any recompense whatsoever, either for the care Zatti had given him or for the medicine he had received. Along the way to the hotel, however, misfortune struck. He either lost his wallet or had it stolen. Since without his money he could not go to the hotel, he returned to the hospital, where he had to plead with Zatti to take him back.

When the manager of the newly-opened branch of the National Bank, who did not know Zatti, asked him to declare the extent and value of his holdings as a guarantee against the loan he was asking, Zatti stood for a moment deep in thought.

"My holdings?" he finally repeated. "Among my holdings are forty very sick people who need my help and yours. Isn't one human being worth more than a thousand sheep?" In those parts the number of sheep one owned was a gauge of one's wealth.

At this novel presentation the manager had nothing more to say and extended Zatti the credit he was asking for.

"I don't ask God to give me any money," Zatti often remarked. "All I ask is that He show me where it is."

Zatti always had trouble with the banks for the simple reason that he was forever in their debt and apparently never able to extricate himself.

At one particular time he owed the banks in Viedma and Patagones a total of 21,000 pesos—a considerable sum of money. But the bankers were well aware that client number 226 was no ordinary client. In fact, Doctor Juan Pablo, manager of the Viedma branch of the National Bank, entered the following observation regarding Zatti's bank account: "To deny credit in this case would be to deny the very lifeblood to those who possess nothing, who go to his hospital and receive the best of treatment without fear of being asked for payment of any kind. The administrator may lack a certain responsibility in the conduct of his material affairs, but in place of that he possesses a sense of moral responsibility toward these unfortunate people which is far superior to the kind of responsibility he feels is due to his creditors."

Another reason why Zatti never had enough money was his habit of emptying his pockets to the first person who asked for or seemed to need his help. He was never one to probe too deeply into the merits of these demands on his resources. Because of this he was often the target of criti-

cism by those, some of them confreres, who accused him of “improvident prodigality,” “lack of foresight” and so on.

There were times when even his superiors worried. That was when they saw the debts of the hospital mount up without seeing any indication that Zatti would be able to meet them. In this regard, his provincial once sent him the following letter:

“My dear Zatti . . . I received your letter and I am sure you will understand that I am as worried as yourself about the hospital debts. It is now some years since you first advised me that, with the raising of the subsidy we gave you, you would in a few years have paid off these debts. Instead, I see that they have remained at the same level as before. If I belonged to a province rich enough to allow me to assume those debts for you, I would willingly do so. Unfortunately, our province is suffering hunger. We are doing our best to pay off debts which are choking us. We try to save everywhere and we hope that by praying and confiding in the goodness of God we can pay them. You must try to do the same and not incur any more debts, large or small . . .”

In order to clear up the mystery of how Zatti could keep such an operation as the hospital going without sufficient financial resources, in 1932 the superiors sent him an accountant who was German and traditionally methodical. He lasted only one year before he threw up his hands. In 1941 they sent him another accountant well versed in double entry. This one lasted only half as long. He found it too frustrating not to know where good bookkeeping left off and providence took over.

“Financial crises are due to the fact that people continue to hoard their wealth,” was how Zatti explained his constant shortage. “We have two classes of people, one called the rich and the other called the poor. The former has too much money and the latter too little. Once the poor learn to make do with what they have and the rich learn to use properly what is over and above what they need, then everything will go well. But when the poor scream and the rich squander, everything goes wrong. Money should circulate from one to another so that everyone derives some benefit from it.

“Let me tell you a story. Once in a little town all the leading citizens were in debt. No one dared to go outside the house for fear of meeting a creditor. The owner of the local hotel owed a thousand pesos to the storekeeper, the storekeeper owed a thousand to the chemist, the chemist owed a thousand to the builder, the builder owed a thousand to the doctor, who owed a thousand to the hotel owner. So these people went on hiding from one another, until one day a traveller came to town. He was carrying a thousand pesos which he asked the owner of the hotel to keep for him while he went away about his business.

“Once the traveller had left, the hotel owner began to think about the

thousand pesos he held in safe-keeping. Suddenly he had a bright idea. 'Suppose I pay off the storekeeper with this money,' he said. So he gave the thousand pesos to the storekeeper, who gave them to the chemist, who gave them to the builder, who gave them to the doctor, who gave them to the hotel owner, who put them back in the safe for when the traveller would return. By circulating the one thousand pesos, he and the others had paid off debts amounting to no less than five thousand pesos. It's all a question," Zatti concluded, "of proper circulation."

If Zatti's theories on economics did not impress the local economists, the long list of his accomplishments certainly did. A partial list of these gathered from existing archives include the following:

- 1915 One hundred eighty-nine chronically ill were hospitalized; thousands were attended to in the consulting room; 26,085 pesos were spent, of which 5,580 came from the government, 2,791 from the patients, 2,398 from the consulting room, and 518 from alms. Zatti himself had to find the remaining 14,798 pesos.
- 1928 By this time there were seventy beds in the hospital. During this year 656 patients were admitted free of charge; only 90 paid anything; 11,187 patients were attended to in the consulting room.
- 1931 Zatti received 35,112 pesos but spent 99,542; he had to make up the rest. The number of patients received into the hospital was 1,001; 13,340 out-patients were cared for.
- 1938 A total of 21,000 pesos was owed to both banks.
- 1942 Seventy-five beds in the hospital were full.
- 1943 Received 36,840 pesos (25,000 from the government); spent 63,558 pesos. Zatti had to find the rest.
- 1944 Although the government hospital was now open, Zatti still received 999 in-patients and attended to 13,779 out-patients.
- 1946 Out-patients attended to: 15,000.

Because he was in charge of administration, Zatti had to deal with some of the major medical supply companies. This, of course, meant a lot of paper work, and since Zatti could not afford to employ the personnel capable of handling such paper work, year by year it kept piling up. Even if he had the time, he was not the kind of person for the job. The result was that the records of the hospital were not always kept in the best of order. Zatti, of course, knew where this or that document, this or that receipt was. But nobody else did.

Once a government inspector came to inspect the hospital books in order to verify the use of a subsidy which was based on the number of government patients in the hospital. Zatti simply set in front of him a

huge carton full of accounts payable, bills, and notifications of payments; when opened, it emitted a musty smell mixed with the odors of chloroform and iodine. After rustling through the papers, the government official extracted a few, made a cursory examination, heaved a sigh, put them back again, closed the carton and stood up.

“That’s all,” he said to Zatti, and he left never to return.

If Zatti often received from the large companies free supplies of alcohol, gauze, bandages and other medicines, he was equally generous to the local clinics and pharmacies when their supplies ran short or an emergency came up. He was also generous with the sisters and the Salesians when they asked for medicines. Requests often came from places and people he had never heard of, as when the Fathers of the Divine Word asked him for some medical supplies for their sisters who had been expelled from China. All he had to know was what they wanted and how much. If he could give anyone what was needed, he did so without the slightest indication that he expected anything in return.

He would receive letters from former patients who found themselves in need of money, medicine or both. For these, too, Zatti opened both his heart and his purse.

Did he ever ask for bills to be paid? Sometimes. Generally speaking, when one of his patients stayed at the hospital over an extended period of time, he would present a bill. But it would be so small that it was clear that it did not cover even a fraction of the cost. If the bill was not paid, he never pressed. Indeed, after his death many bills were found which he had prepared but had never sent.

It was all proof, if proof were needed, that in Zatti’s mind money was not important. To some of his critics he seemed overly generous, but this was not so. He simply believed that money was only as good as the good it did. If it did no good, especially to those in need, then it was worse than useless; to possess it could even be sinful. The root of all evil planted in the garden of Zatti put forth only good fruit.

In company with many of the saints, Zatti seems to have lacked what we might consider proper concern in the handling of money. On closer examination, however, one discovers that it was not lack of concern or anything similar. The simple truth is that, like Don Bosco and other saints, he possessed a far greater degree of trust in divine providence than most of us.

In handling projects requiring large sums of money, Don Bosco’s guiding principle was: “If the project is for the good of souls, spend all you have on it and even borrow money for it. Divine providence will come to your aid. But if it is not for the good of souls then do not spend a dime on it, for providence will never help you.” Moreover, Don Bosco, despite all the money which passed through his hands, never spent any of it on

himself. He would not spend even the few cents he had for a pair of shoes. He preferred to give the money to a poor woman he met who asked him for alms.

In all this, Zatti followed the example of his spiritual father. He often spent all the money he had and went into debt to finance projects which he was convinced were for the good of souls. As for spending money on himself, even the clothes he wore, for the most part, were given him by those who were leaving the hospital or else were leaving this world.

Zatti simply followed the admonition of Our Lord, who said: "Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." (Mk 10:21)

10

Changing Times

History was on the move, Argentina was growing, and the Church was growing with it. Several new dioceses were created in 1934 in what were up to then considered mission territories. One of them was the diocese of Viedma; its bishop was Bishop Nicholas Esandi, a native of Bahia Blanca and a Salesian.

At first the new bishop and his curia had their residence in the old school which had belonged to the Salesian sisters, but neither the building nor the location was suited to such a purpose. The building was so old that it would have been pointless to spend money trying to adapt it.

The creation of the new diocese also brought up the delicate question of the division of property between the Salesian Congregation and the diocese, for the latter was being established in territory which up to then had been a Salesian mission. In 1936, Father Peter Berruti, prefect general of the Salesians, arrived in Viedma to discuss the matter with the bishop. As was to be expected, the proceedings went along smoothly and the division was accomplished with a minimum of discord.

The decisions taken at these meetings, however, were to have a profound effect on the future of the hospital. Since its beginning in the stable in 1889, it had developed over the years; in 1912 and 1913 new buildings had been raised, and in 1922 a new wing had been added. The years 1913-1923, while Father Louis Pedemonte was provincial, could be considered the golden age of the hospital. He and Zatti got along well together and between them had outlined an ambitious future for the hospital. Unfor-

tunately, when he left to take up his new assignment outside Argentina, those plans were abandoned because they did not fit in with the ideas of his successor. But the hospital still functioned well and Zatti was able to continue his healing mission.

Nevertheless, the land on which the hospital stood was land which, it had now been decided, was to be given to the bishop. This was considered the most suitable site in Viedma on which to erect the bishop's new residence. It was also thought that the center of a growing Viedma was no longer a suitable location for a hospital. People complained that the sight of the invalids sunning themselves in the piazza did little to enhance the image of what was now the capital of the Province of Rio Negro.

Since, according to law in Argentina, it was the government's responsibility to provide for the Church's needs as far as buildings were concerned, the government sent architects to inspect the site and draw up plans for the residence. That done, they informed the bishop, who in turn informed the Salesian provincial, whose sad duty it was to inform Zatti that the government had decided that the land on which the hospital stood would have to be cleared to make way for the bishop's residence.

Moreover, given the growing importance of the region and the increase in population, the government had also decided to build a regional hospital in Viedma to provide for the needs of the people.

On being informed of these developments, an anguished Zatti could not restrain his tears. For a long time he prayed and suffered in silence. Finally, he put his thoughts on paper and wrote a letter to the provincial. The provincial lost no time before replying to Zatti's letter, well aware that while he might be dealing with an excellent religious, he was also dealing with a man who was suffering intensely.

"Esteemed and well remembered Don Zatti," he wrote on December 12, 1941, "I have received your letter which was evidently written more with the heart than with the pen. You have opened up a heart dedicated to the charitable and self-sacrificing mission which for years you have carried on in this hospital. It is quite understandable that you should feel no little pain at the approach of the time when, given the circumstances, this hospital should give place to the government hospital.

"Try to remember that in this hospital of Saint Joseph which is partly you, if not indeed entirely you, you have not sacrificed yourself in vain for forty years of helping the suffering and the unfortunate. I do not doubt that the Good Lord who has given you the strength and the courage to accept such prolonged sacrifices will also give you the strength and the courage to accept this obedience.

"I shall listen carefully to the project which you have suggested for paying off the hospital debts, a project which you evidently consider satisfactory. What

a pity you did not put it into action long before this! You did assure me several times that the debts would be liquidated in two years, but they are still outstanding. I do not know how much is involved, since you have not sent me the accounts of the previous years, but after studying the proposal of Doctor Herostoguy, the council will make its decision. In the meantime, I beg of you as a good Salesian not to lose the merit of obedience."

In the meantime, the engineers began demolishing the hospital while Zatti hoped and prayed for a miracle. The only miracle which occurred was that of his obedience to the wishes of his superior.

"I saw him cry like a baby," said one who observed Zatti during those difficult days. "While men went about tearing down the buildings, the patients were still living inside, and Zatti had no idea what to do with them or where to put them."

The only time he openly reacted was when a local busybody cornered him. "Don Zatti," he began, "do you know what they are saying about you and the hospital?"

"No," responded Zatti. "I'm not interested, either."

"They say that you yourself are closing it down because it went bankrupt."

On hearing this, Zatti ground his teeth, clenched his fists and emitted a groan. His face reddened as he lifted his arms to heaven. "Please!" he cried. "Don't make me talk! Don't make me talk!"

Zatti's tormentor later remarked that he had never before seen him in such an angry mood. He had never imagined that such an outwardly peaceful and serene character could possess the strong emotions which he had seen Zatti exhibit that day. Once Zatti had expressed himself, however, he withdrew to be alone with his sorrow.

When the decision had been made to knock down the hospital, it had also been decided that provision would be made for the patients. Zatti was informed that he could use some of the buildings and land belonging to the Salesian Agricultural School, which stood less than a mile from the hospital.

Since there was nothing but bare walls waiting for him at the Agricultural School, Zatti hoped that the authorities would at least let him take away from the hospital the material for which they no longer had use, such as bathtubs, lighting fixtures, window blinds and so on. He was quickly disillusioned. Everything had to be turned over to the government. The workers took away whatever could be detached from the buildings before they knocked down the walls.

A further disappointment came in the form of an order from his superiors: Do not accept any more patients. More than anything else, this order came closest to breaking Zatti's heart. His policy at the hospital had always been one of complete availability to all who needed his care.

It did not matter who would not accept them or who had sent them away; it did not matter if they could not pay. If they needed medical care and attention, Zatti welcomed them with open arms. As far as he was concerned, they had been sent to him by providence.

Consequently, when he received this order he could only shake his head in despair. "And suppose it's Jesus himself," he said, "who asks to be admitted?"

This supposition was enough to make the superiors change their minds. They did insist, however, that he should use more discretion.

Once the order had been given to tear down everything, then everything had to be torn down. If that meant removing the roofs which sheltered the sick, then the roofs had to go. If it meant trampling down the garden which had delighted the sick during convalescence and churning the roses, the lilies and all the other flowers into the soil, then that, too, had to be done. And if all this was extremely painful to witness on the part of the patients and the personnel, how much more painful must it have been for Zatti! Not many would have accepted so much without some sort of protest, if not, indeed, with open rebellion. But Zatti accepted it all in silence, with tears in his eyes.

All the carts and cars that Zatti could muster were driven to the Agricultural School, to carry the sick, the equipment, the beds and furniture and everything else that could be taken away. Since the transfer did not happen all at once, Zatti had to watch as they emptied one room after another to make way for the levellers. What they could not take away for the moment they stored in the place which up to that time Zatti had held most sacred—the operating room. To have gone to such trouble and expense to build what was one of the finest operating rooms in the region and then to see it turned into a common storeroom!

There were many around Zatti who saw in all this an attack on his character and even on his apostolate, and these were anxious for him to do something to defend himself and his life's work. Zatti refused. He even supported these acts of his superiors in public and would allow no one to take action against them in his defense.

When they began to move out of the hospital, the question arose: What should be moved first, the furniture or the patients? Zatti decided for the patients. He also determined that he would be the last to leave the hospital. When the truck carrying the first of the patients left the building, the school band was there to give it a rousing send-off. And when Zatti arrived with the last load at the Agricultural School, he was welcomed by a burst of fireworks. In the meantime, the people of the town looked on, aware that they were witnessing the end of an institution which for forty years had been dedicated to their health and well-being.

Since the accommodations at the school were too small to hold all

the patients, Zatti had to find places for some of them outside the school. He lodged five patients in a house belonging to the prisons until proper accommodations could be found for them. He was also obliged to rent two other houses until he could adapt a wing of the school to house them.

This meant that in order to take care of those living outside the Agricultural School, Zatti had to visit them regularly in all kinds of weather, and, if they needed it, at all times of the day or night. Fortunately, the men and women who helped him run the hospital remained loyal to him even at the cost of great personal sacrifice. In one house, the infirmarian and the cook had to sleep in the kitchen. On the nights when it rained heavily, the rain penetrated the roof so copiously that the infirmarian had to sleep with an umbrella over her head, while the cook slept in her raincoat!

Finally the move was completed and the patients began to adjust to their new home. The first thing they did was to plant a garden with flowers—signs of new hope. Within two years, Zatti had changed the school buildings into a regular hospital surrounded by a kitchen garden, with fruit and ornamental trees. In a letter to his sister Hildegarda, Zatti told her, “When they knocked down the hospital to make way for the bishop’s residence, we moved, body and soul, to the Agricultural School. Here we live in an earthly paradise, and when we have finished the improvements we have planned, which are soon to be completed, you will not find another hospital or sanatorium better equipped than ours!”

When the Salesians offered Zatti part of their Agricultural School and even provided his patients with much of their food, they were continuing a tradition carried on from the earliest days of the hospital’s history. They had supported the work of the hospital ever since that night when the four brothers had brought the drunken painter to the stable. Among the Salesians who were always ready to help when the need arose, these merit special mention: Brothers Francis Brioschi, August Rebola and Francis Bielawski, who until he died was Zatti’s right-hand man. When things were not going well, Zatti knew that he could always find assistance and encouragement in his community.

From the very first, too, the Salesian sisters had played their part in this glorious enterprise. Since that moment when Sister Eugenia Galli had nervously waited for the arrival of her first patient, wondering how she would handle such an unaccustomed task, the sisters had rendered Trojan service. Sister Eugenia was the forerunner of a long line of sisters who, like Zatti, saw Christ in the person of the poor and the afflicted. These included Sisters Annunciata Tolomei, Anna Panzica, Maria Graña, Maria Mendez and finally Sister Severina Teghile, who herself served the poor for more than forty years and was Zatti’s most faithful helper. When she died he wept unashamedly.

Among the doctors who represented the hospital before the authori-

ties were several Christian gentlemen whose lives stood out in contrast to the lives of many of their medical associates. Among these were Doctor Richard Spurr, who was the first of the line and was succeeded by Doctor Francisco Pietrafaccia, who, incidentally, died in Zatti's bed, and Doctor Anthony G. Sussini.

One of Zatti's outstanding traits was his gift for enlisting volunteers to work with him. Still more amazing was his ability to form what amounted to a religious association out of a group of young women who had dedicated their lives to working in the hospital with no other recompense than that of an eternal reward.

Aware of all this, Zatti sensed that when he died no one else would be able to gather together or hold for long such a splendid body of cooperators, and that, in consequence, the hospital might not be able to carry on. This is perhaps why he once confessed to Doctor Sussini, "Before I die, I should like to close the hospital."

By 1943 the hospital was well established in its new surroundings, and Zatti was happy in the knowledge that he could still carry on the good work that he was doing for the sick and the poor.

Time marches on, nevertheless, and by 1945 the new government hospital was already accepting patients who, incidentally, were being cared for by the Salesian sisters. The sick of the region were now being taken to that hospital unless they insisted on being taken to the hospital run by Zatti. On his part, Zatti was a frequent visitor to the wards of the government hospital and willingly lent his services and gave his advice when it was asked for.

By the year 1950 only ten male and twenty female patients were being cared for at his hospital, all of them of an advanced age. This was as much as Zatti could handle, since he himself had reached the biblical quota of three score and ten.

The advancing years, together with the sacrifices he had made and the laborious life he had led, had drained him of his former energy and drive. Still, he was happy with the way things were going. His only concern, after all, was and always had been to see that the sick and the poor were taken care of.

11

Eventide

*E*ver since he had been cured of tuberculosis, Zatti had enjoyed good health and had suffered from nothing more serious than a touch of dry eczema on his right leg. This caused only a slight itch and presented no danger to his health.

On July 19, 1950, the water tank over the pavillion sprung a leak, lowering the pressure and allowing water to drip to the floor. It was something which needed immediate attention. Since at the moment there was no one at the hospital who could repair the damage, Zatti decided to take care of it. Outside it was raining heavily and, at that time of the year, bitterly cold.

"Be careful!" he was warned. "That rain is making things slippery."

"A little water will only cool my head," was Zatti's response.

Placing a ladder against the wall, he began to climb up to the tank. As he was climbing, his right foot slipped through one of the rungs and he fell backward, pulling the ladder down on top of him. The noise of the fall brought the servants running, and when they arrived on the scene they found Zatti lying on the ground, unconscious. While they were looking for help, he slowly regained consciousness, sat up and stared about him. "It's nothing," was all he said.

He was brought inside, where the doctor examined him and found that in the fall he had injured his head and his leg. "You'd better go to bed at once," was the doctor's advice.

"What do you mean, Doctor?" objected Zatti. "*Me* go to bed?"

He could not accept the idea that he who had sent so many others to bed and taken care of them was now to be given the same treatment. Nevertheless, the doctor's orders had to be obeyed and Zatti was brought to bed, where he remained in a semiconscious state until late that evening. Only then did he fully regain consciousness. When they brought him something to eat, he shook his head. "You don't get an appetite in bed," was his comment. When questioned as to exactly what had happened, all he could remember was putting his foot on the ladder and nothing more.

He stayed in bed for the next three days, then decided that he was in good enough shape to rise. When he did so he discovered that his head was all right and so was his leg, but he felt a sharp pain in his left side. The best treatment for that was to procure a broad band of cloth several yards long and bind it tightly around his waist. Once he had adjusted it, he declared that he now felt as right as rain. His next move was to go to church and thank God for saving his life. To get there, however, he still had to keep close to the wall for support.

When word of the accident got around, Zatti was visited by a host of people anxious to know how he felt and promising to pray for his recovery.

"I'm as snug as a bug in a rug," was his answer to their inquiries.

By the end of the month he had recovered enough to take his bicycle out for a short ride, and a month after that he was able to rejoin his community. But he had not fully recovered; he still experienced some difficulty in doing his regular rounds. Also, those close to him noticed that his color, normally a healthy tone, now showed a yellow tinge.

"Why do you have that yellow on your face?" he was asked by some visiting girls.

"Don't you girls paint your face?" was his answer. "So do I. Only I paint myself a different color. Besides, a good lemon isn't ripe until it has turned yellow. Come back in six months and you'll see how well I look."

Given his experience with the treatment of the many illnesses of the body, Zatti was slowly becoming aware of the serious nature of his own illness. When the infirmarian prepared to give him an injection, she remarked, quoting his own words, "For the love of the Lord, you must now receive this injection."

"And you hope to cure me with an injection!" was all he said.

Next day she returned to give him another injection. "Señorita," he suddenly inquired, "what did your father die of?"

"Cancer," she replied.

"I see," he said, smiling to cover the pain.

With the coming of summer, several medical students and professors from the universities arrived in Viedma for the vacation. Among these were two old friends, Doctor Romulo Guidi and Professor N. Thompson.

Both of them thought a great deal of Zatti, and it upset them to see him in such a state.

"In a short while you'll receive a letter from your mama," he told Doctor Guidi, "and it will say 'Zatti is dead.' Then be good enough to say an Our Father for me."

Around this time a cancerous growth was discovered in his pancreas, and its effects could clearly be seen. To find out what was wrong with him, all he had to do was look in the mirror. At times the thought of what was happening to him brought tears to his eyes. But those tears were not shed for himself. He was thinking of what would happen to the hospital when he was gone. Those dependent on him were thinking the same thing, and they grew more anxious than ever when they saw his countenance becoming increasingly yellow.

"What will happen to us," they kept asking one another, "if Zatti dies?"

Zatti assured them, however, that they had nothing to fear. They would be well taken care of by the Salesians.

"How's it going, Zatti?" the doctor would ask.

"Going up, Doctor," Zatti would answer, raising his eyes to heaven.

Despite the pain, he never once asked for a painkiller. Each time they gave him an injection for the pain, he objected. "Can't you understand," he told them, "that suffering is the only thing of any value that I have left? If I lose that, what's left for me?"

When he did take the injections it was more to please the doctors than it was to spare himself pain. One thing that seemed to worry him was the possibility that the provincial might send him for treatment to Buenos Aires. "As if you didn't die in Buenos Aires the same as anywhere else!" was his comment. He was afraid that he might die there and not in Viedma.

If he obtained the grace of not being sent to Buenos Aires, he still had to go to Bahia Blanca on the orders of the provincial, who hoped that the doctors there might be able to do more than they could in Viedma to save his life.

In January of 1951 he entered the *Sanatorium and Maternity Hospital of the South*, where the doctors subjected him to a thorough examination. At the end of it, they could only shake their heads. This did not greatly affect Zatti, for he already knew what their verdict would be. When they told him that they had found a tumor in the pancreas, he smiled and thanked them, then went to visit his family and the Salesians in Bahia Blanca. While he was there his niece, Sister Mariquita, came to see him.

"Uncle dear," she said at the end of the visit, "when you go to heaven, put me in your pocket and take me with you."

"If I take you," he replied, "I'll do what the eagle did with the tortoise who wanted to fly with him. I'll drop you to the ground where you'll crack

up. You'll get to heaven, all right," he added, "but it won't be due to anyone's efforts but your own."

On January 13 he was back in Viedma; he arrived at the hospital while they were making a novena for his recovery. He tried to start to work again but was not able. Yet he appealed to the doctor to at least let him leave his room.

"What's the use of staying in bed?" he objected. "You and I know I'll never get better, so I might as well do some good while I can."

As evidence of the progress of the disease appeared on his face, he remarked to the doctor, "You see how ripe I'm getting."

"Don Zatti," said a visiting confrere, "you've changed color. Are you turning into a Japanese?"

"No," replied Zatti, "up to now I've been only a plain sparrow. Now I'm turning into a beautiful canary!"

Letters came in from different parts of the country, from the poor people he had helped in their hour of need, and from prominent people who had helped him while they had been living in Viedma.

What remained of his strength was fast giving out, and on February 19 he asked for the Last Rites. The director, however, thought that these should be deferred for a while. (In those days the Last Rites were given only at the imminent approach of death.) On February 27, at nine o'clock in the morning, the bell tolled and all those in the hospital who could walk formed a procession to accompany the Blessed Sacrament to Zatti's room. As the priest gave him the Last Rites, he answered the responses, in complete possession of his faculties, and renewed both his baptismal promises and his religious vows. He thanked God and the superiors for having received him into the congregation, for his forty-nine years as a religious and for being able to die a Salesian. He also thanked those who had come to assist him at this moment. Many of the people could not contain their emotions, and when Zatti tried to console them they burst into tears.

A week before this, he had surprised everyone by writing out prescriptions for the medicines he should be given for the coming week. These were measured out to last until March 14, the day before he died. A few days earlier, he had noticed the arrival of Angelo Casella, the local undertaker, who had come to drive some of the sisters into town.

"Don't be in such a hurry, Angelo!" he called out. "There's still time before I go!"

He now insisted that those in charge should make certain that he was dead so that he would not be buried alive. He also told them what to do in case his body gave off unpleasant odors.

When his brother Erminio and his cousin Nino Vecchio arrived, he recognized them and talked with them for a while.

“Fifty years ago I came here to prepare myself for death,” he told them. “And now that the moment has come, what more do I want? All my life I have been preparing for this.”

He remained conscious until eleven in the evening, and when those around the bed began to pray that he might pass away in peace, he shook his head to indicate that his hour had not yet come. He was right, for it was only at six the following morning that he entered into his agony, and at six-thirty, disturbed neither by death rattle nor by spasm, he passed away.

Doctor Anthony G. Sussini certifies that Artemis Zatti, 70 years of age, domiciled in Viedma on Gallardo Street, son of Louis and Albina Zatti, naturalized Argentine, died from failure of the liver on ... in Saint Joseph's Hospital, which he states after having assisted at his death.

The above death certificate was written not by Doctor Sussini but by Zatti himself. Such was the character of the man. He was so well prepared for and had so little fear of death that when it came it held no terrors for him.

Yet if he was not disturbed by his death, many others were. The closer people had lived to him, the more they were affected. A cloud of sadness descended over the Agricultural School and the hospital. The sick above all felt the loss deeply, not only because they had lost their beloved Zatti, their benefactor and protector, but also because, with the death of Zatti, they feared for their future. This was despite assurances to the contrary by the Salesians.

When the undertaker asked the director what sort of funeral he wanted for Zatti, he replied, “The funeral of the poor.” That was the only kind of funeral the Salesians could afford, even for one of their most honored sons. On March 16, the body was laid in a coffin bare of adornment and brought to the Church of Saint Francis de Sales. The chapel of former bishop John Cagliero was used as the chapel of repose; it quickly became the mecca of all who were anxious to pay their last respects to Zatti. But when the other undertakers saw the kind of coffin which had been used, they protested and, as a sign of their love and respect, persuaded the director to accept the gift of a more expensive coffin and a more dignified style of funeral.

There was a continual stream of mourners composed of the healthy and the sick, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, the high-class and the lowly.

“I have never in all my life seen so many flowers at the funeral of anyone, no matter how prominent,” was the comment of one witness.

Another impression observers received was that, even in their sorrow, the people seemed to be assisting not so much at a funeral as at a kind

of triumph. Zatti, who had never accepted anything for himself in life, in death was being offered everything. In the words of one mourner, "It was the most important manifestation of affection and homage Viedma has ever given to anyone."

Among the mourners were a farmer carrying a basket of wild flowers which he placed reverently on the coffin, a little girl with a bunch of marigolds, and an old woman who approached the coffin to offer a silent prayer. Then it was a group of children from the school, still wearing their white aprons; these were the children of fathers and mothers for whom Zatti had sacrificed so much. After that it was a man whose life Zatti had saved and who, because of the care Zatti had taken of him, had outlived his benefactor.

"I thought Don Zatti would never die," he said sorrowfully. Then he added, "Men like him should never die!"

The Salesian provincial said the Mass in a cathedral filled with the largest crowd it had ever seen, who raised their voices to mourn their loss.¹ The city fathers had declared a day of mourning, and the government offices, banks and stores were closed in a final gesture of respect for this great benefactor of their community. The Church was well represented in the person of the vicar-capitular, and the civil authorities in the persons of the chief of police and the president of the council.

The funeral took place in the worst of weather, with the Patagonian winds intensifying the bitter winter cold, yet this did not in the least deter the crowd from following the cortege to the cemetery. Many people, anxious to participate to the fullest, placed themselves between the authorities and the hearse.

The procession halted in front of the Salesian mausoleum to hear the praises of Zatti being proclaimed by the leading members of the community. Everyone agreed that, although Zatti's body might descend into the tomb, his spirit would live on as an inspiration to the people. In the eulogies, the parable of the Good Samaritan was often referred to, with much truth.

"The burial of the remains of Don Artemis Zatti was the most important demonstration which has ever been witnessed in either Viedma or Patagones," wrote the newspaper, *La Nueva Era*, of March 24, 1951.

So great was the desire on the part of the people to pay their last

1 This cathedral holds the remains of three eminent Salesian prelates whose tombs are marked on the floor with their individual coats-of-arms. They are John Cardinal Cagliero, the first bishop of the Sec of Viedma, whose body was brought back from Italy at the request of the people and the government of Argentina; and his two immediate successors, Bishop Nicholas Esandi and Bishop Joseph Borgatti.

respects to Zatti that the authorities decided not to lower the coffin immediately. Instead, it was allowed to remain on view in the mausoleum until everyone could pay his or her final act of homage to the man “who should never have died.” This was the sentiment expressed by *La Nueva Era* on behalf of the people of Viedma.

After Zatti’s death, no more patients were accepted at the hospital. Those who remained were cared for by the infirmarian Maria Denieli, an associate of Zatti. When the last of these died, the hospital closed its doors forever.

12

The Hundredfold

With most local heroes, fame lasts only for a time before the memory fades and the person is forgotten. Not so with Zatti. He had so entered the lives of the people, had so endeared himself to them, that they were determined not to let the memory of all that he had done for them, of all the sacrifices he had made for them, of the Christlike example of living and loving he had shown them, fade away and die.

To keep the memory of Zatti alive, a committee was immediately formed; the first thing the members decided was to have an anniversary Mass said every year. Other committees followed, whose purpose was to insure that his memory would be preserved in practical ways. Their efforts were rewarded when one of the main thoroughfares in Viedma was named after him, and a statue of him, possessing great dignity and significance, was raised in front of a new and modern hospital also named in his honor.

Because of his growing popularity and the increasing devotion to him, the Salesian brothers of South America, through their regional, national and international congresses, appealed to the hierarchy of Latin America on April 10, 1974, and on October 6 of that year to the major superiors of the Salesian Congregation, to study the possibility of introducing the cause of beatification and canonization of Artemis Zatti. Cardinals Edward Pironio and Raul Franc and the Apostolic Nuncio of Argentina, Archbishop

Pio Laghi, together with the Conference of the Bishops of Argentina, unani-
mously requested the Holy See to consider the cause.

As a result, a preliminary investigation was begun on December 2, 1976 in Viedma, under the presidency of Bishop Miguel A. Aleman. On June 1, 1979, Pope John Paul II introduced the cause of beatification and canonization. On March 22, 1980, in the name of the Holy See, Bishop Stephen Hesayne of Viedma performed the obligatory ceremony of recog-
nition of the remains; he opened the process on that day and closed it on May 21, 1982. The findings of these proceedings were sent to Rome to be studied by the appropriate Sacred Congregation. Sixty witnesses had been interviewed who provided the commission with six thousand pages of testimony.

On December 13, 1981, the remains of Zatti were exhumed and in the presence of Church and civil authorities and a gathering of the faith-
ful were placed in a niche at the entrance of the Church of Saint John Bosco in Viedma, on the site formerly occupied by the hospital.

Those who love him await the decision of the Church. To obtain the assistance of the faithful in hastening that decision, the following prayer was composed:

Dear Jesus:

You called Don Zatti, Salesian brother, to serve you in the person of the poor and the needy.

You gave him the strength to offer himself joyfully and without reserve to his sick brethren.

You made him a just man who knew how to live your gospel faithfully in daily toil and hidden sacrifice.

Grant us the joy of seeing him shine among your saints in heaven and of giving us the testimony of your light.

We also beg of You, through his intercession, the grace of . . . (Here ask for the favor you need) for your glory and that of your faithful servant, Don Zatti. Amen.

Artemis Zatti was a brother of the Salesian Congregation, and his canonization will mean that this genial form of religious life has been given the highest seal of heaven. It will also present Zatti to the world as a model of the Salesian brother according to the mind of Saint John Bosco, and an inspiration, for generations to come, to young men and women blessed with high ideals.

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