What Artemides Zatti says to a young person today

Testimonies of young people from ILE on Saint Artemides Zatti

Simone:

There is a phrase that continues to echo within me since I heard about Artemides Zatti, and that has completely reversed my perspective and outlook on my life: Artemides was a man who had “forgotten about himself”. But how do you forget yourself? How is it possible to claim to arrive at happiness by forgetting one’s own person, one’s own self? Doesn’t my happiness have to start from the search for myself? Who did I graduate for? For whom did I sweat and struggle with my degree? Well, I did it to have an identity in this society, to be recognised, to be seen. Simply put, I did it for myself. Yet, here I am, still wondering who I am and for whom I am. Looking only to myself, I ended up getting lost. Artemides shouts at me with his life that this perspective must be changed. The spotlight needs to be shifted. “You see, with happiness, each one carries it within themselves.” This is how Zatti answered a doctor who asked him about happiness. With this answer he reveals in a disarming way how useless is this continuous pursuit to which we young people often submit ourselves to reach one goal after another, claiming to fill the thirst for love that grips us with something external, that does not belong to us. Diploma, degree, work, home and so on? I thought that along the path of seeking my vocation, the centre was me. Deep down, that was my belief. And instead we are fooled, we get caught up, we get lost. From the time of his illness to his total gift of himself for the sick, Artemides always and only put Christ at the centre, completely forgetting himself, in fact for me, Artemides was the living proof that only by giving ourselves completely without compromise, letting ourselves be consumed by those placed along our path, can we reach happiness, true happiness.

Emanuele:

The most beautiful side of Artemides Zatti, I think, is his simple but authentically lived faith. From what I have been able to know of him, it seems to me that his relationship with God was more through gestures than speeches, more from his hands and feet than from his mouth, allowing him to even endure times of serious difficulty such as illness, the management of the hospital, the numerous visits to the sick, always with the most vivid hope in the goodness of God. I believe, then, that the most obvious “symptom” of how deep-rooted this faith was in him, was the serene cheerfulness that shone through his words even in the hardest moments: what is striking, indeed, is his attitude when confronted with death, which he faced seriously but also with a touch of wit. One wonders, in fact, how this man could have drafted his own will shortly before he died, if he had not realised his state of health. Moreover, how could he have used wit when facing such a painful death, describing himself “as yellow as a ripe lemon”, if he had not believed that soon he would meet that Lord whom he loved so much? Secondly, this concrete nature of his faith I think also emerges from his vocational discernment, carried out not within the four walls of a room, but on the “battlefield”, together with the sick and through the unexpected events that life had in store for him. I do not believe, in fact, that the young Artemides would ever have imagined having to question his “dream kept in the drawer” (that is, becoming a priest), because of a disease he would contract out of love of his neighbour. However, God is always greater than our imagination, and if Artemides, once healed, managed to get back into things again, he probably would have realised this. In conclusion, I believe that “Dr. Zatti” helps us to see the way of holiness as being possible, since he first knew how to live life with faith. And his life was about as real as life can be! If I may make this comparison, his approach reminds me of the approach of many of our grandparents (figures so important to us young people!) who have experienced crosses much heavier than ours, but with a human and Christian calibre that one can only respect; people who have been able to seek and bring God into a life that is so often “twisted”, thus managing to transform it into a masterpiece!

Ernesto:

The life of Artemides Zatti sums up very well the concept of Salesian holiness, that is, always doing one’s duty well, cheerfully, observing one’s duties of study and prayer and doing good to others. It made me think a lot about the fact that he emigrated at the age of 17 and left friends and relatives and it makes me wonder how much I am willing to leave to follow the Lord Jesus. I am impressed by the level of spirituality inherent in the letters that young Artemides wrote to his family members and this challenges me personally because they propose an example to follow, like when he wrote to his brothers: “Ah!... my brothers do not follow, I recommend, the maxims of the world by saying: ‘We are young; let us enjoy ourselves, later on we will do good.’” It is important to follow the path traced out by the Lord now, without delaying, without procrastinating, because it affects our happiness in our life but above all in the lives of others. He also teaches me the beauty of giving oneself, in his case to the sick, in my case probably to the young, and the importance of entrusting oneself to the Help of Christians and her mantle. This, in my opinion, makes us understand the joy and the fullness of a life spent for others. Initially, however, Zatti thought his vocation was to be a priest, but because of the illness and his promise, he made his profession as a Brother and I am very struck by the fact that Artemides Zatti said: “God can be served both as a priest and as a brother: both are valid for God as long as it is done with a sense of vocation and love.” We can do many things in life. The important thing is the love we put into serving the Lord, because it is on that that we will be judged.

Samuele:

At this moment in my life I am going through an experience of vocational discernment with the Salesians in Milan, so I see the life of the Salesian up close, and often among the various activities it seems we are running from one place to the other. Yet, I am often lucky like Zatti was on his bicycle, to be able to stop and spend time with people. This is how I encounter God, stopping like one stops to spend time before the Eucharist, and so did Zatti with the people. However, I would like to be more capable of this courage and patience of his, without having to run away out of fear, shame or indifference. Zatti reminds me of this: before me, the other person is a reflection of God who asks me to love. I am struck by Zatti’s words: “how can we not always smile, if God loves us so much?” These words come from a true lively Salesian spirit, one that impacts on us, fascinates us. If I think about my life I see how very often I am sad, even if masked by a smile, because I feel dissatisfied, because I miss something, but even more so because I am focusing on myself. I can grasp a deeper meaning in these words – the presence of God who embraces me when instead I am trying to embrace myself. I am happy only if I truly understand that God loves me, as Zatti had well understood, so much so that because of this love he could be happy even in the most disadvantaged situations. Referring again to that stopping to spend time mentioned above, I am struck by a particular fact in his story. It is... that he was far from his family, but he was able to bridge that distance with an incredible depth of heart. In a letter he wrote to the family about meeting up with one another when spending time before the Eucharist and thus meeting up in the divine heart of Jesus. I think as a young person I can find important messages in the story of St Artemides for me and my own journey: to stop and spend time with the other and smile because God loves us. I know that I am no longer self-sufficient and that I am looking for something to enlighten me. I am in search of the love of God who is light and life, because feeling that I am loved by him I can give that love to others and give all of myself as Zatti did with the sick and the poor.

Marco:

I think that Zatti teaches a young man like me that living for others – the question “for whom am I?” is strongly presented in his story – and in communion with God is the recipe for living in a truly happy way, and in a higher gear. His strength then is that he is not a saint out of reach, one of those who had visions, the stigmata or a famous character like Padre Pio or John Paul II. No, he was someone who lived, sought and found holiness in the concreteness of life. Two things struck me about his life: the first is travelling by bicycle, which for him was a way to meet, be among people, in search of someone in need; and to be able to stop with people to take care of them with material goods, or even just a word of comfort, a handshake, a small gesture of attention to those who perhaps only needed to feel loved. The second is precisely the Spirit that those who met him saw in him: in fact Artemides was a generator of love, hope and trust in everyday life. The thing that I connect most to my daily life, being a student, is how Zatti handled his studies: with perseverance and humility, not looking for excuses, and not feeling down about them. In Bernal, the 20-year-old aspirant Artemides studied with 12-year-olds, but he was never depressed, demoralized or ashamed by this, and despite the many tasks entrusted to him by his superiors, he always continued his studies, certainly sometimes struggling and suffering, but always with discretion and optimism (*Mt 6:16*) and overcoming every challenge with confidence and prayer: even the disappointment of no longer being able to become a priest after his illness, and even including the demolition of his hospital.

Here, I believe that this cheerfulness, this joy, this positivity that comes from God and therefore in the encounter with others, especially those most in need and in the simplicity of a small gesture, is the most beautiful thing that a young person can aspire to. It is what I want to achieve because it is what really saves souls and makes a saint...a saint.

Finally, the last aspect that has intrigued me in my journey of discernment is what I believe Zatti helps us to understand better – the figure of the Brother, and that he embodied the spirit of this to the end by living it as a way to be even closer to people than the priest can do. Maybe the priest can be seen as detached from reality and someone whom maybe you are a little hesitant at times to discuss with or be too close to.

Nicola:

The life and example of Saint Artemides Zatti does not leave me unmoved, but encourages me daily to walk on the path of holiness, loving the Lord Jesus and having my neighbour at heart.

His witness urges me, in a special way, to offer a smile and a good word to everyone, to visit and help the confreres in community and the people who are sick and lonely, to notice even the smallest needs of those who are close to me. This makes a difference: being concretely in the present; facing up to the difficulties that can be encountered and experienced personally with trust and hope in God; witnessing to him by example; putting the Gospel and my faith in Jesus Christ into words; living the moments of prayer and fraternity in community well and constantly; entrusting my life and everyone else’s life to God; letting myself be enveloped by his Love and blindly trusting in his Providence. Saint Artemides had a deep relationship with the Lord, something he nurtured every day and that nourished his relationships and the activities of his day: he recognised Christ himself in every brother and sister he met.