



SOCIETY OF SAINT FRANCIS DE SALES
SALESIAN GENERALATE

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The Rector Major

Prot. 17/0116

Letter of the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, on the occasion of the recognition as Venerable of the Servant of God Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya, Bishop of Chachapoyas (Peru) and the first Peruvian Salesian.

My dear Salesian confreres,

My dear brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family,

Recently we rejoiced at the recognition as Venerable of Fr Francesco Convertini and Fr Josè Vandor. Just one month later, on 27 February 2017, Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the Decree regarding the heroic virtues of the Servant God Octavio Ortiz Arrieta of the Salesians of Don Bosco, Bishop of Chachapoyas. He was born in Lima on 19

April 1878 and died in Chachapoyas on 1 March 1958. This is a new gift to our family and a confirmation of the holiness that flourished from the charism given by God to the Church through our father Don Bosco.

Venerable Bishop Octavio Ortiz Arrieta Coya spent the first part of life as an oratorian, a student and then a Salesian engaged in the works of the sons of Don Bosco in Peru. He was the first Salesian formed in the first Salesian house of Peru. It was in Rimac, a poor neighbourhood, where he learned to live an austere life of sacrifice. Among the first Salesians who arrived in Peru in 1891, he became familiar with the spirit of Don Bosco and the Preventive System. As a Salesian of the first generation, he learned that service and self-giving would be the hallmark of his life. Even as a young Salesian he assumed important responsibilities, such as the opening of new works and the direction of others, with simplicity, sacrifice and total dedication to the poor.

The second part of life, from the beginning of the twenties, he spent as Bishop of Chachapoyas, a vast diocese that had been vacant for years. The prohibitive conditions of the territory led to a closed mentality, especially in the more remote villages. Here the field and the challenges of the apostolate were immense.

Ortiz Arrieta was of a lively temperament, and he was accustomed to community life. He was a sensitive soul to the point of being called "pecadito" in his younger years, due to his exactness in detecting faults and helping himself and others to amend their ways. He had an innate sense of strictness and moral duty. The conditions under which he had to exercise his episcopal ministry were the exact opposite: loneliness and no possibility of sharing Salesian and priestly life, despite repeated requests to the congregation; the need to balance moral rigour with a growing docility; his delicate moral conscience was constantly tested by the coarseness and lack of commitment of some of his collaborators who were less heroic than he was; and a people of God who were ready to oppose the bishop when his speech involved denunciation of injustice and diagnosis of spiritual ills. His path towards the fullness of holiness, in the exercise of virtue, was marked by

fatigue, difficulties and the continuing need of conversion under the action of the Spirit.

Without doubt we find in his life some episodes that could be called heroic in the strict sense. However, we should also point out that he chose the path of virtue especially perhaps at times when he could have acted differently, but chose not to. He did not yield to human despair but always found new hope. He did not settle for charity on a grand scale but practised full availability in the exercise of that heroic charity with exemplary fidelity for several decades. Twice he was offered a move to a better diocese. On the second occasion, he was offered the primatial see of Lima, but he decided to stay among the poor, the people nobody else wanted, people who were really on the margins of society. He wanted to stay in the diocese to which he was wedded, and which he loved, and he devoted himself with all his being to make it even a little bit better. He was a 'modern' pastor in his style of presence and his use of all means of action such as associations and the press. A man of strong temperament and firm convictions of faith, Bishop Ortiz Arrieta certainly used this gift for government in his leadership, but it was always exercised with respect and love, and expressed with extraordinary consistency.

Although he lived before the Second Vatican Council, nevertheless, the way he planned and carried out the pastoral tasks assigned to him is still relevant. He took pastoral care of vocations and gave concrete support to his seminarians and priests. He gave attention to the catechetical and human formation of the young, and to family ministry. He used to meet couples in crisis or cohabiting partners who were reluctant to regularize their union. Indeed, Bishop Ortiz Arrieta educated not only by his concrete pastoral action, but also by the example of his own behaviour.

He had the ability to discern for himself, first of all, what it means and what is needed to renew his fidelity to the road taken. He really persevered in heroic poverty and strength through the many trials of life, and in radical fidelity to the diocese to which he had been assigned. He was humble, simple, always serene, both serious and gentle. His calmness of spirit shone through in the look from his eyes

The beautiful characteristics that his Salesian superiors noted before his first priestly ordination - when he was described as a "Salesian Pearl" and they remarked upon his spirit of sacrifice - return as a constant throughout his life, even as a bishop. Indeed, it can be said that Ortiz Arrieta had "become all things to all people, that [he] might by all means save some" (1 Cor 9, 22). He was authoritative with the authorities, simple with children, poor among the poor, mild with those who abused him or tried by rancour to delegitimize him, always ready not to return evil for evil, but to overcome evil with good (cf Rm 12, 21). His whole life was dominated by the primacy of the salvation of souls: a salvation which he sought to bring actively also to his priests. He tried to counter the temptation to settle for easy certainties or to seek positions of greater prestige, but to engage them instead in pastoral service. It can really be said that he was at the 'high' level of Christian life. He was a pastor who embodied pastoral charity in an original way, seeking communion with God's people, reaching out to the most needy and witnessing a life of evangelical poverty.

In conclusion, I wish to express my closeness to the Church of Chachapoyas which had him for 36 years as its pastor, and to the Salesian Family of Peru that venerates him as the country's first Salesian. I also wish to entrust once again our Salesian Family to Mary Help of Christians, of whom Bishop Octavio Ortiz Arrieta was a devoted son. I invite you to get to know his testimony and to ask, through his intercession, for the grace of the miracle that may open the way to his beatification.

Rome, 19 March 2017

Solemnity of St. Joseph



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ángel Fernández A." with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Fr Ángel Fernández A., SDB

Rector Major

