

# Ozanam: Who Was This Holy Man?

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It is always a great joy for me to speak about dear brother Antoine Frederic Ozanam, one of the founders of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, in 1833. But there are so many qualities and examples from his life that a chronicle like this can say little with complete certainty about this holy man, beatified by the Catholic Church in 1997.

Ozanam was a survivor: there were 14 brothers in his family, but only three survived: Alphonse, Charles and Antoine Frederic. He was chosen by God to undertake great works and, from his birth, his life was a blessing. We cannot forget that he was a sick child, who was on

the verge of death at eight years of age. He had a fragile health, but he did wonderful things during his short life. As we know, he died young, at 40, and came to ask God, in his last moments of life, to let him live “a little longer” in order to educate his daughter Marie Josephine. But Divine Providence wanted him in heaven.

Ozanam was a person of prayer. A curiosity that few know: before entering the classroom (as we know, Ozanam was a teacher in several academic institutions, including the Sorbonne, where he himself obtained two university degrees), he prayed with fervor, asking God to give him a productive and quiet work day, without conflicts with the students. He also read the Bible daily, and it was his idea to comment on fragments of the book “The Imitation of Christ” in the weekly meetings of the Conference in which he participated.

Ozanam was a social activist. Not only did he defend the practice of charity as a Christian way of helping those who suffer, but he was also an illustrious lawyer and journalist who fought for social justice with the means available to him. For example, the newspaper “L’Ère Nouvelle (The New Era)”, founded by him, aimed to denounce the appalling working conditions of the Parisian workers. In the articles he wrote, Ozanam proposed social and labor reforms that, years later, were incorporated by the Church in the Encyclical “Rerum Novarum,” by Pope Leo XIII.

Ozanam was a brilliant inspiration for the other founders. It is clear that the founding of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul was a collegiate act, but nothing would have happened without the leadership of Ozanam. Bailly brought balance to that group of provincial university students, who dreamed of a new France, but it was Ozanam who had a vanguard vision when proposing the dismemberment of the first Conference and the creation of the General Council (to maintain the unity of the nascent entity ). Ozanam fascinated everyone with his speeches in favor of the poor, and invited the young people of his time to join the Conferences of Charity, recruiting dozens of new members.

To terminate this reflection, I leave two questions that can be debated in the weekly meeting of the Conference: For you, who was that holy man, Ozanam? What does he represent in your life, today? I am sure that the answers will be very beautiful.

Dear brother Ozanam, we thank God for your life and for doing so much good to humanity!

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