



SOCIETÀ DI SAN FRANCESCO DI SALES

SEDE CENTRALE SALESIANA

Via Marsala, 42 – 00185 Roma

Il Rettor Maggiore

Prot. 18/316

Letter of the Rector Major, Fr Ángel Fernández Artime, on the occasion of the Venerability of the Servant of God Augustus Hlond, of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, Archbishop of Gniezno and Warsaw, Founder of the Society of Christ for the Emigrants of Poland.

My dear Salesian Confrères

My dear brothers and sisters of the Salesian Family

On May 19, 2018, the Holy Father Pope Francis authorized the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to promulgate the decree concerning the heroic virtues of the Servant of God Augustus Joseph Hlond, of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco, Archbishop of Gniezno and Warszawa, Primate of Poland, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, Founder of the Society of Christ for Migrants; he was born on July 5, 1881 in Brzęczkowice (Poland) and died in Warszawa (Poland) on October 22, 1948.

This is a new gift to our Family and a confirmation of the path of holiness flourished from the charism given by God to the Church through our father Don Bosco.

He was the second of 11 children and his father was a railway worker. Having received from his parents a simple but strong faith, at the age of 12, attracted by the fame of Don Bosco, he followed his brother Ignatius to Italy to consecrate himself to the Lord in the Salesian Society, and there he soon attracted two other brothers: Antonio who would become a Salesian and a renowned musician and Clement, who would be a missionary. The college of Valsalice welcomed him for his high school studies. Admitted to the novitiate, he received the cassock from Blessed Michael Rua (1896). After making his religious profession in 1897, his superiors sent him to Rome at the Gregorian University for the course of philosophy that he crowned with his degree. From Rome he returned to Poland for the practical training in the college of Oświęcim. His fidelity to the educational system of Don Bosco, his commitment to assistance and in the school, his dedication to the young and the kindness of his trait gained him great ascendancy. He also immediately asserted himself for his musical talent.

After completing his theological studies, on 23 September 1905 he was ordained a priest by Bishop Nowak in Krakow. In the years 1905-09 he attended the faculty of letters at the universities of Krakow and Lviv. In 1907 he was in charge of running the new house in Przemyśl (1907-09), from where he passed to the management of the house in Vienna (1909-19). Here, his personal value and ability proved even greater because of the particular difficulties the institute was facing in the imperial capital.

Fr. Augustus Hlond, with his virtue and his touch, succeeded in a short time not only to fix the economic situation, but also to give rise to a flowering of youth works that attracted the admiration of every class of people. The care for the poor, workers and children attracted the affection of the humblest classes. Very dear to the bishops and apostolic nuncios, he enjoyed the esteem of the authorities and of the imperial family themselves. In recognition of this social and educational work, he received three times some of the most prestigious honours.

In 1919 the development of the Austro-Hungarian Province recommended a division proportional to the number of houses, and the superiors appointed Fr. Hlond as provincial of the German-Hungarian Province, based in Vienna (1919-22), entrusting him with the care of the Austrian, German and Hungarian confreres. In less than three years, the young provincial opened about ten new Salesian presences, and formed them in the most genuine Salesian spirit, awakening numerous vocations.

It was in the full fervour of his Salesian activity, when, in 1922, the Holy See having to provide for the religious organization of Polish Silesian that was still bleeding for the political and national struggles, that the Holy Father Pius XI entrusted him with the most delicate mission and appointed him Apostolic Administrator. From his mediation between the Germans and Poles the diocese of Katowice was born in 1925, of which he became bishop. In 1926 he was archbishop of Gniezno and Poznań and primate of Poland. On the following year the Pope created him cardinal. In 1932 he founded the Society of Christ for Polish Emigrants, which was intended to assist the many compatriots who had left the country.

In March 1939 he took part in the Conclave that elected Pius XII. On September 1 of the same year the Nazis invaded Poland: the Second World War began. The cardinal raised his voice against the violations of human rights and religious freedom committed by Hitler. Forced into exile, he took refuge in France, at the Abbey of Hautecombe, denouncing the persecutions against the Jews in Poland. The Gestapo penetrated the Abbey and arrested him, deporting him to Paris. The cardinal categorically refuses to support the formation of a pro-Nazi Polish government. He was first interned in Lorraine and then in Westphalia. Freed by Allied troops, he returned to his homeland in 1945.

In the new Poland freed from Nazism, he found Communism. He courageously defended the Poles from Marxist atheist oppression, even escaping some attempts on his life. He died on 22 October 1948 from pneumonia at the age of 67. Thousands of people flocked to his funeral.

Cardinal Hlond was a virtuous man, a luminous example of a Salesian religious and a generous, austere pastor, capable of prophetic visions. Obedient to the Church and firm in the exercise of authority, he showed heroic humility and unequivocal constancy in moments of greatest trial. He cultivated poverty and did justice to the poor and needy. The two columns of his spiritual life, at the school of St. John Bosco, were the Eucharist and Mary Help of Christians.

In the history of the Church of Poland, Cardinal Augustus Hlond was one of the most eminent figures for the religious witness of his life, the greatness, variety and originality of his pastoral ministry, for the sufferings he faced with an intrepid Christian spirit for the Kingdom of God. The apostolic ardour distinguished the pastoral work and spiritual physiognomy of Venerable Augustus Hlond, who, taking as his episcopal motto *Da mihi animas coetera tolle*, as the true son of Saint John Bosco, confirmed it with his life as a consecrated person and bishop, giving witness of tireless pastoral charity.

Finally, I would like to recall his great love for Our Lady, which he learned in his family and in the great devotion of the Polish people to the Mother of God, venerated in the sanctuary of Czestochowa. Furthermore, from Turin, where he began his journey as a Salesian, he spread the cult of Mary Help of Christians in Poland and consecrated Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. His entrusting himself to Mary always supported him in adversities and in the hour of his extreme encounter with the Lord. He died with the beads of the Rosary in his hands telling those present that the victory, when it would come, would be the victory of Mary Immaculate.

In conclusion I want to underline how Venerable Cardinal Augustus Hlond is a singular witness of how we must accept the way of the Gospel every day despite the fact that it causes us problems, difficulties and even persecutions: this is holiness. "Jesus reminds us how many people have been, and still are, persecuted simply because they struggle for justice, because they take seriously their commitment to God and to others. Unless we wish to sink into an obscure mediocrity, let us not long for an easy life, for "whoever would save his life will lose it" (*Mt 16:25*). In living the Gospel, we cannot expect that everything will be easy, for the thirst for power and worldly interests often stands in our way... Whatever weariness and pain we may experience in living the commandment of love and following the way of justice, the cross remains the source of our growth and sanctification" (Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, No. 90-92).

I hope that you may truly draw inspiration from this example of Salesian holiness, knowing his witness and asking through his intercession for the grace of the miracle that opens the way to beatification.

Rome, 5 July 2018
Anniversary of the birth
of Venerable Augustus Hlond



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Rector Major

