

February 19, 2010 - Vatican – Fr. Titus Zeman, a new Servant of God in the Salesian Family



(ANS – Vatican City) – On January 22 the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Abp. Angelo Amato, SDB, signed the *nihil obstat* for the start of the diocesan enquiry concerning the martyrdom of the Slovak Salesian priest Fr. Titus Zeman (1915-1969). His story is an excellent example to fidelity to the cause of Don Bosco.

Fr. Zeman was born into a Catholic family on January 4, 1915, at Vajnory, near Bratislava. He wanted to become a priest from 10 years of age and completed his high school studies with the Salesians; in 1931 he made his novitiate, and on March 7, 1938, he made his perpetual profession at the Sacred Heart in Rome.

A student of theology at the Gregorian University in Rome and then in Chieri, he spent his spare time carrying out his apostolate in the oratory. In Turin on June 23 1940, he achieved his long-held goal of priestly ordination at the hands of Cardinal Maurizio Fossati. On August 4, 1940 he said his first Mass in his home town.

When the Czechoslovak Communist regime in April 1950 forbade religious orders and began deporting religious to concentration camps, it became necessary to organize secret journeys to Turin to enable religious to complete their studies. Fr. Zeman took on this dangerous task.

The Servant of God organized two expeditions for over 60 young Salesians. At the third attempt Fr. Zeman, together with those escaping, were arrested. He was subjected to a rough trial, during which he was described as a traitor to the fatherland and a Vatican spy, and he was threatened with death. On February 22, 1952, in consideration of some attenuating circumstances he was sentenced to 25 years in prison.

Fr. Zeman was paroled on March 10, 1964, after 12 years incarceration. Indelibly marked by the sufferings endured in prison, he died five years later on January 8, 1969, surrounded by the glorious reputation of a martyr and a saint.

Fr. Titus Zeman is the 172nd "hero" of the Salesian Family and the 28th Servant of God. In the next few weeks in the diocese of Bratislava, where the Servant of God died, the opening session of the diocesan process will be celebrated.