



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ARGENTINA
ON THE OCCASION OF THE BEATIFICATION
OF FATHER JOSÉ GABRIEL BROCHERO**

*To His Excellency the Most Reverend
Archbishop José María Arancedo
Archbishop of Santa Fe
President of the Bishops' Conference of Argentina*

Dear Brother,

That the “Gaucho Priest” is at last among the blessed is a very great joy and blessing for the Argentinians and devotees of this pastor who smelled of his sheep, who made himself poor among the poor, who always struggled to be very close to God and to the people, and who did and still does so much good for our suffering people.

Today I like to imagine Brochero the parish priest on the back of his mule with the white mane (*malacara*), crossing the broad, dry and desolate roads of his 200-square-kilometre parish. He would go from house to house, seeking out your great-grandparents and your great-great-grandparents to ask them whether they needed anything and invite them to do the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius of Loyola. He knew his parish inside out. He did not stay in the sacristy combing the sheep.

The visit of Brochero the Gaucho Priest brought Jesus himself to every family. He would take with him an image of Our Lady, a prayer book with the word of God and his kit to celebrate daily Mass. They would invite him in to drink *mate*; they would chat and Brochero would speak to them in a way they could all understand so that the faith and love he himself felt for Jesus would well up in their hearts.

José Gabriel Brochero centred his pastoral action on prayer. He had barely arrived in his parish when he began to take men and women to Córdoba to do spiritual exercises with the Jesuit fathers. With great sacrifice they first crossed the Sierras Grandes, covered with snow in winter, to pray in the regions's capital Córdoba! Afterwards, they worked hard to build the Holy House for the exercises in the parish! They prayed at length there before the crucifix in order to know, feel and enjoy the immense love of Jesus' heart, and it all ended with God's pardon in confession, with a priest who was full of love and mercy — immense mercy!

His apostolic courage, his missionary zeal, the bravery in his heart, compassionate like the heart of Jesus, — that made him say: "There'll be trouble if the devil robs me of a single soul!" — spurred Brochero to win over crooks and difficult fellow countrymen to God. One can count by the thousands the men and women who, thanks to Brochero's priestly ministry, gave up their vices and quarrels. They received the sacraments during the spiritual exercises and with them the power and light of faith to be good sons and daughters of God, good brothers and sisters and good parents in a great community of friends committed to the good of all and who respected and helped each other.

A contemporary pastoral approach is very important in a beatification. Brochero the Gaucho Priest had a currently relevant approach to the Gospel. He was a pioneer in going out to the geographical and existential peripheries to take God's love and mercy to everyone. He did not stay in the parish office, he tired himself out riding his mule and in the end fell ill with leprosy as a result of going out to find people as a *callejero*, a "street priest" of faith. This is what Jesus wants today, missionary disciples, street priests of faith!

Brochero was an ordinary man, frail like the rest of us, but he knew the love of Jesus, his heart was forged by God's mercy. He was able to come out from the cavern of "I-me-my-with me-for me", of the small-minded selfishness from which we all suffer, he conquered himself, with God's help, he overcame those inner forces that the devil uses to chain us to comfort, to the search for fleeting pleasure, to the lack of incentive to work. Brochero listened to God's call. He chose the sacrifice of working for his Kingdom, for the common good that the great dignity of every person as a child of God deserves. He was faithful to the end: he continued praying and celebrating Mass even when he was blind and ill with leprosy.

Today let us permit Brochero the Gaucho Priest, with his mule and all, to enter the house of our heart and invite us to prayer, to the encounter with Jesus that sets us free from attachments so that we may go out to the street and seek our brother or sister, to touch the flesh of Christ in those who suffer, who need God's love. Only in this way shall we savour the joy that Brochero the Gaucho Priest felt, a foretaste of the happiness he now enjoys as a blessed in heaven.

I pray the Lord grant you this grace, I bless you and I ask the Blessed Virgin to guide you.

Affectionately,

FRANCIS

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