1. The diocese and the city of Troyes, as well as the Oblates and the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales, joyfully celebrate today the beatification of Fr. Louis Brisson, eminent educator of the young and courageous founder of two very dynamic religious congregations.

It is an extraordinary event which takes its rightful place in the glorious history of this diocese. Indeed, it is fitting to recall that Troyes has been an episcopal seat since the beginning of the fourth century and that many of its former pastors were recognized as saints. In the Middle Ages, several important synods were held here in Troyes. The city is known for two beautiful churches: this gothic cathedral of Saint-Pierre-et-Saint-Paul and the basilica of Saint-Urbain, both of which date from the thirteenth century. Pope Urban IV (1195-1264), celebrated in the history of the Church for having instituted the Feast of Corpus Christi, the “Fête Dieu,” was a native of Troyes.

To these great past events, there is added today to the diocese and the city of Troyes another historical date: that of the Beatification of Fr. Louis Brisson, Founder of the Oblates and the Oblate Sisters of St. Francis de Sales.

2. We see shine forth in the Blessed Louis Brisson the virtue of the just man, who is not vanquished by violence and iniquity (Wisdom 12:17-20) because he places his trust in the Lord, his support and his salvation (Psalm 53:3-9). And it is precisely in times of tribulation that he demonstrates the firmness of his faith and the wisdom which comes from God and which is “pure, peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and full of good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity” (James 3:17).

Three virtues in particular shine forth like shining stars in the constellation of his sanctity: strength, faith and charity.

Although gentle by nature, Fr. Brisson was a strong man. As a young seminarian, he set out to overcome the rebelliousness he felt over unjust punishments and to accept without complaining
whatever happened to him. For example, he forced himself to eat everything, even the soups that, as a child, he did not like and the large servings of pumpkin, cooked salad or steamed rice.

He exhibited this firmness of soul afterwards at the time of the founding and growth of his congregations and also in defending their rights. In his life, he encountered many trials and much opposition. He was stripped of the position as chaplain to the Visitation, a position which he held for over forty years and to which he was very attached. He suffered the loss of his works, the dispersion and exile of his sons, and of being all alone in his final days. Once he remarked: “I am sad of heart, troubled and ill at ease. If you don’t have faith, you would not be able to resist.” But, although overwhelmed by trials, he never lost courage; his hope was anchored in the love of Christ. For him trial was the guaranty of success in the apostolate.

3. We can ask: Where did he find this heroic strength? Was his courage uniquely the fruit of his nature, of the self-mastery of his life and his ability to endure trials?

His apostolic audacity was rooted in his spirit of faith. He frequently strived to educate the young in the faith. Only one who has the faith is able to transmit it to others. He used to say that only the one who breathes in the faith can pass it on to others. Faith like grace is a reality which escapes the senses and communicates itself in a manner which remains mysterious to us: “The mantel of Elijah,” he used to say to his religious, “works miracles not because of its texture, but because it was worn on the shoulders of the prophet. ... Why does the vestment of the Lord work miracles? It will be the same for you if you have faith.”

His faith was nourished daily by the Eucharist. He had the habit of saying: “Jesus Christ in this sacrament is my habitat, my nourishment, my all.”

4. Love for Christ is accompanied by the conviction of the living presence in his vicar on earth, the Pope. He had a filial devotion to the Pope, whom he considered the “center” of the faith. Everything concerning the Church and the Pope was sacred for him. In an instruction given on 4 March 1887, he said: “The Congregation professes an inviolable attachment to Holy Church. ... With regard to Holy Church and to the Pope, we will remain always like infants under the tutelage of their father and their mother. With us, there is neither battles nor struggles of opinions. It is a waste of time. ... Our heart must feel with regard to the Pope something profoundly filial, pious, a very great veneration for him as representing Our Lord, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. This is where all of our teaching is found.”

Mother Madeleine de Sales, Superior General of the Oblate Sisters, confirms this: “He had a filial love for the Pope and a blind obedience. He never did anything important without consulting Rome. He multiplied his trips (to Rome); he distributed encyclicals; he recommended on every occasion docility to the teachings of the Pope.”

5. His heroic faith was embodied in a discrete and generous charity, drawn from the merciful heart of Jesus. And we saw blossoming like flowers in spring from this charity, his patience in the ministry
of confessions, in the education and guidance of the young, his availability in welcoming and listening to the neighbor, regardless of social status, in his goodness and proverbial magnanimity.

His generous charity was exhibited on numerous occasions. In 1904, for example, he worked to alleviate, as much as possible, the suffering of the poor workers on strike. He demonstrated his magnanimity to an ex-seminarian, named France, who became a vagabond and was reduced to abject poverty. He made sure that he had a daily meal at the Oblate Sisters, and every Wednesday, he invited France to dine with him. France was happy to have found such human warmth and a decent living condition. But one day he did not come for his meal. Anxious, our Blessed Brisson sent someone to look for him. They found him dying. Comforted by the sacraments of the Church and by the fraternal presence of religious, France died peacefully.

Supported by faith and charity, Blessed Brisson literally put into practice the word of Jesus who invites everyone to welcome children, the poor, the needy because by welcoming the indigent, one welcomes Jesus himself.

6. My dear Oblates, dear friends, the Church needs today saintly priests like Blessed Brisson, model of strength, of faith, and of charity. His beatification challenges our aspiration to be saints. Everything is changing around us. Each day, buildings become higher, television more perfected, trains more rapid. Progress advances without being able to be stopped, manifestations of limitless horizons open to the exploration of human intelligence.

If everything around us is changing, within us, on the contrary, there exists core values, like love, goodness, friendship, justice, which are essential for all good education because they still move and move profoundly the heart of every human person. An act of kindness is an eternal expression of authentic humanity. And the saints are the heroic interpreters of this good heroic humanity, inspired by the Gospel. By their virtues, they illuminate not only the Church, but society as well, which is in great need of good and wise persons. The saints, like Blessed Brisson, are not beings at the margins of society, but socially useful persons, who make this society grow in communion and fraternity.

For that reason, we thank the Church which honors these heroic sons by presenting them for our reflection, our admiration and above all, our imitation. But we must also pray to the saints because they are close to the throne of the grace of the Trinitarian God and effectively intercede on our behalf.

_Blessed Louis Brisson, pray for us!_  
(Translated by Alexander T. Pocetto, OSFS)

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1 _Positio II_ Summarium, p.197ff.
3 _Positio I_, p. XXXV.
4 _Positio I_, p. XXXIX.
5 _Positio II_, Summarium, p. 171.
6 _Positio II_, Summarium, p. 171.