On December 19, 2009 the Vatican Information Service reported that the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, authorized the promulgation of the decree affirming the “heroic virtues” of the Servant of God LOUIS BRISSON, French priest and founder of the Oblates of St. Francis of Sales (1817-1908).

By signing this decree, the Pope confirms the positive evaluation already given by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints to a “Servant of God” (i.e., a person for whom the “cause” of sanctity has been formally introduced for study/analysis at the Vatican). This evaluation follows upon rigorous historical and theological analyses, which are based on a “positio” (documented biography) that narrates in significant detail how the person lived a virtuous life. (The English version of that biography was edited by Fr. Alexander Pocetto, the Senior Salesian Scholar at DSU and is available in the Trexler Library.)

What this decree means is that Fr. Brisson is now considered “Venerable” – a new designation along the stages toward sainthood. As the director of the Holy See’s Press Office, Fr. Frederico Lombardi, SJ, explains, this designation “concerns the witness of Christian life that the person showed (his intense relationship with God and continuous search for evangelical perfection).” This is not a liturgical honor (i.e., there is no “cult” or public worship associated with it). But it does move the cause one stage closer. The next step would be to document, both scientifically and theologically, the miraculous intercession of the Venerable one, after which he would be “beatified” (and designated as “Blessed”). Following that, a second documented miracle would be needed for him to be “canonized” (and designated a “Saint”).

In his address to the staff of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on the same day, Pope Benedict XVI pointed out that saints "are not representatives of the past; rather, they form part of the present and future of the Church and society. ... The lives of these extraordinary believers, who come from every region of the earth", are characterised by "their relationship with the Lord … and by an intense dialogue with Him". The lives of the saints likewise reveal "a continuous search for evangelical perfection, the rejection of mediocrity and a tendency towards total adherence to Christ".

In this sacred season, we rejoice in the gift that God has given to the Church and to the world in the life and legacy of Fr. Louis Brisson. And we pray that his holiness will shine forth in ways that lead to his eventual canonization … so that we might recognize worthily his contribution to our Salesian tradition and that we might imitate his example in our own day. (Learn more about Fr. Brisson at this link.)