

Q&A. Blessed Stephen Sándor

Salesian Brother | Master Printer | Youth Minister | Martyr

JUNE 8, MEMORIAL

Where and when was Stephen Sándor born?

He was born at Szolnok, Hungary on 26 October 1914, the firstborn of three brothers. His father, Stephen Sr., worked at the railroad station of the town. Despite the family's poor circumstances, his mother, Mária Fekete, gave a decent education to Stephen and his two younger brothers, László and János.

He was active in his Franciscan Parish, joyfully volunteering as an altar server and manifesting the character of a leader. Already as a young teenager, he entrusted himself to a spiritual guide.



How did Stephen Sándor come to know Don Bosco?

The Franciscans, seeing his dedication, counseled his family to send the fourteen year-old Stephen to study at the Clarisseum in Ràkospalota at the outskirts of Budapest. This was a vocational school of Graphic arts managed by the Salesians that included a festive oratory and an orphanage for boys in trouble.

There, he came to know about Don Bosco and felt attracted to the Salesian charism.

How did his Salesian vocation grow?

After finishing his vocational course in Ràkospalota, Stephen had to return to his home town to work. There, he regularly received the Salesian Bulletin. Reading the Bulletin and reflecting on his experience in the Clarisseum, Stephen pondered on what God wanted of him. With the help of his spiritual guide, he recognized the signs of God's call to the Salesian religious life. At the age of 18, he wanted to join the Salesians but was prevented because his parents did not give their consent.

Finally, in 1936 at the age of 22, he was accepted at the Clarisseum in Budapest where he did a two-year aspirantate. During this time, he also attended courses in printing technology at the Don Bosco Press and became a master printer.

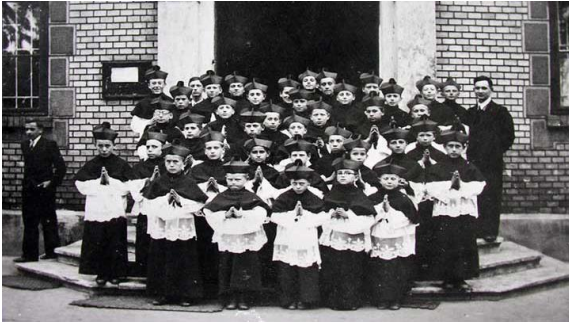
When did he make his first profession?

On 1 April 1938, he began his novitiate but had to interrupt it as he was called to military service. On 30 April 1939 he was able to resume his novitiate and eventually made his first profession on 8 September 1940 as a Salesian Brother. He was 26 years old.

Br. Stephen was enthusiastic about his vocation as a Salesian Brother: "I spent the period of the novitiate with the constant aspiration to a perfect life, assimilating more and more the spirit of our holy Father Don Bosco [...]. It was my firm decision to spend my life in accordance with the holy rule, to sanctify my soul and that of others, and to implant in the greatest number of young souls the devotion to Mary that Don Bosco taught us."

What were his responsibilities as a Salesian?

He was assigned to the print shop of the Clarisseum, and was actively involved in technical education. He was an assistant at the oratory and promoted the Catholic Association of Young Workers.



He was a dedicated Salesian educator: he was a teacher of typography and printing; an animator of the altar servers; a catechist and spiritual guide of youth groups. He was rightly convinced that the young apprentices needed spiritual education in addition to learning the printing trade.

His life as a Salesian Brother was summed up beautifully by those who knew him when they said that he loved books, the altar and the Oratory.

How did the Salesians fare under Communist rule in Hungary? How did this impact Br. Stephen Sándor personally?

At the outbreak of World War II, he was conscripted as a telegrapher. He did not hide from his military unit that he was a consecrated person, even organizing a group of soldiers whom he encouraged to pray. Transferred to the Russian Front, he comported himself with valor that he was deemed worthy to be decorated with the War Cross of Merit. At the end of the War he returned to Ràkospalota. However, the apostolate of the Salesian Community was greatly hindered by the occupying Soviet forces and the subsequent Communist government.

In 1949 the State confiscated all ecclesiastical goods and began the persecution of Catholic schools. Br. Stephen tried to save what could be saved. Almost overnight religious found themselves reduced to nothing and had to disband. Br. Stephen had to leave his printing operations – which had become well-known – and “disappear”, but instead of fleeing to the West he stayed in the country so he could keep working for Hungarian youth. He managed to find employment in a detergent factory in the Capital. There, he fearlessly but secretly kept up his apostolate of organizing and giving spiritual guidance to young students and workers. This he knew was a dangerous activity, for gathering the youth for religious formation was considered a capital crime.

When was Br. Sándor captured and what happened to him?

His illegal activity was discovered and on 28 July 1952 he was taken into custody and brought to the Military Tribunal prison of Budapest. There he was subjected to torture and lengthy interrogations. In a secret trial on 28-30 October 1952, he was declared “guilty of plotting against the people’s democracy and of high treason” and was meted the death penalty.

He was returned to the Military Tribunal to await his fate. In the cell which he shared with other prisoners, Br. Stephen continued to give courage to his companions by leading them in prayer, especially the rosary, and by sharing spiritual thoughts. He did this notwithstanding the knowledge that there were spies even in the prison.

On 8 June 1953, he was brought out to the prison courtyard, and in the midst of the roar of truck engines, revved up to drown the sound of the executions, Br. Stephen was put to death by hanging. His corpse, together with those who were killed with him, were brought by

truck to the cemetery of the judiciary prison in the town of Vác, where they were buried all together in a common grave, without any sign of identification. He was 39 years old.

Where and when was he Beatified?



In 2006, the canonical process for the recognition of the martyrdom of Br. Stephen was begun. On 10 December 2007, the Diocesan Process was closed at Budapest and word was sent to Rome, to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.

On 19 October 2013, on the steps of St. Stephen's Basilica in Budapest and before a large congregation of Salesians, youth and the faithful, through Cardinal Angelo Amato SDB, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Br. Stephen Sándor was declared Blessed.

Blessed Stephen Sándor continues to be an inspiration for all Salesians, priests and brothers alike. For, the cause to which he dedicated his entire life – the instilling of Christian virtue in the world of work of the young – is still as timely as ever.



Prayer of Offering

Composed and Recited Daily by Bl. Stephen Sándor

*Lord Jesus, I offer to you every prayer, every work, every joy,
every disappointment and burden of this day.*

*Grant to me and to all my brother-workers
the grace to be able to think like you,
to pray, to work and to live with you.*

*Bestow on me the grace to be able to love you with all my heart
and to serve you everywhere and with all my strength.*

*May your kingdom come among us,
in our workplaces and in our families.*

May you be known and loved everywhere and always.

Save us from all evil and from all sin.

May your grace assist those in danger.

May those who die while working rest in peace. Amen.