

Blessed Peter Donders - Interesting?

For a long time next to my desk I have had some bookmarks from an organisation called "little fish", a Christian counterpart of a "secular" group which publishes posters and cards with phrases that make you think.

One of those phrases which I see daily says: "Jesus is much more interesting than most of the Christians".

Due to a question recently posed by somebody "who doesn't know Blessed Peter Donders very well", this strikes me now more strongly than before. The question was, whether Peter Donders would be a person who led an interesting life, who could set something in motion in the entire Province, whether it would offer an opportunity ("It" referring to a proposal which literally and symbolically would move some people).

This question comes on top of the fact that, very often when we describe the spirituality of a Saint or Blessed person, we quote their writings. There is a proverb "Those who write, remain", in the Church in some situations even restricted to "That what is not in the acts, is not in the world". But, does this mean



that those, who did not write, do not remain? Jesus himself did not write except once onto the ground – at least the Bible doesn't mention any other writings – but he certainly still "remains". From Blessed Peter Donders we know no other writings than his letters – the writing to which he felt obliged – and a few other texts, some of them written on request. Two of them are curricula vitae.

For a religious, leading an interesting life is certainly no aim of itself. In the obligatory examination of conscience, around 1874, Peter Donders answered the question, whether he would be averse to practising the virtues, that he longed to have all of them, especially profound humility, gentleness, submission to God's will, suffering for the love of Jesus, who suffered so much for him. He thinks that he has the right intentions, but his works leave him saddened.

Undoubtedly, Jesus' life and spirituality were interesting, as we know from the writings about him and his followers. He attracted people by his words as well as his deeds. He built bridges between human beings and God.

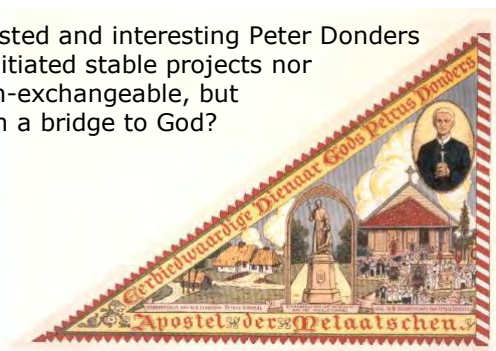
Blessed Peter Donders also brought people closer to God. He reached out to them – he moved. He left everything to follow Jesus and fulfil the will of God, as we read in his first curriculum vitae. "Following" is a movement. Jezus reached out to people, he visited them, walked around. When people asked him to come, he went to help them. He did not wait for them visiting him at home. Blessed Peter Donders went where God sent him. He did not confine himself to houses, convenient, safe or known places. He was interested in people; he wanted to instruct people, not to run a school; he wanted to care for people, not to construct a hospital. In his letters he describes a lot of things and observations which were new not only to the addressees, but also to himself.

Did Peter Donders lead an interesting life? For sure, he led an interested life. He was open to whatever God asked him to do. He went where he was sent, without elaborating plans for himself. He mentioned difficulties, but he did not ask God to take him away from them. He went to places which for most of us still are unknown. He touched people Jesus also touched, but who we normally would not. This proved interesting enough for people to ask for his canonisation.

Is the life of Blessed Peter Donders more or less interesting than the life of Jesus? Offering your life literally is definitely more interesting than offering it by reaching out to the marginalized and staying alive, and Jesus, being the only door through which we can enter heaven, is the most interesting bridge between human beings and God. However imitating the way the missionary Redemptorist priest Blessed Peter Donders followed Jesus may be a more feasible route for most of us.

Couldn't any person be set in motion by the example of the interested and interesting Peter Donders who left everything to more closely follow Jesus, having neither initiated stable projects nor having taken on tasks for which he would be considered being non-exchangeable, but who was interested in and interesting for people, building for them a bridge to God?

Blessed Peter Donders wanted us all to become Saints¹ ...



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¹ Last phrase of the answer to the question whether he would be averse to anybody or would feel affection for anybody.