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 Curia Generalis
Fratrum Minorum
Capuccinorum



A RSENIUS OF TRIGOLO

Ignatian **rigor** and Franciscan **simplicity**

Letter of the General Minister of the Friars Minor Capuchin

ARSENIUS OF TRIGOLO,
CAPUCHIN PRIEST

FOUNDER OF THE SISTERS OF MARY MOST HOLY CONSOLATRIX

MILAN, OCTOBER 7, 2017

Dear Brothers,
May the Lord give you peace.

1 • It is my joy to present to you a new blessed: Br. Arsenius of Trigolo from the Province of San Carlo (Lombardy). A first, quick glance at his life gives the impression of someone who was always changing, almost of someone unstable. In fact, though first a diocesan priest at a certain point he became a Jesuit and then finally a Capuchin. His spirituality was that of the nineteenth century, but let us be careful not to stop at the exterior, the superficial. It is essential that we look for the man who stands behind exterior things. There we will find someone who seeks God above

all things, who wants to do only his will. The events of his life are many, seeming to shine differently depending on the light, liminal, or even contradictory, but it is true that he never lost sight of his compass: Your will be done!

So, what can a Capuchin of yesterday say to us Capuchin friars of today? What is the strongest word or message that Blessed Arsenius of Trigolo can say to the Order today? Though he spent only seven years among us, the last seven years of his life, he can certainly say something to us that is worth hearing.

The life of Blessed Arsenius can be summarized in his own prophetic reflection recorded in his Spiritual Notes: “Arsenius, you must not content yourself with having given up the

world, possessions, family [...], you must detach yourself from everything else, even heart and feeling, for otherwise what good is this? It's worth nothing to seem to be a religious to the world but not really to be one with God." It is the tension that was with him his whole life in his seeking to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. (Mt 5:48)

2. Blessed Arsenius's shifting lifestyle, with continuous changes even of his state of life, can be interpreted as a symptom of a weak personality, of someone discontent, or of an unsettled dreamer looking for a stability that was not to be found. Reading his life with attention, however, one discovers rather a personality that knew how to accept the continual uprooting that God was working in order to guide him to perfection. To change his state of life as he did, leaving behind dear ones and relationships that had been built up with much effort and to depart from places and the certainties for which he had persevered, highlights how he was always making himself available not only for seeking God's will, but also for how God would shape and work on him in his acceptance of the difficulties of concrete circumstances without ever getting discouraged or giving up on the will of God.

3. Let us recall his life. Blessed Arsenius was born in Trigolo in the Italian region of Lombardy on June 13, 1849, the fifth of twelve children. He was baptized six days later in the church of St. Benedict in Trigolo and given the name Giuseppe. His parents, Glicerio Migliavacca and Annunciata Stumia were sincere believers. They owned an inn and a bread shop with which they were able to support the large family. While still a boy, Giuseppe already wanted to serve the Lord in the ordained ministry, and so entered the seminary in Cremona where he took the course of studies from 1863 to 1873, a time when the cultural and political climate was conditioned by unhappy relations between the Kingdom of Italy and the Papal States. At the age of fourteen, Giuseppe's choice to become a priest was surely not a comfortable

one nor a way to set himself up in life, but was a courageous, mature, and determined choice of one who did not fear the cultural and social environment around him. It is enough to recall that when Geremia Bonomelli arrived in Cremona as bishop in December 1871, a year after the Breach of Porta Pia¹ and a good four years after the death of the previous bishop, Antonio Novasconi, he found only thirty-two seminarians, a scant number for that time, and one of these was our Blessed.

4. The aspiration of the young Giuseppe was clear and determined: to be a holy priest! Thus he writes in his Spiritual Notes: "Oh, how much more good could be done for the people if the priest was more perfect: knowledge is good and very necessary—priests can't be ordained without it—but if knowledge is not shaken up by true piety and perfection, it puffs up the spirit and makes for pride. True piety makes us know our nothingness and our misery, and that we have everything from God and thus everything refers back to him. Without true piety one becomes an obstacle to God." He was not, however, a dreamer, but knew his limits and therefore knew well the urgent and continual need for the grace of God in support of his determination to follow Jesus and to be a priest for Jesus and in Jesus.

Piety, study, grace, and humility were and are the cornerstones of a holy priesthood. Piety and study cannot be separated "because one is the soul of the other." Grace and humility cannot be separated "because one is the soul of the other." A priest like many, we could say with 'ordinary' gifts, but in precisely this characteristic—being 'ordinary'—he had the rare gift of an industrious and humble fidelity to his ministry. To the best of his ability Blessed Arsenius communicated nothing else but the grace of God and his Love without hiding the Gospel and above all without running after the approval of the world or hiding the mystery of the foolishness and scandal of the Cross.

5. On March 21, 1874 the future Blessed Arsenius was ordained priest and sent to

¹ On September 20, 1870, the Piedmontese army, breaking through a part of the old Aurelian Walls, entered Rome and thus joined the last bastion of the Papal States to the newborn Italian State, recently formed through the wars of Italian Unification guided by the Savoy dynasty.

be assistant to the pastor in Paderno di Ossolero (today Paderno Ponchielli) and then to Casano d'Adda. It was there that he probably met for the first time the young Giuseppina (Pasqualina) Fumagalli, then a sister of the French Congregation of Notre Dame du Bon Secours, who would make many difficulties for him.

Blessed Arsenius lived his priesthood aware of having been called by grace, and only by grace, giving his whole self to the love God, celebrating deeply the mysteries of salvation and at the same time not lacking in love of neighbor or fraternal charity. The choice to be a priest seemed to be well-founded and he lived it with sincerity and commitment. However, as he writes in his Spiritual Notes, "for some years" he felt the desire for religious consecration, for an oblation that could be a total dedication of self to God.

6. Courageously, calling it divine will and God's victory over his attraction to "apostolic ministry, which is overwhelmingly fulfilling for me and is highly esteemed," he decided to enter the Society of Jesus. It was December 14, 1875.

He wanted to do nothing else but God's will. "Whatever happens to me, I will take hold of it as your will and therefore I shall not be disturbed," he wrote at the beginning of a retreat on March 20, 1876. Blessed Arsenius then made first religious profession in 1877 at the age of 28.

Because of his 'ordinary' commitment to study, things went poorly enough for Blessed Arsenius to have to suspend his academic activities. Transferred as Prefect in the College of Cremona in 1879 he finished philosophy and then, in 1884, in Portoré in Istria he began to study theology again, but without much success. He made the year of probation in Lainz, Vienna, and then on August 15, 1888 he made solemn profession as a 'formed spiritual coadjutor.' Esteemed by all, he continued his ministry as preacher, confessor, catechist for young people, and as retreat director, above all for communities of women religious.

7. In Venice, in the years between 1888 and 1890, Blessed Arsenius again met Pasqualina Giuseppina Fumagalli, now having been dismissed from the Sisters of Notre

Dame du Bon Secours, but continuing to dress as a sister anyway. She had also begun a new religious institute, calling it the Consolation Sisters, though without having obtained permission from the respective bishops, gathering around herself a group of young women, some of whom also had Blessed Arsenius for a spiritual director. It was this complex relationship with Pasqualina, judged negatively by the Jesuit superiors, that led to their decision to transfer Arsenius first to Trento, then to Piacenza, and finally to ask him to leave the Society. After a brief period of resistance, he was dismissed.

These were the years of the greatest upheaval. Alone, without anything but a failure and judgment behind him that was surely unflattering, who would not become closed off, isolated, and an embittered, empty complainer?

And yet on April 25, 1892, Blessed Arsenius arrived in Turin, once again willing to do the will of God that came to him even in difficult circumstances and in decisions imposed upon him by others. Presenting himself to the Archbishop Davide dei Conti Riccardi, he took on the spiritual direction of the new Pious Institute of Mary Consolatrix, formed by a group of sisters that had left Pasqualina Fumagalli. When perhaps it was the time to gather up the efforts of youth and the joys of middle age, at the age of forty-two, Blessed Arsenius took up this new path. Thus, for ten years (1892-1902) he gave form, norms, and guidance to the new institute in its presence in Turin and the latter also in Milan, writing for them a Rule and Constitutions.

Everything seemed to be moving toward a secure harbor, but in the first general chapter of the institute, held in 1899, there arose discord between the sisters in Milan and those in Turin, dissensions that led the Archbishop of Milan, Blessed Andrea Carlo Ferrari, to replace all of the superiors and to ask Blessed Arsenius to take a step back and give up the direction of the institute. Uprooted again, once more the face of God's will was revealed amidst a painful rift.

8. Now fifty-three years old, after having obtained the approval of various superiors, on June 21, 1902 Blessed Arsenius began a new way of life, entering the novitiate of the

Capuchin Friars Minor in Lovere. This new and demanding state of life granted him also a new name: Brother Arsenius of Trigolo. Even though he entered at an older age, Blessed Arsenius made challenging choices. The change of name was the easiest thing. Deeper was to put into practice what he had said many times to the sisters: to ask the Lord each day for “the practical love that is true charity in deeds and works.” (cf. Sermons for people’s missions)

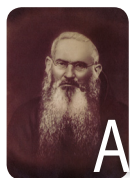
Having made temporary vows, Blessed Arsenius was sent to Bergamo as a spiritual guide for the young Capuchin students. Here, except for a brief period away, he spent his final years of pastoral ministry, where he also took care of the Third Order.

In 1909 he began to have health problems. Transferred from the friary to infirmary, during the night of December 10, 1909, he died from a cardiac aneurysm. The impressive attendance by the people at the funeral, celebrated with Franciscan simplicity, witnessed to the good Blessed Arsenius had sown during his earthly life.

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Daily prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist, and the charitable acts toward so many in need had worked in Blessed Arsenius that transformation that is granted to those who put all their trust in God and in his living Word: to embrace silence, hiddenness, and forgiveness, never holding on to anything for himself, whether the evil done to him or the good, and to leave recompense to the Lord who sees in secret.

9. Dear brothers, Blessed Arsenius of Trigolo is added to the grand array of the saints and blessed of the Order, each with his own particular story. Blessed Arsenius, formed as both a Jesuit and a Capuchin, shows us certain important elements of each spiritual tradition. To be inspired by the desire to do everything for the greater glory of God is the heart of the teaching of St. Ignatius, while in



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the grace of perfect joy in bearing tribulation, injury, and slander, always thanking God, recognizing that it is God who has loved us first, it is Francis who is teaching and forming. In this double role, Blessed Arsenius reminds us friars that the first work to fulfill is faith in Christ who alone gives glory to God and who can be brought to the world only with joy.

May Blessed Arsenius obtain for all the friars, and those of the Province of Lombardy in particular, a renewed commitment to bringing the Gospel of Christ to the world, that it may know the Highest Good and his Peace. By his intercession, may the Sisters of Mary Most Holy Consolatrix remain always faithful in their works of charity.

Fraternally,

Rome, 8 September 2017
Feast of the Nativity of Mary

Br. Mauro Jöhri
General Minister OFM Cap