

Circular letter of the General Minister Announcement of the Laurentian Year

(Prot. N. 00678/18)

*To all the friars of the Order
To the Capuchin Poor Clares*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It was the month of September in 1993. Wishing to prepare two friars in post-novitiate for perpetual profession, I proposed to them that they make the *Camino de Santiago*. Arriving in León, the friars welcomed us fraternally, as they did also in Pamplona, Estella, and Logroño, and they let us know that in Villafranca del Bierzo we would be able to stay the night at the monastery of the Poor Clares. When we got to the monastery I was surprised when the nuns told me that buried in their church were the remains of our St. Lawrence of Brindisi.

Next year will be the four hundredth anniversary of the death of St. Lawrence and I believe that a year dedicated to his honor on this occasion will be very meaningful. Therefore, with this letter, I call for its celebration from July 21, 2018 to July 21, 2019.

I will give some brief sketch of the man himself; what I wish is that this year dedicated to St. Lawrence see initiatives of various kinds for the study and appreciation of his story and message. I note also that Lawrence of Brindisi is thus far the only General Minister of our Order who has been raised to the altars, and that he has also been proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. Born in Brindisi on July 22, 1559 with the name Giulio Cesare Russo, at the age of seven he lost his father and a few years later his mother as well. In 1574 he went to stay with his uncle Pietro, a priest, in Venice. About a year later he knocked on the door of the Capuchin friary on Giudecca, one of the islands in the Venetian Lagoon. His request to enter the Capuchins was accepted. The novitiate and the years of study followed, and in January 1582 Br. Lawrence was ordained priest. Completing his theological studies, he dedicated himself to teaching, the formation of novices, and to preaching. Soon enough, however, he was called to the tasks of leadership and governance: in 1590 he was elected provincial minister of Tuscany, in 1594 that of Venice, and in 1596 general definator. In 1598 we find him as provincial minister of Switzerland and in 1599 general definator once again. In that same year he was entrusted with the foundation of a friary in Prague.

Finally, in the General Chapter of 1602 Br. Lawrence was elected General Minister of the Friars Minor Capuchin on May 24.

The service to which he had been called carried with it the task of visiting all the provinces of the Order. In carrying out these visitations during the three years of his mandate as general minister, Br. Lawrence went up and down Italy, traveled through Switzerland, the Netherlands, France, and Spain, all on foot. At the end of his term, popes and various European princes entrusted him with different diplomatic missions. These tasks did not allow him to dedicate himself completely to the contemplative life or the study that he felt were the important aspects of his vocation. For three years, from 1610 to 1613, Br. Lawrence stayed in MONACO as the representative of the Holy See. These were the years in which the Catholic kingdoms were preparing themselves against the advance of the Protestant princes. In the same years Br. Lawrence was called to peacemaking in the most intricate conflicts. Along with all this intense diplomatic work, he remained a very sought-after preacher and was again elected provincial minister. In fact, having been elected general definator for the third time in the General Chapter of 1613 he was sent as visitor to the Province of Genoa where he was elected provincial minister. Very well known and appreciated by the people, each time the future saint arrived in a city the population hurried *en masse* to see him, whereupon many healings were also attributed to him. Notwithstanding all this intense work, Br. Lawrence spent hours absorbed in prayer and even long periods of contemplation during the celebration of Mass. His final diplomatic mission took him to Lisbon where he interceded for the Neapolitan population who felt oppressed by the Spanish Duke of Osuna, who was also Viceroy of Naples. Br. Lawrence died on July 22, 1619 in Lisbon, at the age of sixty. His body was carried to the monastery of the Poor Clares in Villafranca del Bierzo, where he was entombed. Lawrence of Brindisi was beatified in 1783 by Pius VI and canonized in 1881 by Leo XIII.

Even given all the time he spent traveling, the heavy duties of administration and all his diplomatic work, Br. Lawrence found time and inspiration for many writings, which remained unedited until his *Opera omnia* was published between 1928 and 1956. This publication of Lawrence's writings played a large role in the decision of Pope St. John XXIII, on March 19, 1959, to declare him a Doctor of the Church with the title *Doctor Apostolicus*.

I have presented this brief sketch of the life of St. Lawrence, a life rich with travel, with various works, but also rich with study, teaching, and a deep prayer life. As I mentioned at the beginning of the letter, I invite the Order to arrange for a fitting celebration of the holiness of St. Lawrence of Brindisi in this fourth centenary of his death. In particular, I

hope that this observance will have a particular importance at our International College 'San Lorenzo da Brindisi' in Rome.¹

Dear Brothers, in this my last letter I am writing to you, I take the opportunity to thank you for your patience and all the kindness you have shown to me. I am aware that it was not possible for me to respond to the hopes and concerns of everyone. I thank you for the welcome I was shown everywhere and I ask humbly that you continue to pray for me.

I am happy to send to each of you my fraternal greetings, together with my Franciscan best wishes of Peace and Good.

Br. Mauro Jöhri
General Minister OFMCap

Given in Rome, at our General Curia, 21 July 2018

¹ In writing these few lines I have drawn from the brief biography written by Br. Niklaus Kuster: *Laurentius von Brindisi: Apostel auf den Straßen Europas. (Topos Taschenbücher, Band 714, Kevelaer 2010.)*. It would be good if this text could be translated into other languages.