



ORDO FRATRUM MINORUM MINISTER GENERALIS

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To all the friars of the Order
To the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ
To the Brothers and Sisters of the OFS and YOUFRA
To the Poor Sisters of St Clare
To the Conceptionist Sisters

Rome, 30 April 2022

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

Today, 30 April 2022, Armida Barelli will be proclaimed blessed in Milan Cathedral. She has been called a woman between two centuries, a forerunner of the most contemporary times, an all-around laywoman. She died on 15 August 1952 and is finally recognised by the Church as an evangelical example to be proposed to all the faithful. In the synodal time in which we live in the whole Church, it is fascinating and precious that it is a woman, a laywoman, a consecrated woman who is presented as an example of holiness.

I am present on behalf of the Order at this celebration. Why? Indeed, the root of Armida Barelli's human, Christian, and vocational journey was undoubtedly that Franciscan soul that deeply marked her. It is thanks to the meeting with Br Agostino Gemelli that this woman, at the beginning of the twentieth century, opened her deep spiritual search to the freshness of the Franciscan charism, finding in it evangelical inspiration, freedom of spirit and joy, evangelical radicalism in the following of Christ, living fully in the world and in the secular condition. The Minister General of the time welcomed her into our family as a tertiary and then as a consecrated person in full secularity. Nevertheless, her bond with the Order has always remained deep and free, never marked by subordination, but by sharing.

Armida Barelli was born on 1 December 1882 in Milan into a well-to-do middle-class family and did not experience a properly religious environment in the home, where an outward practice was part of social convention. She made her own personal journey thanks to the refined education she received and to the encounters with other women who shaped her rich, exuberant and profound personality. It was in this way that she opened up to a deep and convinced faith and gradually made her way to the very transparent intuition that God was calling her to live fully in the lay state, seeking with all her heart to adhere to God's presence and action in her life and in the world.

This is a formidable starting point for approaching the life and message of this woman, an all-around Milanese, deeply rooted in her time and able to anticipate the future like few others: Armida Barelli, the Elder Sister for so many girls, adolescents, young girls and women of the 1900s. This was the starting point for a work to promote women that was truly extraordinary for its time. A forerunner of the times, she understood that women had their own characteristics, not tied to rigid social roles and not even to exclusive ties with the family or the convent.

She was able to give shape to the desires and dreams of so many girls and women of her time, releasing their intense energies. From the cultural to the political field, from liturgical animation to education to the faith, from living the tragedy of the First World War in a Christian way to the closeness to those who suffered its consequences, from the resistance to the dictatorship that at that time afflicted her country Italy to participating fully in the civil and social rebirth following the Second World War. In all these fields, Armida was able to inspire, drag, motivate and express all the capacities of women.

Without a doubt, Blessed Armida was a formidable builder, in all senses: of movements, of buildings and works, of initiatives even in dark times like those of war, of ideas and dreams of the future. But, at the same time, she was a builder of interiority, her most profound life. Here we are at the heart of her existence as a woman, Christian, and Franciscan.

"Prayer is transformed into will, will into work, work into prayer and deed".

Barelli was a woman of prayer; *"the yearning for an intimate dialogue with God"*, as she herself said, accompanied her from the beginning and found in her its presence in relationships, work, travel, projects and anxieties and hopes its ever more natural environment.

Armida lived an incarnated spirituality, which makes of all life a prayer and of prayer a transforming action of the world so that the seed of the Kingdom may grow.

Here the new Blessed was an authentic disciple of St Francis because she anticipated the future with her "lay" way of praying, which could transform work into a spiritual experience, which could interpret, in exhausting activity, in tiring journeys and encounters faced for the sake of the Kingdom, a new but no less demanding way of living penance and sacrifice;

a spirituality for laypeople who do not have timetables and bells that invite them to prayer but who seek times of intimacy with the Lord as a deep yearning of the soul;

a spirituality that does not separate itself from the world but reads the "signs of the times" in the events of history, listening to the voice of the Lord.

Along this path, Blessed Armida Barelli, together with Fr Gemelli, gave life to a community of consecrated women in the world that still exists in many countries in which we Friars Minor are present and how many times, as I myself can testify, the path is common and fraternal, supporting each other in living faithfulness to the Gospel on the roads of the world.

I speak of the Secular Institute of the Missionaries of the Kingship of Christ.

For many of us friars, it is a sign of the Father's tenderness as we live the common life of so many people. It is also, for us and for many, a possibility of companionship in faith and vocation with the feminine sensitivity that enriches us so much.

As we see the flowering of this free and loving woman, let us ask the Spirit of the Lord that we may not remain indifferent to the evangelical furrow of holiness she opened in the bosom of modern Franciscanism. As we thank the Most High for this gift, let us respond by returning ever anew to that humanity and that world that God so loved and loves the Gospel proclamation of life and freedom.

Especially today, in this difficult time which calls for peace and justice for so many.

With my fraternal greetings and blessing

Br Massimo Fusarelli, ofm
Minister General