

Br. Chrysostomus Van Gool

Constantinus Van Gool was the son of Franciscus Van Gool and Veronica Oostvogels born in Kalmthouse Hoek on March 13, 1874. At the age of 13, he was accepted in the Scholasticate in Bruges on April 18, 1887. He then entered novitiate in Edingen receiving the Capuchin habit on September 17 and a year later made simple vows on September 17, 1892. In Brussels he pronounced his solemn vows in 1895. .Doing most of his theology in-house in Bruges, Br. Chrysostomus was one of two friars to be first in attending the University of Leuven.

Meanwhile he was ordained a priest in Brugge on December 18, 1897. In Leuven Br. Chrysostomus defended his obligatory theses and obtained his baccalaureate on July 14, 1899. Two years later he earned the licentiate after defending his thesis on July 15, 1901. Later on October 1, 1920 he would be promoted to Doctor in Theology.

He then taught in Izegem as vice-prefect and then prefect of the Seminary. On September 22, 1906 he was sent to Brugge-Ste Claire to accompany a group of friar student theologians, who for reasons of a disciplinary nature were put in “quarantine”. On the occasion of the Chapter of 1909, Br. Chrysostomus petitioned to leave for Punjab Pakistan as a missionary. The reply was: “Ok you’d like to go to the missions? But go first and beg a million for our missionaries. Our procurator in Antwerp is sick...” And so on July 16th 1909, he landed at the monastery of Antwerp where he collected more than millions for the missions, was vicar of the monastery, director of three Third Order Sodalities, confessor and assistant to the Novice Master of the lay-brothers novices.

During the war of 1914-1918 by request of His Eminence Cardinal Mercier, one Capuchin had to accompany each boat with refugees sailing from Antwerp to England. Br. Chrysostomus accompanied the last boat, a small ship of the Harwich Co., which had room for 300 persons but in reality had taken 1000 people. The boat left in the morning hours of October 5th, 1914 and reached England, after a turbulent and miserable crossing in the afternoon of of October 6th. Immediately after the war, an appeal was made for new missionaries for Congo and Pakistan. He volunteered immediately and the Definitory appointed him for Punjab on April 23, 1919.

In spite of his appointment as a missionary, Br. Chrysostomus was chosen as Minister Provincial at the Chapter in Aalst on August 27-28, 1919. His three year term was very busy going to Rome for the General Chapter, compiling a book on “Monastic customs” which became obligatory in the Province. He also founded a separate Seraphic School for the Walloon French speaking candidates as Capuchins in Spy, later in Doornik as well as a new monastery Because of an increase in vocations, he also had an annex built next to the monastery in Aalst. He also allowed 34 missionaries to leave: 14 for the Congo, 16 for India and 4 for the Seychelles Islands.



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At the Chapter of 1922, he asked for permission to go to the Seychelles Islands but was refused. He returned to Antwerp as Procurator of the Province and of the Missions. In the subsequent Chapter in Aalst August 6 -7 1925 he was re-elected Minister Provincial for a second time. After the Chapter of April 2, 1928, he requested to leave for Canada. Permission was granted on August 28, 1928. He was seasick all the way to Montreal. Together with Br. Marius he arrived by train in Blenheim and then to St. Boniface as pastor of Sacred Heart parish and local superior. He was named Provincial Delegate of the Belgian Capuchins in Canada. He kept this function and title until January 1938 when the Canadian Custody was canonically erected. As local superior in St. Boniface he served as novice master.

Let us also mention that Br. Chrysostomus held the Canonical Visitation of the Pittsburg Province in the U.S.A. on November 5th, 1934 by order of the General. It seems that rumors gave the impression that the Province was becoming lax in the wearing of the beard. When he met with the community in the refectory, he walked by each friar and pulled at their beards. His report was most favorable although some friars were reducing their beards to goatees. From 1928 to 1934 he served as pastor of the Sacred Heart Belgian Church. Father was instrumental for the material improvements of the parish as well as its spiritual development. In 1934 Br. Chrysostomus was given permission to build a chapel about 40 minutes walking from Sacred Heart church. It was in time affectionately known by the friars as “The Dump” or “St. Francis Church.”

In 1949, due to health reasons he resigned as chaplain and after that led a rather retiring life and passed his days in prayer, study and reading. The troubles of old age notwithstanding, he remained until the end an example of self-discipline and monastic observance. When he could not be cared for in the Monastery he agreed to be taken up in the Nursing Home of the Sisters of Charity on Tache Avenue. There he died on March 24th 1954. In his “Spiritual Testament” he thanks God for his religious and priestly vocation and also “because you have given me so many gifts in the order both of nature and grace”. Br. Chrysostomus was indeed favored by God with a great intellect, an iron will, a tremendous energy and great administration qualities.

