

THE COAT OF ARMS

At the top of the lunette of the Franciscan tree, there is the coat of arms of the General Minister of the Order, frescoed on the ceiling. The central part is divided into four sections.

In the first, at the top left, on a blue background, there is a bare arm with the nail mark on the palm of the hand; the other arm, clothed in the Franciscan habit, crosses the first, with the same mark on the palm of the hand; behind them, a cross.

The meaning of the image can be deduced from an episode in the last days of St. Francis's life.

Bonaventure tells us:

"When the hour of his passing was approaching, he summoned all the friars who were residing in the place [...] and while his sons stood all around him, the patriarch of the poor, the holy man, almost blind and close to death, crossed his arms and stretched his hands over them in the form of a cross (he had always loved this gesture) and blessed all the friars, present and absent, in the power and in the name of the Crucified."

To indicate that the blessing was imparted by St. Francis "in the power and in the name of the Crucified," the two arms in the coat of arms are depicted, one bare and the other clothed: the arm of Christ and the arm of Francis. Naturally, the meaning always given to the Franciscan emblem is that of the "conformity" of Francis to Christ.

It is also told that:

"In 1213-1214, St. Francis was hosted at the castle of Susa by Beatrice of Geneva, wife of the Count of Savoy. The countess gave the Saint a piece of land so that a convent could be built there. As a sign of gratitude, to fulfill the desire of the pious benefactress who asked him for a memento, St. Francis removed a sleeve from his tunic and gave it to her. Thus, during the long journey, everyone saw the Saint with one bare arm and one clothed, and so they were blessed by him with his arms in the form of a cross. The relic still exists and is venerated in the Cathedral of Chambery, in Savoy."

At the top right is the icon of the five wounds, which again relates to Jesus and Francis. At the bottom left, a seraphic angel, an attribute of St. Francis; at the bottom right, a heart pierced by the three nails of the Passion.