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**Prædicator Gratiaë: Letter of the Holy Father to the Master of the Order of Preachers for the 8th Centenary of the death of St. Dominic of Caleruega**



*To Brother Gerard Francisco Timoner, O.P.,  
Master General of the Order of Preachers*

Praedicator Gratiae: among the titles attributed to Saint Dominic, that of “Preacher of Grace” stands out for its consonance with the charism and mission of the Order he founded. In this year that marks the eight hundredth anniversary of Saint Dominic’s death, I gladly join the Friars Preachers in giving thanks for the spiritual fruitfulness of that charism and mission, seen in the rich variety of the Dominican family as it has grown over the centuries. My prayerful greetings and good wishes go to all the members of that great family, which embraces the contemplative lives and apostolic works of its nuns and religious sisters, its priestly and lay fraternities, its secular institutes and its youth movements.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* I expressed my conviction that “each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel” (No. 19). Dominic responded

to the urgent need of his time not only for a renewed and vibrant preaching of the Gospel, but, equally important, for a convincing witness to its summons to holiness in the living communion of the Church. In the spirit of all true reform, he sought a return to the poverty and simplicity of the earliest Christian community, gathered around the apostles and faithful to their teaching (cf. Acts 2:42). At the same time, his zeal for the salvation of souls led him to form a corps of committed preachers whose love of the sacred page and integrity of life could enlighten minds and warm hearts with the life-giving truth of the divine word.

In our own age, characterized by epochal changes and new challenges to the Church's evangelizing mission, Dominic can thus serve as an inspiration to all the baptized, who are called, as missionary disciples, to reach every "periphery" of our world with the light of the Gospel and the merciful love of Christ. In speaking of the perennial timeliness of Saint Dominic's vision and charism, Pope Benedict XVI reminded us that "in the heart of the Church, a missionary fire must always burn" (Audience of 3 February 2010).

Dominic's great call was to preach the Gospel of God's merciful love in all its saving truth and redemptive power. As a student in Palencia, he came to appreciate the inseparability of faith and charity, truth and love, integrity and compassion. As Blessed Jordan of Saxony tells us, touched by the great numbers who were suffering and dying during a severe famine, Dominic sold his precious books and, with exemplary kindness established a center for almsgiving where the poor could be fed (Libellus, 10). His witness to the mercy of Christ and his desire to bring its healing balm to those experiencing material and spiritual poverty was to inspire the foundation of your Order and shape the life and apostolate of countless Dominicans in varied times and places. The unity of truth and charity found perhaps its finest expression in the Dominican school of Salamanca, and particularly in the work of Friar Francisco de Vitoria, who proposed a framework of international law grounded in universal human rights. This in turn provided the philosophical and theological foundation for the heroic efforts of Friars Antonio Montesinos and Bartolomé de Las Casas in the Americas, and Domingo de Salazar in Asia to defend the dignity and rights of the native peoples.

The Gospel message of our inalienable human dignity as children of God and members of the one human family challenges the Church in our own day to strengthen the bonds of social friendship, to overcome unjust economic and political structures, and to work for the integral development of every individual and people. Faithful to the Lord's will, and prompted by the Holy Spirit, Christ's followers are called to cooperate in every effort "to give birth to a new world, where all of us are brothers and sisters, where there is room for all those whom our societies discard, where justice and peace are resplendent" (Fratelli Tutti, 278). May the Order of Preachers, now as then, be in the forefront of a renewed proclamation of the Gospel, one that can speak to the hearts of the men and women of our time and awaken in them a thirst for the coming of Christ's kingdom of holiness, justice and peace!

Saint Dominic's zeal for the Gospel and his desire for a genuinely apostolic life led him to stress the importance of life in common. Again, Blessed Jordan of Saxony tells us that, in founding your Order, Dominic significantly chose "to be called, not sub-prior, but Brother Dominic" (Libellus, 21). This ideal of fraternity was to find expression in an inclusive form of governance, in which all shared in the process of discernment and decision-making, in accordance with their respective roles and authority, through the system of chapters at all levels. This "synodal" process enabled the Order to adapt its life and mission to changing historical contexts while maintaining fraternal communion. The witness of evangelical fraternity, as a prophetic testimony to God's ultimate plan in Christ for the reconciliation and unity of the entire human family, remains a fundamental element of the Dominican charism and a pillar of the Order's effort to promote the renewal of Christian life and the spread of the Gospel in our own time.

Together with Saint Francis of Assisi, Dominic understood that the proclamation of the Gospel, *verbis et exemplo*, entailed the building up of the entire ecclesial community in fraternal unity and missionary discipleship. The Dominican charism of preaching overflowed early into the establishment of the varied branches of the larger Dominican family, embracing all the states of life in the Church. In succeeding centuries, it found eloquent expression in the writings of Saint Catherine of Siena, the paintings of Blessed Fra Angelico and

the charitable works of Saint Rose of Lima, Blessed John Macias and Saint Margaret of Castello. So too, in our own time it continues to inspire the work of artists, scholars, teachers and communicators. In this anniversary year, we cannot fail to remember those members of the Dominican family whose martyrdom was itself a powerful form of preaching. Or the countless men and women who, imitating the simplicity and compassion of Saint Martin de Porres, have brought the joy of the Gospel to the peripheries of societies and our world. Here I think in particular of the quiet witness given by the many thousands of Dominican tertiaries and members of the Dominican Youth Movement, who reflect the important and indeed indispensable role of the laity in the work of evangelization.

On the Jubilee of the birth of Saint Dominic into eternal life, I would like in a particular way to express gratitude to the Friars Preachers for the outstanding contribution they have made to the preaching of the Gospel through the theological exploration of the mysteries of the faith. By sending the first friars to the emerging universities in Europe, Dominic acknowledged the vital importance of providing future preachers with a sound and solid theological formation based on sacred Scripture, respectful of the questions posed by reason, and prepared to engage in disciplined and respectful dialogue in the service of God's revelation in Christ. The Order's intellectual apostolate, its numerous schools and institutes of higher learning, its cultivation of the sacred sciences and its presence in the world of culture have stimulated the encounter between faith and reason, nurtured the vitality of the Christian faith and advanced the Church's mission of drawing minds and hearts to Christ. In this regard too, I can only renew my gratitude for the Order's history of service to the Apostolic See, which dates back to Dominic himself.

During my visit to Bologna five years ago, I was blessed to spend some moments in prayer before the tomb of Saint Dominic. I prayed in a special way for the Order of Preachers, imploring for its members the grace of perseverance in fidelity to their founding charism and to the splendid tradition of which they are heirs. In thanking the Saint for all the good that his sons and daughters accomplish in the Church, I asked, as a particular gift, for a considerable increase of priestly and religious vocations

May the celebration of the Jubilee Year shower an abundance of graces upon the Friars Preachers and the entire Dominican family, and usher in a new springtime of the Gospel. With great affection, I commend all taking part in the Jubilee celebrations to the loving intercession of Our Lady of the Rosary and your patriarch Saint Dominic, and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of wisdom, joy and peace in the Lord. ■

FRANCIS

## Prædicator Gratiae and the Grace of Preaching in the Church



The Dominican Family is profoundly grateful to our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for writing *Praedicator gratiae*, his inspiring and encouraging letter to the Order on the 8th Centenary of the dies natalis of St. Dominic of Caleruega. The incipit (title) of his letter echoes the historic event when Pope Honorius III confirmed preaching as the mission of the Order and gave Dominic and his brothers in Toulouse the name "preachers". Pope Francis affirms in his letter that preacher of grace is a title attributed to St. Dominic that "stands out for its consonance with the charism and mission of the Order he founded" i.e., the grace of preaching and the preaching of grace.

We thank the Holy Father for being Peter to us, for strengthening us in the faith (Luke 22:32). We thank Pope Francis for greeting the family of Dominic. We recall how Domingo de Caleruega and Francesco d'Assisi incarnate saintly fraternity and friendship as foundation of the evangelization in their time. As we thank Pope Francis for his paternal solicitude and fraternal closeness to the Order, we also greet him and the Society of Jesus on the 5th centenary of the

conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola on this same year of the Lord 2021. It is well known that a significant aspect of that graced moment of conversion was his life-changing question: "What if I should do what Saint Francis or Saint Dominic did?" Indeed, it is marvelous that on this providential coincidence of jubilees, a confrere of Ignatius, the first Pope who chose the name Francis writes a letter to the family of Dominic!

By expressing his "prayerful greetings... to all the members of that great family, which embraces the contemplative lives and apostolic works of its nuns and religious sisters, its priestly and lay fraternities, its secular institutes and its youth movements" the Holy Father recognizes that the family of preachers practically includes all states of life in the church. Consequently, the writings of scholars, poets and mystics as well as artworks, works of charity and mercy by the members of the different branches of the family are acknowledged as forms or "genres" of preaching. Significantly, the members of the Dominican family, whose voices were silenced by martyrdom, are recognized as offering us an extraordinarily eloquent form of preaching.

"Speaking either with God or about God", St. Dominic embodied a synergy of contemplation and action and exemplified a disciple-missionary, called to follow and sent to preach the way of the Gospel. It is worth pondering that the Holy Father uses the term missionary-disciple instead. Perhaps, Pope Francis is inviting us to realize that the God who sends us in mission is the same God who is present everywhere and constantly invites us to follow Him as disciples. ■

Brother Gerard Francisco Timoner III,  
O.P.  
Master of the Order  
May 24, 2021 | Memorial of the  
Translation of Our Father St. Dominic

## New Vice Provincial of the Vice Province of St Pius V, DRC

Brother Augustin Wiliwoli Sibiloni, O.P. , was born in Isiro, Democratic Republic of Congo, on October 25, 1977. He received the habit of the Order on August 8, 1999 and made his first profession on August 8, 2000. He was solemnly professed in 2005



and ordained to the priesthood on August 19, 2012 by Bishop Julien Andavo, the Bishop of Isiro Diocese. On the completion of his initial formation and before his ordination, he was assigned to the Convent of St. Dominic, Kinshasa, as Syndic.

He had his BA in Philosophy from St. Augustine University, Kinshasa, and B.Th. from the Catholic University of Congo. After ordination, he obtained his Licentiate in Philosophy also from the Catholic University of Congo. Thereafter, he was sent to Louvain, Belgium, for complementary studies and was assigned to the Fra Angelico Community, Louvain. He graduated with a doctorate degree in Philosophy from the Université Catholique de Louvain.

On his return to Congo, he taught Philosophy at the University of Uélé, DRC. He was the superior of St. Martin de Porres House in Kisangani until his election as Vice Provincial. He is a quiet and reflective person.

Brother Augustin was canonically elected by the capitulars gathered to celebrate their 2nd Vice Provincial Chapter in the Convent of St. Martin de Porres, Kisangani, on May 19, 2021. The Master of the Order confirmed his election. With his acceptance, Brother Augustin becomes the third Vice Provincial of the young Vice Province of St. Pius V which was erected in 2016.

May God's grace accompany him throughout his mandate as he strives to serve the brothers of his Vice Province and the Dominican family in the Congo. ■

## New Prior Provincial of Central America



Brother Ricardo Guardado Flores, O.P., was elected Prior Provincial of the Province of St. Vincent Ferrer in Central America on May 18, 2021, during its fourth Provincial Chapter at the Casa de Espiritualidad San Benito, Heredia in Costa Rica. The election was confirmed by the Master of the Order on the same day and Bro. Ricardo accepted his election on May 20, 2021.

Born on January 14, 1978, at the San Francisco, La Virtud, Lempira in Honduras, Bro. Ricardo made profession in the Order on January 26, 2002, and was eventually ordained a priest on October 24, 2009. He holds a Licentiate in Moral Theology from the Pontifical University of Mexico.

He has collaborated in various tasks of the Province, which range from formation to mission. He was director of the Pre-Novitiate in San José, Costa Rica from 2017 to 2019. He likewise worked among the indigenous brothers in Cahabón, Alta Vera Paz in Guatemala. Currently, he collaborates with the CIDALC (Conferencia Interprovincial de Dominicos en América Latina y el Caribe) as Promoter of Justice and Peace in the region.

Until his election, Bro. Ricardo was superior of the community of Santa Maria del Rosario, Cahabon, Alta Verapaz in Guatemala. ■

## New Vicar of the Master of the Order



On the day of Pentecost, May 23, 2021, the Master of the Order, Bro. Gerard Francisco Timoner III, O.P., appointed Bro. Mark Christopher Padrez, O.P., as Vicar of the Master of the Order. He succeeds Bro. Miguel Angel del Rio, O.P., who had been serving in this capacity since February 2017, and whom we thank for his service.

Bro. Mark was born and raised in Nogales, Arizona, on the border between the United States and Mexico. He attended the University of Arizona and graduated in 1987. It was at the university where Bro. Mark met the Dominicans who worked in the chaplaincy. He entered the novitiate in 1987, made the profession in 1988 and was ordained in 1995.

He was assigned to Holy Rosary Parish and then to the chaplaincy at the University of San Diego. He was appointed vocation promoter in 2003. In 2007, he was appointed Socius of the Provincial and was elected Provincial in 2011, serving in that capacity until 2018. In March 2018, he was elected president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in the United States, which represents male religious communities in the country.

In February 2020, Bro. Mark was appointed Socius for Fraternal Life and Formation by the Master of the Order. To this responsibility is now added that of Vicar of the Master of the Order. We commend our brother Mark to your prayers for his new ministry. ■

## Preacher of Grace



St. Francis and St. Dominic were reputed to be friends and so it is beautiful that the first Pope named after St. Francis has sent this in this Letter a gift of warm fraternity to the brothers and sisters of St. Dominic, on the 800th anniversary of his death. The Holy Father begins by saluting Dominic as the “Preacher of Grace”. The foundational expression of this grace was the fraternity of Dominic’s Family, which from the beginning consisted of friars, sisters and lay people. This spoke to a world in which the old vertical hierarchies of feudalism were crumbling and the cities were filled with strangers. It speaks to our world today which is undergoing a similar radical transformation as we find ourselves natives of a new and barely known world, the digital continent.

Dominic’s spacious family is not just our home in an uncertain time but a small sign of the Kingdom, in which all are called to discover each other as Christ’s brothers and sisters. So we are impelled outwards in every generation to find unknown brothers and sisters, as when the first band of friars went to the Americas and vigorously defended the dignity of the indigenous people, whom Bartolomé de Las Casas saw as Christ crucified a thousand times. To what new brothers and sisters are we now sent? The pandemic brings sharply to light how in times of crisis, the rich nations are tempted to draw narrowly the circle of those whom we recognise as our own.

Dominic stands both in the centre of the Church – in medio ecclesiae – cherishing the saving truths of the faith, but despatches us to the ‘peripheries’ to study, to teach and to learn. Unless we think with the Church, we have nothing to say, but unless we are close to those far from the Church, sympathetic to their experience and open to their questions, we

will be unable to share the good news. Often it is artists who preach most powerfully a word that is new and old.

Pope Francis draws attention to the “synodal” government that Dominic left the Order. It holds in unity those who are unafraid sometimes to disagree, forming them to listen to each other in the search of a more spacious truth. This may be an inspiration to the Church as it ventures on the synodal path at a time when fruitful debate is often hindered by mutual incomprehension.

When St. Dominic was dying, he assured his brethren he would of more use to them praying for them in heaven than with them on earth. May he give us now the courage and freedom to preach with courage and creativity! ■

Brother Timothy Radcliffe, O.P.  
Master of the Order, 1992-2001

## Echoes of the Letter Prædicator Gratiæ almost from the Ends of the Earth



The 8th centenary of St. Dominic’s Easter has multiplied our joy with the message that Pope Francis has addressed to the Master of the Order. I would like to express my gratitude using the words of O Lumen, the antiphon that the Dominican Family sings in celebration of the Saint from Caleruega.

Light of the Church: Dominic wanted to live and die in medio Ecclesiae. His gaze, heart and preaching manifested this luminous tenor by fostering missionary communion, uniting charism and hierarchy in the desire to reach out to all through a truly apostolic life.

Doctor of Truth: The letter invites us – as Our Father did – to love the Truth as one loves a person. The Good News of Jesus Christ removes all temptation to “have” the truth and helps us to understand the height, breadth, length and depth of the misericordia veritatis (mercy of truth) that embraces us.

An example of patience: The life of the Order is inspired to praise, bless and preach God’s work in creation and salvation history. The mystery of the Incarnation leads to generating processes through attraction – proper to friendship – and not from proselytism or the imperatives of “power”. This generates a deep, dynamic, open, missionary communion and encourages participation, dialogue and listening: we are Fratelli tutti!

Ideal of chastity: Eyes, hearts and mouths, impassioned by the Word, nourish the desire to be missionary disciples on a shared, synodal journey. Instead, we sometimes notice the worldly temptation to want to “possess” people, to control them, to manipulate them, trampling on their conscience under the mere appearance of an alleged purity.

You gave us the water of Wisdom to drink: Wisdom always invites us to “distinguish in order to unite”. Thus we want that study and preaching to be useful to all brothers and sisters. Even in crises, may they promote unity that prevails over conflict; may they be open to the reality, more important than the idea; may they recognise that the whole is superior to the part. This is an inheritance that Dominic has left to his sons and daughters (Albert, Thomas, Catherine, Rose and so many others!).

Preacher of grace: Holiness – God’s gift – is revealed in friendship with Him and with each other. We seek to live it in awareness of its two subtle enemies: Gnosticism and Pelagianism (self-referential and narcissistic), which can lead us into a mediocre, watered-down, liquefied existence.

Unite us to the saints: This is what we ask for, because the ultimate goal of the human being is blessedness: the fruit of a choice on the part of God who has predestined us to be holy and blameless before Him through love.

Thank you, “Sweet Christ on earth” – as St. Catherine of Siena used to call the Successor of Peter – for reminding us of this ecclesial vocation.

Bahía Blanca, 24 May, 2021  
Memorial of the Translation of Saint Dominic ■

+ Brother Carlos A. Azpiroz Costa, O.P.  
Master of the Order, 2001-2010

## In gratitude for Pope Francis’ Letter *Prædicator Gratiaë*



Faced with the profound transformations that mark the contemporary world, the Pope once again underlines the need for a renewal of evangelization. In this year of thanksgiving, he encourages us and all the baptized to inscribe ourselves in what was Dominic’s missionary impulse, animated by a hope for the world and for mankind.

A hope for the world, whose name could be communion. The point of departure of Dominic’s apostolic impulse was in fact the choice to return to the way in which the first Christian communities, in poverty and simplicity of life, gave a sign of communion. Even today, it is this choice that can best dispose us to be, like Jesus, moved by compassion in the face of the fractures that disfigure and divide the world. Compassion, then, puts at the heart of missionary disciples the desire to give themselves to serve communion among men, and the courage to go and proclaim the Gospel of mercy to the most distant, the most despised and those who are the most alienated from the faith. In the school of Dominic, Francis emphasizes, evangelization is intrinsically linked to the hope that a new world can be born where justice and peace are embraced, and where the dignity and rights of each person and of peoples are recognized, protected and promoted. Bearers of this hope of communion for the world, we are today more than ever invited to open together, brothers

and sisters and lay people (whose important role in evangelization the Pope underlines), new paths for evangelization: it is by walking together with all, proclaiming the good news, that the Church becomes a sign of communion for the world.

A hope for mankind. The Pope recalls that, taking the road of evangelization, “Brother Dominic”, as did Francis of Assisi, entrusted his Order and his family with a treasure that gives all its strength to such a missionary drive: the treasure of fraternity. Learning together to become brothers and sisters in the name of the Gospel, to be as familiar as possible with our contemporaries and to awaken in them this same desire. To become brothers and sisters, and thus, echoing the “Salamanca moment”, to be all the more sensitive to the calls to commit one’s life to promoting the dignity and rights of persons and peoples in all the fractured places of the world. To be brothers and friends of people in order to build with them that “common house” where all can be happy to live together. To be brothers and sisters, to study and search for the truth, in friendly dialogue with others, and in the concern to serve the intelligence in faith. Fraternity with all, fraternity in Christ, which teaches us to hold charity and truth together, and thus grow in the friendship of God.

Brothers and sisters for communion! It is with deep gratitude to Pope Francis that we can hear his invitation to renew our joy in the impulse of Dominic, preacher of the Gospel of grace! ■

Brother Bruno Cadoré, O. P.  
Master of the Order, 2010-2019

## A Holiness to be Rediscovered: St. Dominic of Caleruega and the Grace of Preaching

On 6th January this year, the Jubilee of the Eighth Centenary of the death – dies natalis – of St. Dominic of Caleruega (c. 1274-1221), which happened on 6th August 1221 in a humid, sweltering Bologna, was inaugurated throughout the Order of Preachers. With the Apostolic Letter *Praedicator gratiae*, addressed to the whole Dominican Family all over the world, Pope Francis wanted to recall and honour the figure of the great Saint who, together with Francis of Assisi, not only marked a decisive and original turning point in the



history of the Church, but represents, as it did in the past and still does today, a shining example of a life consumed in the service of evangelical charity and the salvation of souls. The Order of Preachers was born of the apostolic heart of this man who, as St. Catherine of Siena so aptly recalls, “took up the Office of the Word” and “most zealous for the salvation of souls [...] intent on speaking [with God or about God]”, combining apostolate and contemplation in an admirable balance, “devoted himself totally to the renewal of the Church” (Preface of the Mass for St. Dominic).

Dominic’s holiness, officially recognised by Pope Gregory IX on 14th July 1234 in Rieti, is an eminently apostolic holiness, nourished and sustained by an early dedication to prayer and the study of theology. From the early sources we can draw a profile of his holiness. These texts recount many of his miracles in great detail, but as his successor, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, recalls: “more splendid than the miracles were his sublime character and burning zeal”, namely his charisma, his virtues and his life.

Cardinal Ugolino of Ostia met Francis and Dominic in person and, as Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241), canonised them both. The Bull of canonisation states that God gave Dominic “the strength of faith and the fervour of divine preaching”. He “did not abandon his role as teacher and minister in the militant Church” and “dedicated himself to spreading God’s word by becoming, through Christ’s Gospel, the father of many children”.

For those who knew him, “So steadfastly did [Dominic] adhere to a decision reached before God that he seldom, if ever, changed a resolve born of due reflection. and the equilibrium of the interior man “was manifested in the goodness and joy of his countenance”; a man of authentic and uninterrupted

prayer, he was an amiable brother to his companions: “At night no one was more assiduous in his vigils and prayers, by day no one more sociable (*nemo communiore*) with his brothers, no one more cheerful”. He was like this, too, with the first nuns of the Order, with whom he had an amiable, affectionate friendship.

St. Dominic burned with love and compassion for all mankind and, as a witness to the Process of Canonisation stated: ‘he extended his charity and compassion not only to the faithful but also to the infidels and gentiles and the damned in hell. He wept freely for them’. This was the source of his apostolate and the night prayer expressed in the cry: “Lord, what will become of sinners?”. Another witness recalls that “he wept so loudly that he could be heard everywhere [...]. So he spent the nights without sleep, weeping and commiserating the sins of others”.

All this was achieved through daily meditation on the Word of God, adherence to sound doctrine and a fruitful relationship with the institutional Church: he was a man in *medio ecclesiae*. According to one of Dominic’s earliest hagiographers, Pope Innocent III had a supernatural confirmation of Dominic’s fundamental importance for the whole Church: during a dream, in fact, he had a vision of the Lateran Basilica on the point of collapsing and the Saint hastening to support it with the strength of his shoulders and thus prevent a dangerous disintegration. One of his successors as Master of the Order, Humbert of Romans, commented: “[the pope] at first seemed to be a little wary [of Dominic’s request] which, however, did not happen without the will of God, so that the vicar of Jesus Christ certainly knew, from the vision he had afterwards, how necessary it was for the universal Church [...] what the man of God Dominic yearned for by divine inspiration”. And the Church did not collapse...

St. Dominic was above all a “humble minister of preaching / *Predicationis humilis minister*”, as he signed himself in a document at the beginning of 1215. The following year, according to hagiographers, during another stay in Rome, the Saint had the famous vision of Saints Peter and Paul: “The man of God Dominic was in Rome. While he was at prayer, in the basilica of St. Peter, in the presence of God, in his prayer for the preservation and propagation of the Order [...] the hand of the Lord was upon him and immediately he saw, in a

vision of the imagination, the glorious princes Peter and Paul coming towards him: it seemed that the first, Peter, gave him a stick, Paul a book, and they went on to say: “Go, preach, for you have been chosen by God for this ministry”. Immediately, in an instant, he seemed to see his sons scattered throughout the world, going forth two by two and preaching to the peoples the word of God”.

The dream of Innocent III and the vision in St. Peter’s: the Order of Preachers was born in Dominic’s heart and entirely at the service of the Church.

The Second Vatican Council recalled that “the People of God are joined together primarily by the word of the living God” (*Presbyterorum Ordinis* 4). Preaching had been reduced and Dominic had the gift of bringing it back to light. If he began preaching in order to combat heresy and wished to evangelise pagan populations, in fact his ministry extended to all the faithful, as in Bologna when he preached “to students and other good people”.

In the Sources the image of the saint who celebrated – sang – Mass every day and when possible even while travelling, shedding abundant tears during the Canon and at the Our Father, recurs very often. This is because the Word is fulfilled and understood in the Eucharist, as the journey of the two disciples of Emmaus teaches (Lk 24: 27-31). Moreover, again in the Sources, his ecstasies at the moment of the elevation of the consecrated Host are recalled: “Frequently, then, at the elevation of the Lord’s body during Mass, he was enraptured in such ecstasy, [it was] as if he saw Christ incarnate present there; for this reason, for a long time he did not hear Mass with the others”.

His life, with his message, his legacy and his holiness, are still today the “cornerstone” on which the Order of Preachers stands, and an example for the whole Church to look to in order to learn to model the believer’s life on that of Christ, in the service of our brothers and sisters. As Dominic did. ■

Br. Gianni Festa, O.P.  
Postulator General of the Order of  
Preachers

## St. Dominic Between Center and Periphery



The Dominican historian Brother Simon Tugwell, in the first of his series of articles on Dominic of Caleruega, published in 1995 in the journal *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, entitled one chapter “Dominic and his Popes”. There he discussed the personal relationship Dominic had with the first two Popes of the thirteenth century, Innocent III (1198-1216) and Honorius III (1216-1227): it was thanks to the openness of both to his project that the Order of Preachers was born and spread rapidly in the various regions of Christian Europe.

To these two popes we must add a third: Gregory IX (1227-1241) who, while still Cardinal Ugolino, Bishop of Ostia, was linked to Dominic by a deep friendship, so much so that he presided at his funeral in Bologna in 1221. It was Gregory IX who canonised the founder of the Order of Preachers in 1234. A thirteenth-century source, known as the “Encyclical” of Blessed Jordan of Saxony on the Translation of St. Dominic’s Body, reports that Pope Gregory expressed his conviction of Dominic’s sanctity even before the translation took place in 1233.

To the host of pastors of the universal Church who can be called ‘Dominic’s popes’ Pope Francis undoubtedly belongs. In his address to the participants at the General Chapter of the Order of Preachers on 4 August 2016, in the year of the celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the founding of the Order, the Pope praised Dominic for his work, noting that “his example inspires us to face the future with hope, knowing that God always renews everything...”. Today, in his letter *Praedicator Gratiae*, written on the occasion of the

eighth centenary of the dies natalis of Saint Dominic, the Pope again highlights the various aspects of the Saint’s personality and his many contributions to the Church of the time. Some of these aspects could also be summed up in Dominic’s extraordinary ability to move between centre and periphery, or better still between centres and peripheries.

Dominic showed great courage in going beyond the monastic-canonical tradition in which he had been formed, without abandoning it completely, in order to fulfil his vocation as an itinerant preacher of the Gospel in the face of the current needs of his time. The sources explain his loving commitment to the people on the social and ecclesiastical peripheries by his being anchored in the love of Christ, the centre of his life as a preacher. As one friar testified during his canonisation process, Dominic’s interest was focused on the salvation not only of Christians, but also of unbelievers, from whom he did not want to be cut off to keep his faith intact, but whom he ardently desired to meet, in humility and with respect, in order to communicate to them his faith in Jesus Christ. And it is precisely this intention that lies at the heart of the Order he founded. However, in order for his brothers to succeed everywhere, he also took care of their education, sending them to Paris, the intellectual centre of Europe at that time. Pope Francis has stressed the importance of this option for the Preachers who must be well prepared for the evangelising mission of the Church.

An important, well-known aspect of Dominic’s personality is that he sought affinity with the popes, the pivot of the universal Church: and this, certainly, was neither to seek personal advantage, nor to benefit from the support of central ‘power’, but to obtain the endorsement of his preaching project aimed at the salvation of souls, the ultimate goal of preaching. Historians have repeatedly emphasised Dominic’s focus on the objective that became fundamental to Dominican legislation. This aspect has been called “system rationality” (*Systemrationalität*) by the German historian Gert Melville and presented as the reason for the success of Dominic’s Order in the Middle Ages.

Referring to the community form of government of the Order of Preachers chosen by the founder, the Pope touched on another personal characteristic of Dominic’s: namely, the fact that his role as the centre or principle of unity of the Order was not for

him a matter of personal success, but a matter of service to the Church. The nostalgia for the periphery, for the life of a simple preacher, did not leave him until the end of his earthly life. In conclusion, I believe I can say, without fear of contradiction, that Dominic's extraordinary ability to be a man of balance between centre(s) and periphery(ies) is the reason that he always deserves our attention. ■

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## His Beautiful Feet!



How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the one bringing good news (Isaiah 52:7).

Saint Dominic must have had beautiful feet because he allowed those feet to make him an apostle to the peripheries proclaiming Veritas, refuting error and bringing His blessings to all. Those feet were surely holy feet—pure like the virginal lily; fiery and restless like a torch by the mouth of a dog, and brilliant like a star, having instructed God's people in goodness.

Those were courageous feet that literally ran away from wealth and comfort to reach the depths of evangelical poverty submitting everything by the feet of the Lord. Those feet, probably worn out and deformed by seemingly endless missionary travels, were certainly inspiring to behold and edifying to ponder upon. They were the feet of a missionary Brother that disturb our cold hearts and shame our dragging feet until now. When those feet were not walking for God, they stood still only for preaching and praying and studying by the feet of the Lord. When not walking for the missions, those legs bent before the feet of the Lord.

When the feet had to stop walking, they only stopped to stand in order to preach and bless. The courageous feet that knew not rest were the same beautiful feet that the Lord washed as Dominic prayed and studied. Yes, I believe Saint Dominic allowed his feet to be washed by the Lord in his solitary moments with Him. Those moments of intimate mystical foot washing by the Lord in prayer made the feet of Saint Dominic beautiful unto death and beyond his dies natalis. For prayer is not only giving God our homage; prayer is also allowing God to mold us like clay in the potter's hands (Jer18:6); it is allowing God to wash with His waters of mercy our life and ministry tainted by original sin.

When those feet could not walk anymore and his dies natalis had dawned, he gave simple and clear instructions "Bury me under the feet of my brothers!" This holy man, whose feet were used only and always for the good news, wanted to be buried under the feet of his brothers! It was as if he said without saying, "When my feet die with my body and can no longer walk to bring the good news, it is now the turn of the brethren to use their feet to praise and to bless and to preach. Forget me but do not forget the mission."

From the desire of being honored and extolled, praised and remembered, Saint Dominic seemed fully liberated. He was willing to be stepped on and to be forgotten under the feet of his brothers in obedience to the example of the Lord "who emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil.2:7). Step on me; let me be the floor to lead you to the altar. Step on me; "He must increase I must decrease" (John 3:30).

To the feet of the Lord, Dominic submitted all. Through the feet of Dominic, the Lord reached the ends of the earth. ■

+ Socrates B. Villegas, O.P. (Priestly Fraternities of  
St. Dominic)  
Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan

## A female view: Dominic and the nuns of the Order of Preachers



“No display of bizarre piety, simple humanity. Too simple for hagiographers and chroniclers of long-lasting knowledge”: so writes Simon Tugwell in his *Homage to a Saint* (in the Italian edition of G. Bedouelle, *Dominic. The Grace of the Word*), a prayer he addresses to St Dominic. “Simple humanity”: Dominic lived in a period of changing times and new challenges for the Church’s evangelising mission, as Pope Francis wrote in his letter to the Order, *Praedicator Gratiae*. We could easily say: nothing new! On the contrary, today we are living in a time of change, as the Pope himself has reminded us several times. What can Dominic’s charism say today to the women and men of our time? Certainly it is still captivating, given that his Order is very much alive! It will be discussed, and certainly there will be people much more competent and experienced than I who will be able to suggest answers to this question.

However, as a nun of the Order of Preachers, I can accept this question for my own life, not least in the light of that “female” holiness which is such a feature of our history.

It all began... with a meeting Dominic had on the journey with his Bishop Diego, organised for a diplomatic mission. Beyond the borders of Spain, in the south of France, Dominic met the Cathar heresy, or rather, he met the Cathar heretics. He listened, discussed, convinced: the light of the morning was see the conversion of the innkeeper but the conversion, too, of Dominic who in that experience grasped the urgency of a preaching renewed in style and witness, visible in a community that was to be the first apostolic community.

The first nucleus of the Order was formed by a group of women from the Cathar heresy who, accepting Dominic’s preaching and lifestyle, gathered in Prouilhe, in the south of France, and formed the first community of nuns. This is a presence that has never ceased. Women, Cathars: a “periphery”, to use a terminology so dear to Pope Francis. Through this choice, Dominic expressed his conviction that there is no one who does not deserve to be heard, and no one to whom we are not sent to proclaim the Word of life, Christ the Lord. There are countless testimonies of women who met him and were attracted by his amiability, his humanity and his joy and followed him on the path of following Christ... Forget “saint with a sad face”: the witnesses tell us that no one was more joyful than he was and, since he loved everyone, he was loved by all (men and women!) (cf. *Libellus*, 107).

Dominic is the saint who perhaps more than any other has shown us God’s trust in every man and woman. This can be seen concretely in the style of common life, as he wanted, which also includes our particular style of governance: we are sisters, brothers, who meet together to understand which is the path that the Lord asks us to take, whether it be towards new frontiers, or – which is more difficult! – of conversion. Together. Our Chapters are our Cross and our Grace: how often do we go into Chapter with concerns or tensions and then come out bemused by the solutions that have emerged and the joy we share!

Dominic had confidence in women, in his sisters: while he himself was responsible for the formation of the first nuns of Prouilhe, it was these French nuns who were called to transmit the charism to the nuns of Rome, without undermining the figure of the Founder in any way. Trust and respect were also shown by Dominic’s first successor, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, who asked (and was granted) that some nuns from the Roman monastery be transferred to the new foundation in Bologna to formate the women who had received the religious habit from him.

Brothers and sisters: one Order, for 800 years, the *Sancta Praedicatorio*. A unity that is not always easy to incarnate and live, but certainly a challenge and an opportunity to be welcomed...

In the *Libellus*, the first biography of St Dominic written by Blessed Jordan, we read that “God gave

him the singular gift of weeping for sinners, the wretched, and the afflicted, whose sufferings he felt within his compassionate heart, which poured out its hidden feelings in a shower of tears” (cf. Libellus, 12). In the Middle Ages, the “innermost part of the heart” was supposed to be God’s alone: yet Dominic’s heart was inhabited by Christ, whom he loved infinitely, and by all those who are in the heart of God, the poor, sinners, heretics, the distant... The nuns are called to continue to be this “womb”, this “hidden heart”, rich in compassion, in which everyone finds a place, in which no one is excluded and from which a prayer of praise and intercession rises constantly.

Still today our monasteries are this “open refuge” to which anyone can come, with the certainty of finding a heart that listens, that offers the only Word that can give hope, freedom from idols and the chains that oppress and the certainty of remembrance in prayer! The nuns are a constant reminder that preaching comes from contemplation, from the experience of God.

Along the path of these 800 years there are many lights of holiness in our monasteries. Here I would like to recall two sisters who are very dear to me and less well known than the great Catherine of Siena and Rose of Lima: Saint Catherine de’ Ricci (Prato) and the Ven. Domenica da Paradiso (Florence), who recall Saint Dominic’s “speaking with God or about God”. Both recognised as ‘spiritual mothers’, ‘preachers’, through their writings (the Epistolary of the Prato Saint is remarkable) and their meetings in the parlour, they were points of reference in the life and history of their time. They were both witnesses to an extraordinarily passionate love of the humanity of Christ, of his Word of Truth. It is this love, a gift of the Spirit, that opened their eyes and made them contemplatives: capable, like Dominic, of looking at reality and history with God’s own eyes. God’s gaze is “active charity”, like that which Dominic had asked for himself, to be truly a disciple of Christ. A charity that is rooted in the liberating, “life-giving and truth of the divine word” (cf. Pope Francis, Praedicator Gratiae).

“A barely legible signature on the parchments of history. So simple as not to hide the dew of divine light”, writes Simon Tugwell: Dominic disappears between the folds of history, a few lines and nothing more. He does not bind to himself, but always refers

back to his Lord; he leaves no writings, because he is a humble servant of the Word, of the Church and of the Magisterium.

And so, with all our centuries-old history, we too, daughters and sons of Dominic: humble servants of the Word, of the Christ who saves, of every brother and sister. “Simple humanity”. Yes: Dominic, Praedicator Gratiae, is alive in his Order. It is impossible not to love him. ■

Sr. Paola Panetta, O.P.

## Dominic, preacher of grace



It is eight hundred years since St. Dominic died! This is an occasion for the Church to “give thanks for the spiritual fruitfulness of that charism and mission, seen in the rich variety of the Dominican family” (PG 1). As Georges Bernanos wrote in the last century, Dominic’s face is now merged with that of his Order: “If it were in our power to look at the works of God with a single, pure gaze, the Order of Preachers would appear to us as the very charity of Saint Dominic fulfilled in space and time, as his visible prayer.” If there are many charisms in the Church at any time, rarely are they still at work several centuries later. Where does this fruitfulness come from?

What is striking about Dominic is that he was perfectly attuned to “the urgent need of his time” (PG 2). Now, as Pope Francis points out, this need was twofold. There was the need for a new evangelization, to which St. Dominic responded with poor, itinerant preaching; but there was, “equally important, [...] a summons to holiness in the living communion of the Church” (PG 2). And Dominic understood at once that without a lived holiness, his own and that of his communities,

preaching would sooner or later be doomed to failure, that without this resolute return to the way of life of the first Christian community, the word of the Gospel would be lost in the hubbub of the din of the times.

There is a very profound, original reading of what it means to be contemporary with one's time. The philosopher G. Agamben has stated the following thesis: "The contemporary person is the one who receives in his face the beam of darkness that is a product of his time". And this is what happened to Dominic during the famine in Palencia, when, moved by compassion in the face of so much distress, "he sold his precious books and established a centre for almsgiving", and again decisively when he discovered the great poverty of the heresy in the Languedoc. But, Agamben continues, this is not enough: authentic contemporaneity requires more, it must be capable of "perceiving in the darkness of the present that light which seeks to reach us and cannot do so", and he adds: "this is why contemporary people are rare." For Dominic, this light could only be the light of the Gospel, which it was necessary to have the courage to make shine *verbis et exemplo* in its original purity beyond all that covered it in the discourses and mores of the time; and the courage of the Gospel is nothing but holiness. Far from isolating him and distancing him from his time, holiness was therefore that source of light which, drawn from God, was to maintain and support his response as a preacher of grace in the darkness of time.

This is why "each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel" (GE n°19). If the emergence of a charism is always dated and circumstantial, when it is borne by holiness, it is clothed with the power of divine life which knows no end; then it can last and bear fruit. This is "the perennial timeliness of St. Dominic's vision and charism" (PG 3), and not in a purely temporal sense, but in the metaphysical sense of an *actualitas* that refers to the capacity to operate and to "intercede" effectively in the passing of ordinary time. And since the charism of the saint has its source in God, it is also given to the whole Church as its own good and as such can "serve as an inspiration to all the baptised" (PG 3).

"Dominic's great calling was to preach the Gospel of God's merciful love in all its saving truth and redemptive power" (PG 4). Surprisingly, Fra Angelico almost always chooses to represent Dominic the preacher in silence at the foot of the Cross, under the radiance of the mercy of God. There he discovered that he is the recipient of the crucified Love that he believed and knew is destined for all. One and the same experience made him experience his own salvation and the universal brotherhood of the poverty of sin and the limitlessness of Mercy. That this salvific encounter might be lacking became anguish for him. So he begged and cried out, as if to tear open the abyss and open a way out for Mercy. The more he received it, the more he perceived its universal invitation, and the more he allowed himself to be configured to it, the more his "frequent and special prayer ... for the gift of true charity capable of labouring for and procuring the salvation of souls" (Libellus, 13) sprang forth. Fra Angelico understood this: at the foot of the Cross, the call to holiness and the call to mission are one and the same for Dominic.

In this way, two important features of the Dominican charism become clear. First of all, the preaching of grace is not only a matter of discourse and doctrinal content, but it aspires to launch itself as the word event that can give the recipient the fire of an intimate encounter with the Saviour, a dazzling outcome in which the word can become effective, performative, capable of "warm[ing] hearts" (PG 2), of "awaken[ing] in them the thirst for the coming of Christ's kingdom...". (PG 5) Secondly, his insistence on thinking of himself as Brother Dominic stems from the urgency of communion that he drew from divine mercy: there, every human brother, friend and enemy alike, was elevated to the rank of a true intimate friend for God by the death of his Beloved Son on the cross.

To remember Saint Dominic, who wanted to be a friar, at a time when Pope Francis has just offered the world the encyclical *Fratelli tutti* – is it not a wink from Providence? In any case, three types of commitment are proposed here to the Order, like so many concentric circles.

First of all, there is the request to "cooperate in every effort to give birth to a new world, all of us are brothers and sisters... (Fratelli Tutti, 278) ". (PG 5) It is an invitation to walk resolutely along the path

opened up by Gaudium et Spes: Christians have the right and the duty to make their contribution to the construction of a more fraternal world without fearing to take up challenges that may unnerve them at first. It is true that most of our contemporaries do not share, and often even reject, the face of God which is at the base of Christian fraternity. But this refusal cannot de-legitimise the commitment to work alongside them. It is a question of belonging to Christ and of God's wish that no one be lost. What is at stake for the Order is Dominic's compassion in the face of all distress.

The second request sounds like the Church's renewal of the preaching mandate: "May the Order of Preachers, now as then, be in the forefront of a renewed proclamation of the Gospel, one that can speak to the hearts of the men and women of our time and awaken in them a thirst for the coming of Christ's kingdom of holiness, justice and peace!" (PG 5). This means that the Church still needs preachers of grace in order to "reawaken the spiritual energy" (FT 276) that will make fruitful the commitments at the heart of the Church as well as on its margins.

But the most precious contribution of the Order to universal fraternity comes quite simply from the "common life" that Dominic desired, instituted and lived. It is not that the common life fully accomplishes fraternity, but it puts it into action with the effective tools of sharing goods, living together, service, hospitality, etc. It is a promising laboratory. The genius of St. Dominic was to infuse the ideal into government, by choosing an "inclusive form of governance in which all shared in the process of discernment and decision-making" (PG 6). It is therefore possible to move away from the logic of violence and competition, it is possible and good to live together, and, nourished by the Eucharist and the word of God, to open up to a more mysterious reality, that of unity in God through the building up of the Body of Christ. For this reason, common life, more than anything else, has the value of "prophetic testimony to God's ultimate plan in Christ for the unity and reconciliation of the entire human family", and as such constitutes a "fundamental element" of the charism. (PG 6)

When Pope Francis finally speaks of the fruits of holiness and sometimes of genius that the great centuries-old tree of the Dominican family has borne (PG 7), he underlines "the outstanding

contribution they have made to the preaching of the Gospel through the theological exploration of the mysteries of the faith. "(PG 8) It is so true that, historically, the Dominican is commonly regarded as an intellectual!

But the initiative goes back to the saint himself: "By sending the first friars to the emerging universities in Europe, Dominic acknowledged the vital importance of providing future preachers, with a sound and solid theological formation..." (PG 8). In this he differed very markedly from St. Francis who was always suspicious of a "knowledge that puffs up" (1 Cor 8:1). "Study" was for St. Dominic such a fundamental element of Dominican identity that he prescribed it from the outset even to the nuns he gathered in Rome (Early Constitutions of St. Sixtus). But he always combined it with poverty and common life. Poor because it does not seek to make a career but puts itself "in the service of God's revelation in Christ" (PG 8). Poor above all in its effort to strip the mind of the idols that are the false conceptions of God or of man, in its begging for a ray of evangelical light on the realities it scrutinises, and in the end in a radical nakedness in the face of the ever greater mystery of God. As for fraternity, it constitutes both the breeding ground and one of its aims: trusting in human intelligence, it equips it solidly for questioning, dialogue and debate. In a world of violence, this recourse to reason and dialogue will always be the first step towards respect for the other. Therefore, to study is also to "love with all one's ability to understand", as a nun once said.

At the crossroads of faith and reason, of contemplation and missionary impetus, study sheds light particularly on a rhythm, a typically Dominican "cadence", which consists in setting in tension poles which, without being contradictory, are nevertheless opposed, and which require both a coming and going from one to the other – this is Dominic consecrating his days to his neighbour and his nights to God – and a mutual interpenetration, since in God's plan they are conjoined – this is Dominic who learned at an early age "to appreciate the inseparability of faith and charity, truth and love, integrity and compassion". (PG 4) This unresolved tension can be derived from the Lord's order to the apostles: "not to belong to the world" while being "sent into the world". For the apostle, it describes a paradoxical condition in which s/he cannot totally

agree with any of the operations that take place in the world, though without being absent from it, but working to keep together realities that in the order of the world seem to exclude each other. This life of tension, which was Dominic's, is thus like the projection into finite existence of the infinity of the divine life where opposites come together.

Let us dare to go further and formulate the hypothesis that the maintenance of this tension is a guarantee of fruitfulness, while its relaxation through the loss of one of its poles is a sign of the diversion of the charism. To take the example of theology, it is when the concern for truth is combined with that of concrete, effective charity that the Order has written the most beautiful pages of its history: "The unity of truth and charity found perhaps its finest expression in the Dominican school of Salamanca, and particularly in the work of Friar Francisco de Vitoria, who proposed a framework of international law grounded in universal human rights. This in turn provided the philosophical and theological foundation for the heroic efforts of Friars Antonio Montesinos and Bartolome de Las Casas in the Americas, and Domingo de Salazar in Asia to defend the dignity and rights of the native peoples." (PG 4) On the other hand, if truth were to be disqualified in favour of religious observance alone, or if the defence of truth were to set aside the primacy of charity, then a darker page would be written than during the excesses of the Inquisition.

As for the space that is wide open between the poles in tension, it gives rise to expressions and initiatives that are as multiple as they are varied. "The religion of my son Dominic is a delightful garden, immense, joyful and fragrant", said Our Lord one day to Saint Catherine, who reported it. ■

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## The Power of Contemplation



First of all I would like to thank the Holy Father for this letter to the whole Dominican family. In it he encourages us and urges us to live our Dominican charism more intensely – in my case as a contemplative nun.

Our father St. Dominic was, above all, a man of prayer and contemplation. At that time he saw the importance of prayer and believed that the power of contemplation and the hidden life could save souls living in the darkness of heresy. That is why he first founded a monastery of contemplative life in Prouilhe as a support for his apostolic life. And at the same time, "his zeal for the salvation of souls led him to form a body of committed preachers, whose love for the sacred page and integrity of life could enlighten minds and warm hearts with the life-giving truth of the divine word".

St. Dominic's fervour for prayer is very impressive. He spent the whole night in prayer. The "Nine ways of prayer" are a great legacy for all his children: bowing, prostration, genuflection, praying with his hands as he listens to the Word of God, arms outstretched, hands raised in the form of an arrow, etc. These gestures are the expression of his love for God and his fervour for the salvation of souls. When one falls in love with God and experiences His great Love, one cannot but express it and put it into action.

When I was about 15 years old, I went to a Buddhist temple. As ours is an oriental culture, Buddhism is very much part of our history. All the girls from school went there on an excursion. Being a Catholic from birth, I had never seen Buddhists worship, but that day I saw a classmate of ours praying with gestures in the temple: she was standing with her hands together. She opened both hands and

stretched out her arms on either side. She would make a big circle and again clasp her hands together. She would go down on her knees. Her head was almost touching the ground and her palms were facing upwards. It seemed as if she were offering her whole being.

Seeing these gestures made such a great impression on me. Although I was not a Buddhist I respected their worship and I realised that in the soul of man there is a religious spirit and a search for God.

In Asia today, there are various religions, different cultures and situations: There are countries where many vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life are emerging. However, there are others who deny God and persecute him directly and indirectly. There are people who persecute others in the name of God. There are conflicts, there is suffering because of dictatorship. There are souls who have never heard the name of Jesus and follow a strange god.

If St Dominic had lived in our time and seen the circumstances in Asia, what would he have done? If, as it says in the Letter, “His witness to the mercy of Christ and his desire to bring its healing balm to those experiencing material and spiritual poverty was to inspire the foundation of your Order and shape the life and apostolate of countless Dominicans in varied times and places”. I believe that St. Dominic’s sons are carrying on his mission to this day. And we, as contemplative nuns, have the mission of prayer and intercession that St. Dominic so zealously bequeathed to us. We would like to prolong his ways of prayer, his vigils, his penance, his cries, his weeping, his tears, embracing in our hearts all the problems of Asia and the Dominicans working in mission lands.

Once again we thank the Holy Father for his letter and we assure him that he is also very present in our prayers. ■

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## Overflowing with the Joy of the Gospel



The important, profound letter from Pope Francis addressed to the whole Order in this Jubilee year warmly stirs our communities of contemplative life, reminding us of the commitment and involvement that we nuns have had since the beginning of the “Holy Preaching”. Our Region of South America and the Caribbean, thanks to the merciful love of God, has beacons that illuminate and guide the path of preaching, our monasteries are homes that keep the fire of the Word, of praise, of welcome, of compassion, of charity, of hope alive and warm. In this eighth centenary of the death of St. Dominic, each contemplative community has become a womb (uterus), where we gestate with the hearts of mothers, the cries, the merciless cries, the despair, the pain, the impotence of the weakest; we want to give birth through our prayerful, silent life, hidden in Christ, to the testimony that our Father Dominic left us, to bring the gentle balm of consolation to all the “peripheries” of our countries that cry out for mercy.

Yesterday as today, we nuns, at the heart of the Mission of the Order, stand as sentinels of light in the midst of darkness speaking out: “Are these not men whom we treat and humiliate as slaves?” We encourage the Dominican Family, echoing the words of Pope Francis, not to be afraid and to take the risk of preaching justice and truth, defending and caring for life in all its forms. Our Region calls for new “Franciscos de Victorias”, it needs the voices of “Antonios Montesinos”, it needs communities that are “Bartolomé de las Casas”.

In the presence of such an unpleasant smell of oppression, let us perfume ourselves with the sweet smell of Christ as did Rose of Lima, Br. Martín de Porres, Br. Juan Macías, Sr. Ana de los Ángeles

Monteagudo and Br. Louis Bertrán, overflowing with the joy of the Gospel, making ourselves into the bread of charity, building peace with simplicity and cultivating communion and fraternity with exquisite delicacy. As a song that beautifully summarises the presence of the Dominican mission says: “Dominic, your voice in America reveals the strength of truth, Dominic, your voice in America is the fire of freedom”. ■

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## One Soul and One Heart in God



“The witness of evangelical fraternity (...) remains a fundamental element of the Dominican charism. “This is what we can read in Pope Francis’ beautiful letter to the Order!

As Dominican nuns, we live, like all the other branches of the Order, according to the Rule of St. Augustine: “The first thing for which you are gathered together is to dwell in unity in your dwelling place and to be one soul and one heart in God”.

Fraternity is at the heart of our life’s purpose. This is also what the theme of this Jubilee Year, “To be at table with St. Dominic“, reminds us of: there is no better icon of Dominican fraternity. In a fragmented world where so many men and women suffer from loneliness or the failure of relationships, this demand for fraternity that is lived in the smallest things on a daily basis can be a strong message. It is also our first form of preaching, a witness to God’s merciful love.

“The great call Dominic received was to preach the Gospel of God’s merciful love,” writes Francis. This love of mercy which makes us live together, we beg for it for all humanity, begging the Lord in the footsteps of Dominic and Catherine of Siena; to live mercy where we are, firmly believing that invisibly it spreads and bears fruits of life, beyond our communities.

In today’s society, with all its upheavals and rapid changes, our communities can be places where it is good to be welcomed to reflect, to step back, to find peace of heart.

To welcome into one’s heart and into one’s home, is this not our way of concretely living mercy that is asked for and received at every stage of our life in the Order?

And as Pope Francis reminds us, this path is the path of holiness: “Dominic responded to the urgent need of his time not only by means of a renewed and lively preaching of the Gospel, but, just as importantly, by giving convincing witness to his call to holiness in the living communion of the Church.

As nuns of the Order of Preachers, we are committed to this path of holiness through prayer and fraternity. Even if at times the path is hard, we can rely on the promise of St. Dominic’s prayer, which he left to his brothers at the time of his death: “Do not weep, I will be more useful to you where I am going”.

In this confidence we can go forward in joy, like Blessed Reginald who confided: “I have no merit in living in this Order because I have found too much joy in it!” ■

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## Perseverance in Fidelity to Our Founding Charism



Pope Francis, our shepherd, writes to us Dominicans “imploring [for us] the grace of perseverance in fidelity to [our] founding charism”, so that we may participate in the work of the universal Church. Nor could it be otherwise, since the Order of Preachers, as a group of proclaimers of Grace and the Gospel, shares in the mission of the Church itself as proclaimer and preacher of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

From the 13th century to the present day many things have changed, but Dominic’s work is still present, effective and alive: the Order of Preachers: a work destined for its time and which history has shown to be relevant in all times. The need to make the Gospel and the Good News known to the men and women of our societies is undeniable today. There are many who have never heard of it, others who have forgotten it, others who have only heard false news about Jesus Christ, others who are confused and disoriented. But the need for the Order of Preachers is not only justified by its ever-present mission of proclamation, but also because of its method and way of life: starting from a life of faith and prayer as source and nourishment; a community life in simplicity and fraternity; the study of the Truth in order to make it known. If we do not have prayers, nor methods of study, nor edifying exhortations coming directly from Dominic, we have a certainty that he left us a form of government in which Pope Francis finds an evangelical and synodal basis. All Dominicans experience it in the day to day life of our institutions, whatever our way of life: as lay people, nuns, friars, religious in active life, members of secular institutes, priestly fraternities or members of the Youth Movement.

The notion of being brothers and sisters, which leads us to treat decisions as equals, the free debate where consensus is sought as a method of decision-making whenever possible; democratic decision and election, the limitation in time of mandates and their renewal, the transparency of decisions, the participation of all in the decision-making process, are key elements in our life and have been the support of unity, and of the always renewed strength necessary to carry out the mission of preaching. It is in this process that the Spirit can be manifested, not by an individual, but as a result of the search for truth on the part of all. Pope Francis reminds us precisely that Dominic left us the means to avoid clericalism, and that the Order and the Dominican Family in their diversity and complementarity of states and forms of life preserve their evangelising mission in unity. ■

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## Grace and Unity



In his letter marking the 800th anniversary of the ‘birth of St. Dominic into eternal life,’ Pope Francis gave our Order a fantastic summary of the Dominican vocation and charism. Grace and unity are two words that I ponder as I receive this letter as a gift which renews my own enthusiasm for the Dominican life. As an apostolic Sister, together with my brothers and sisters in the Order of Preachers, I share in the grace of Dominic’s vocation and I stand as a witness to the grace he preached ‘*verbis et exemplo*’.

The grace of Christ poured into the Church, which we proclaim, is received and experienced daily in

our prayer and liturgical celebrations, study and preaching. This grace is manifested most of all in our common life of fraternal charity, a life of mercy given and received daily by all, a life of reciprocal trust, the life of free men and women striving for obedience. This grace is the foundation of our unity of minds and hearts, in each community and within the whole Order. With St. Dominic, we are preachers of grace insofar as we are fully open recipients of grace.

Being a preacher of grace in a post-Christian society is challenging. Classic Christian concepts such as gratuity, obedience, freedom, salvation, personhood, charity, mercy, forgiveness or communion are mostly alien as notions and as realities to the people we encounter in our apostolic work. To preach grace means inseparably to share our own experience of grace, and to invite others to experience the grace of Jesus Christ. Our words are not enough and are empty of meaning when they cannot be visibly verified in transformed lives and transformative experiences of divine love. Our Dominican life itself can make this experience of grace visible and available to all. Like matchmakers, as we preach Christ, we invite others to an encounter with Christ.

Sharing in St. Dominic's vocation and family, we are visible signs of grace received, lived, manifested and communicated in unity, as Pope Francis reminds us so powerfully: unity of words and deeds in preaching, unity of contemplation and action in life, unity of minds and hearts in the Lord, culminating in the unity of truth and charity.

Preserving and fostering this unity of truth and charity stands out as the challenge Pope Francis gives me in his letter, in every aspect of my life as an apostolic Dominican Sister called by grace to follow in the steps of our Holy Father Dominic. ■

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## Called to Respond to the Needs of Our Age



I must express my amazement at the precision and insight the pope speaks about our way of life as Dominicans. Surely, he gives an impression of saying things that are both obvious and archaic to every Dominican. He tries to get at the things that must be already behind us as history; yet he brings them out in a way that illuminate and vivify them. Thus, in reading this article, I did not learn new things but I learnt old things from a different light.

I found them very important, interesting and valuable. Am greatly humbled by God's condescension, reaching out to me by calling me not only to be a Christian but a living stone in this Glorious Order of Preachers. Like my brother Master Reginald, I must confess, "I have much doubt if there is anything for me because I have always found so much pleasure in the Order." I would like to share few thoughts which struck me after reflecting on the Pope's letter to us.

First, "Each Saint is a Mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel." As the Pope point out, our Holy Father Dominic responded to the urgent need of his time by his zeal for soul, preaching, acts of mercy, theological formation of the brethren, love of the sacred page, prayer etc. Like Dominic we are called to respond to the needs of our age characterized by epochal changes and new challenges to the Church's evangelizing mission, to inspire all the baptized to set the whole world on fire of God's merciful love. To name but a few: the heresies menacing our age, wars, pandemics, misuse of natural resources, corruption, immigrants.

Since, “The devil fears hearts on fire with love for God.” (St. Catherine), we as nuns in Africa we have continued the Mission, Vision and Charism of our Order by being faithful to our heritage, namely, faithful observance of our regular life as free women under grace for the fruitfulness of our brethren’s preaching and salvation of all souls. We have not failed to show hospitality to the poor and the less fortunate, who knock on our doors looking for physical and spiritual nourishment. But above all we lovingly lift the entire world before the LORD in the celebration of Eucharist, liturgical prayer while watching over the hearth to keep fire burning by personal prayer, study, work and common life; following the example of St. Catherine who once said “I do not beseech you for myself alone, Father, but for the whole world and particularly for the mystical body of the Holy Church.”

Second, the Holy father has expressed his gratitude to us Dominican for our outstanding contribution to the growth of the Church. I remember a story one of my sister told me. One time, she went out and young man (a Theology student in St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary) came running and asked her, “are you a Dominican? She answered yes, the young man continued, you have done a lot in the development of the Church’s Doctrine and have many Saints.” The young man left after they exchanged some other thoughts but Sister wondered, what about me? Have I contributed anything or am I just busking in the Glory won by others through by toil and sweat?

In conclusion, the Pope seems to suggest that Dominic’s vision is desperately needed in our time. But with Master Jordan I lament, “who would ever hope to imitate the virtue of this man? — to be able to do what he did requires more than human strength, it presupposes a particular Grace which he alone had, unless perhaps God in his merciful kindness deigns to bring anyone else to a similar peak of holiness. But who is there who would be ready for such a gift?” (libellus). Let us remember, “it’s better to illuminate than merely to shine.” St. Thomas Aquinas

May, the Holy Father’s address to us challenge us to answer from the bottom of our hearts, here I am LORD I come to do your will. Is. 6:8. remembering, “in your will Oh LORD is our peace”. May we “ponder the fact that God has made you and me a gardener, to root out vice and plant virtue” St.

Catherine of Siena: St. Dominic Preacher of Grace intercede for us. Amen. ■

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## Faith and Charity, Truth and Love, Integrity and Compassion



Two phrases from Pope Francis’s Praedicator Gratiae strike me in particular. First, when he says that as a student in Palencia Dominic “came to appreciate the inseparability of faith and charity, truth and love, integrity and compassion.” Secondly, when in speaking of the importance of life in common in the Dominican tradition and how it inspires a “synodal” form of governance, the Pope points to the prophetic witness of “evangelical fraternity”—“The witness of evangelical fraternity, as a prophetic testimony to God’s ultimate plan in Christ for the reconciliation and unity of the entire human family.”

“Faith and charity, truth and love, integrity and compassion”—these pairs of virtues, going two by two like the apostles, all imply an objective order, God, and the other, and balance one another out. For faith without charity is dead. Charity without faith is condescension. Love without truth is permissiveness. Truth without charity loses all meaning or becomes a weapon. Integrity without compassion becomes rigidity; compassion without integrity, indulgence. Even the virtues benefit from being together!

It seems to me that the Nuns of the Order live one of the most intense forms of fraternity. After the lockdowns and quarantines of this past year, many have had a glimpse of what living a cloistered life is

like. Being together all the time in the same place with the same people can be very challenging. It is easy to fall into cliques and factions and turf wars, making mountains out of molehills and generally getting on one another's nerves. St. Paul's exhortation to the members of the Colossian and the Ephesian communities "to bear with one another in love" (cf. Col 3:13; Eph 4:2) rings more and more true as the years go by. Yet we are living together to grow in love. Without the Holy Spirit, this form of life would be truly impossible to live. I believe this corporate fraternal life of the monastery is the main way the Nuns preach. Interestingly, people when referring to the monastery often speak of "the nuns" in plural form.

In the last 20 years the Catholic Church in the United States has been rocked by revelations of the sexual abuse. I have many friends and family whose faith has been badly shaken by these events or who have left the Church. This is not the case of being taught bad doctrine. It is about how the vulnerable and defenseless were treated, authority abused and trust broken. The implicit reasoning is: "How can what you say be true, when you treat people like that?" or "How can an institution be true when it allows this sort of behavior to go unchecked even when it is known and reported?" In reality, we all have a long way to go to bring how we act into harmony with what we say we believe. Fraternal life is where we attempt to do this. In Dominic's day the opulent lifestyle of the clergy scandalized the laity. Diego, Dominic and their Cistercian companions countered this with a witness of evangelical poverty. If the Church is reeling now with cases of exploitation and abuse, we can counter this with evangelical fraternity. In an individualistic society where it is perfectly acceptable to walk away when things get tough, committed fraternity is countercultural.

One of St. Dominic's most striking features is his compassion. Even in his private prayer, he brought others with him as witnessed in his nightly cry, "Lord, what will become of sinners?" His love was both particular and all-embracing. No wonder Francisco de Vittoria, with his theory of universal human rights, is his spiritual son. Again, I believe Dominican nuns share in Dominic's compassion as expressed in his universal intercessory prayer in a special way. Growing up near a Dominican monastery, it used to be something of a family joke

that if you wanted to know what was happening in the world listen to the Intercessory Prayers at the Monastery. The nuns would pray about wars and earthquakes and typhoons that we never saw in the newspaper, and this was before the internet! Now I realize that this universal concern of the nuns comes right from our father, Dominic. ■

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