

MONIALIBUS

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GREETINGS TO ALL MY NUN SISTERS

Dear Sisters Nuns:

Receive by this magnificent means a fraternal and affectionate greeting in this strange but interesting time of Easter and Pandemic. Happy Easter! May the Lord of glorious Life constantly renew his desire to consecrate himself in his contemplative religious life in our beloved Order of our Father Saint Dominic.

A couple of months ago I arrived at Santa Sabina in Rome, on February 11, the day of Our Lady of Lourdes, eager to carry out my service as Promoter General of the Nuns. Very soon, towards the beginning of March, on the 9th, precisely, the confinement began to avoid contagion. Suddenly everything has stopped. Meetings, encounters, visits all must be postponed. All. Even we keep at least a meter away from each other!

We have had time to reflect on the meaning of this situation in isolation and separation. It is true that we are made for the encounter and that distance undermines our roots as human beings created by God for communion. But you are experts in the contemplative life, silence, solitude, work and life in community. This isolation experience does not change their lives as much as for the rest of the people. However, we can think of our Lord Jesus Christ who was only when his passion began: betrayed, imprisoned, despised. Even on the Cross where he even felt the abandonment of his own Father. But before all this, he has invited us to share the love for the Father, to others, and to ourselves, with the most important commandment. We consider that this experience of “social distancing” is not permanent and that we will soon return to our usual lives. We can



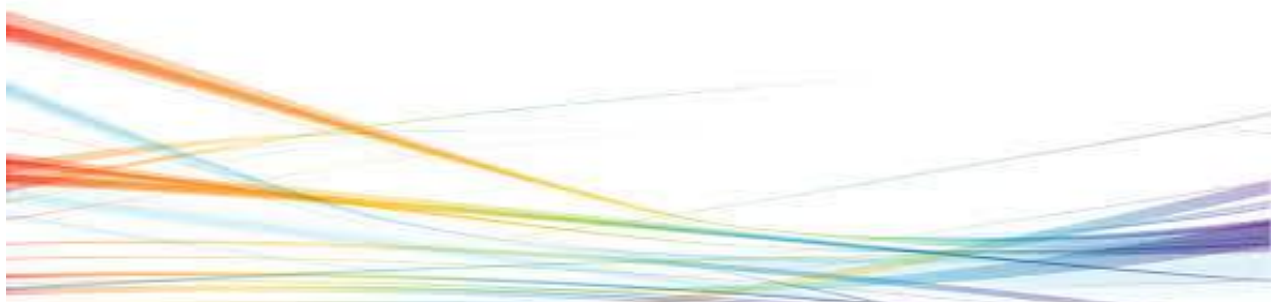
believe that all this has been a nightmare, and it has been, in truth, for those who have been sick or have lost loved ones or have suffered the uncertainty or loss of a job or are living with great deprivations. But perhaps we can also discover that the Lord has shaken us and awakened us from our passivity and quiet life to mobilize us to a new life, to a life truly resurrected. Resurrect from now on with a very clear awareness of who we are, what we have to do. We wanted to consecrate our lives to the preaching of the Word of the Lord following Jesus in the style of Dominic.

These days of Holy Week we have remembered in the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord, that, being created for life, sin has entered our lives through our freedom and weakness. Sin is a human act, it is part of the realities of the person. It is an integral part of our truth as human beings. Recognizing yourself as a sinner is the indispensable principle of returning to God. Thus, sin makes us turn to ourselves to know ourselves better and to know better the One who made himself sin for us to save us. The death on the cross of our Lord and his glorious resurrection impel us to receive that divine mercy that is the work of Redemption as the principle of salvation. The redemptive work of Jesus is similar to a second creation, the word of Jesus at the Last Supper "do this in memory of me" changed the reality of the human being. By virtue of God's action, sin was an occasion of greater good for man, that is why we have sung: "Happy guilt that such Redeemer deserved us." With our vital collaboration in the redemptive work, let us make the work of divine mercy accomplished in Redemption our own. Let us put the best of our effort for a sincere conversion and a new life that makes the Lord's Passover a reality in our lives.

Dear Sisters, from Santa Sabina and wishing to visit you and meet you in your respective monasteries very soon, I wish for you that the bright light that means the Resurrection of Jesus, fill your lives and strengthen you in your contemplative consecration.

Fray Fernando García Fernández, OP
General Promoter of the Nuns

(Original: spanish)

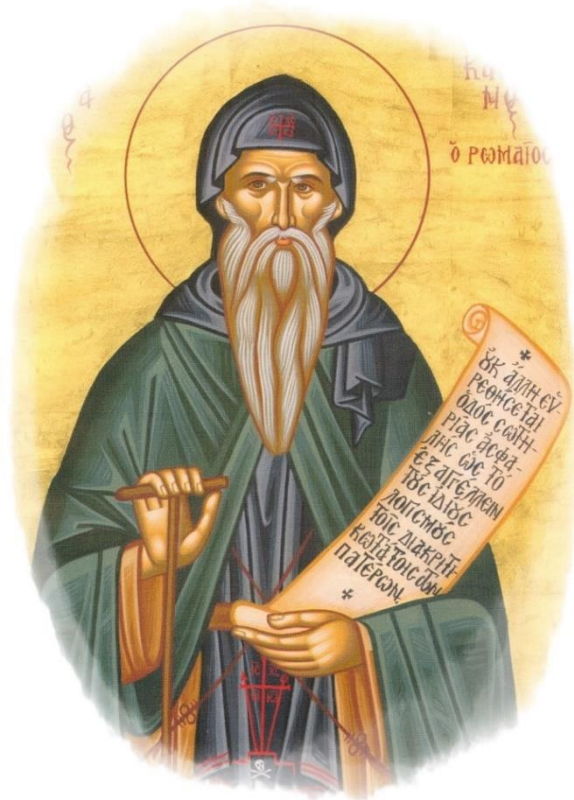


Dominic: Reader of the Conferences of John Cassian

“There is a book entitled the Conferences of the Fathers, which deals with the vices and all matters of spiritual perfection: reading and cherishing it, he (Dominic) sought to discover therein an understanding of the paths of salvation and to imitate them with all the strength of his spirit. With the help of grace, this book led him to an elevated purity of conscience, an abundant light of contemplation, and the heights of perfection.”¹

These lines round off the portrait of Dominic, young sub-prior of the chapter of Osma. There was nothing in itself extraordinary that a young religious at the end of the 12th century should read Cassian, the great monastic author who transmitted the teaching of the first monks of the desert of Skete to the West. But Jordan of Saxony, the author of the *Libellus*, situates this trait at a turning point in his narration: reading Cassian made Dominic spiritually accomplished from an early age. Later on, the adventure of itinerancy and preaching could take him to the frontiers of Christianity and he would not be shaken from his interior stability.

There is something there like a writing strategy on the part of Jordan that, without seeming it, in effect cites chapter 73, which concludes the *Rule* of St. Benedict. In this chapter, Benedict affirms that he wrote his Rule, “that in observing it in monasteries we can show...a beginning of religious life.” The plan of religious perfection, St. Benedict continues, is not then found in the *Rule* destined for beginners, but, “in the teachings of the holy Fathers (and quoting the *Conferences* of the Fathers), the observance of which leads men to the summit of perfection.” We see that Jordan has quoted the *Rule* almost verbatim in n°13 of the *Libellus*. We therefore understand his intention: to show that the preaching vocation in no way derogates from the monastic contemplative ideal, since it is as a consummate contemplative that Dominic launches into itinerant preaching in the footsteps of his bishop, Diego of Osma.



¹ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 13, 2.

But then isn't Dominic's fixation with Cassian nothing but a hagiographic or apologetic motif of the *Libellus*? Did Dominic really "cherish" Cassian to the point of making him his favored guide? If reading the *Institutes* does not present a deciding factor for attempting a response, the fight against the eight vices having become in effect the common property of every religious life, it is quite different from reading the *Conferences*. It is understood that it was in this final work that Cassian wanted to offer the monks of Provence a treatise on spiritual perfection, and not only the basics of monastic life. However, a Dominican reading of the *Conferences* cannot but be seized by the echoes that Cassian's text finds in St. Dominic's life itself. The parallel is far from being improbable since the eremitic revival of the eleventh century had put the spirituality of the desert in a place of honor as we see in St. Romuald, St. Peter Damien and even Etienne de Muret. And in any case, with the Scriptures and the Breviary, Cassian is indeed the only reading we know of associated with Dominic.

1. An elevated purity of conscience

Without making this the work of a specialist—far from it—we would simply like to suggest a few profound accords between what we know of the life of the Father of Preachers and the wisdom of the desert that Cassian's text transmits to us. All of this could be quite meaningful for us, Dominican *moniales*.

Jordan says that the first fruit of reading Cassian was for Dominic, "an elevated purity of conscience". These words send us back expressly to the *first Conference* where Abba Moses helps Cassian and Germain identify and distinguish the end (*telos*) and the goal (*skopos*) of the monastic life. As the laborer constrains himself to hard work in view of the harvest, the monk who aims for the Kingdom of Heaven as his *end* will make "purity of heart" the guiding principle or *goal* of his interior labor. The asceticism whereby the heart purifies itself from the passions of the soul, such is the tilth of the monk. But of this we have barely any clues from Dominic, such as whether the few years at Palencia and Osma propelled him rather quickly from the sowing to the harvest.

Cassian however hastens to illustrate that the negative sense of purity, the purification of the vices and passions, is not sufficient, and that true purity of heart is none other than charity. Relying on the hymn to charity (1 Cor 13), he writes: "We must relate secondary things—fasts, vigils, withdrawal from the world and meditation on the Scriptures—to our main goal, that is to say purity of heart, which is charity...²". Charity alone grants us to "always cling to God and to divine things³". Here we discover indeed the Dominic of whom Jordan speaks, in the paragraph preceding the one on the reading of Cassian:

His frequent and special prayer to God was for the gift of true charity capable of laboring for and procuring the salvation of men, since he deemed that he would be a true member of Christ only when he could devote himself entirely to winning souls, like the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all men, Who offered Himself completely for our salvation.⁴

² Cassian, *Conference* I, 7.

³ Cassian, *Conference* I, 8.

⁴ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 13, 1. Translation from the version published on the US OP Central Province website:

<https://opcentral.org/blog/the-libellus-of-jordan-of-saxony/> accessed 3/15/20

Dominic's prayer led him to the Source Itself of charity: he contemplates there the divine Model, Jesus the Savior, to imitate Him, and this so radically that his own "singular" vocation already begins to develop: win souls to God. Likewise, at the end of the biography of Dominic, Jordan will use this phrase that we love to repeat so much: "All men were swept into the embrace of his charity, and, in loving all, he was beloved by all⁵..." Fr. Ventura of Verona testifies: "He was such a champion for souls that he extended his charity and compassion not only to believers but also to unbelievers, to gentiles and the damned in hell, and he wept copiously for them...⁶". Such is the golden seed whence would be born the tree of preachers: not at first a desire to preach, but the burning desire of love, to work for the salvation of the world.

This is where we recall the place dispensation has taken in the Order as declared as early as the prologue of the *Primitive Constitutions*: "The superior shall have the power to dispense the brethren in his community, especially in what seems to impede study, or preaching, or the good of souls⁷..." Dispensation effectively signifies that primacy is intentionally accorded to apostolic charity rather than religious observances; it does not fail to echo the all-important distinction in *Conference I* of Cassian between the goal and the end, and between secondary observances and the principal goal of monastic profession.

This primacy of charity also accords with the note of *discretion* that Cassian will recommend in the following, in his second *Conference*. *Discretio* is the Latin translation of *diakrisis*, a practice dear to the first monks, which consists in identifying thoughts with a view to sorting them and rejecting those that do not lead to God and love. But in this second *Conference*, Cassian relies on a discourse of St. Anthony the Great to give a new nuance of meaning to the term discretion, that of moderation in asceticism. For, he explains, moderation opens to asceticism, "a royal road that allows one not to stray neither to the right nor to the left: neither to the right, into a foolishly presumptuous virtue and exaggerated fervor...nor to the left, towards laxity and vice⁸..." How could we not recall our Dominican way that Catherine saw as "all spacious, all gladsome, and all fragrant...⁹"? For the challenge of *discretio* as moderation is to make perseverance in good possible, to prevent the fall inevitably caused by an immoderate asceticism. So do we see Dominic not standing out in any way in his asceticism, unless secretly at night in his prayer: he followed the observances of the community¹⁰, and his hostesses in the region of Toulouse were pleased to note the sobriety but also the moderation of his diet¹¹.

The big question then is that of the means of acquiring this moderation that makes charity so vigorous. We know Cassian's response: "true discretion is not acquired but at the price of true humility¹²" and this requires you to refer to the elders in everything in an attitude of unreserved obedience. At first glance, we're quite far from the Dominican universe that substitutes vertical and hierarchical relationships of obedience to the abbot with the principle of fraternal charity. Let us not be deceived! Some historians have said that Dominic's appearance had nothing of

⁵ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 107. Translation from the version published on the US OP Central Province website:

<https://opcentral.org/blog/the-libellus-of-jordan-of-saxony/> accessed 3/15/20

⁶ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, Fr. Ventura of Verona, 11.

⁷ *Primitive Constitutions of the Order of Friars Preachers*, 1228, Prologue, (b).

⁸ Cassian, *Conference II*, 2.

⁹ Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue V*, 158

¹⁰ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, passim.

¹¹ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, 15 and 17

¹² Cassian, *Conference II*, 10

what you'd expect of a founder because all his life, all of his initiatives were always the fruit of a great obedience to his superiors—in the person of Diego of Osma, then Foulques of Toulouse and Popes Innocent II and Honorius II. Not to mention that he also knew how to “obey” events such as the Fourth Lateran Council or the evolution of the Albigensian crusade. Moreover, we account for the manner in which he submitted himself totally to the General Chapter of the friars whose institution he had requested and to the difinitors¹³, so much had humility and obedience become connatural to him. But at the same time, our *Constitutions* recall, “that he kindly, reasonably but firmly required voluntary obedience from all in whatever he himself enjoined after due consideration¹⁴.” In this way, he gave the Order the principle of its unity, and to each of the brethren the means favored by Cassian for attaining spiritual perfection.

To obey, certainly, but by what will the true elder be recognized, worthy of authority? Cassian is forthright in his response: not by his grey hair but by his compassion! And he relates the juicy story of an elder who was too hard and intransigent, who ends up vanquished by the same passion for which he had reproved a young monk coming to seek counsel from him with such harshness that this same fell into despair. The mark of a true elder, on the contrary, is to, “have compassion on the infirmities of others, and to condescend to the frailty of the younger brethren¹⁵”. This compassion, which was the singular grace of Dominic, shines on every page that describes for us the rapport he had with his brethren. Did he not show himself to be “father and comfort to the sick brethren and to all who were in difficulty¹⁶”? But there's more: Dominic transferred this compassion and this aptitude for consoling subjects that is the mark of a true spiritual father to heretics and the lost souls to whom he desired to go and preach: “he was such a champion for souls that he extended his charity and compassion not only to believers but also to unbelievers, to gentiles and to the damned in hell¹⁷.” It was almost as if he made the whole wide world his monastery by dint of his compassion, even to the far-off Cumans, watching with the same vigilance those “on the outside” and the young fragile shoots of his Order. Hadn't he made his chief study “in the book of charity¹⁸”?

One might object that Cassian cannot be invoked as master where the example of Christ and His Gospel suffice. There is however a manner of describing Dominic's charity by connecting it with the signs of purity of heart, which include a joyful countenance, even temper, tranquility, and simplicity without deceit, which strongly evoke the descriptions and teachings of the first *Conferences*.

2. An abundant light of contemplation

When the celebrated *Conference XIV* approaches the question of spiritual knowledge that crowns practical knowledge, that is to say asceticism from the perspective of purity of heart, Cassian assigns two headings to the subject: “the contemplation of things divine and the knowledge of the most sacred thoughts¹⁹”, that is to say the spiritual understanding of the

¹³ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, 33.

¹⁴ *LCO and LCM*, 17-1 (translation taken directly from the English version).

¹⁵ Cassian, *Conference II*, 13.

¹⁶ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, 3, 37, 43

¹⁷ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, 11. Cf. also n°26.

¹⁸ *Vitae Fratrum*, 26.

¹⁹ Cassian, *Conference XIV*, 1

Scriptures in the manner of Origen. But it is only briefly, by allusion and as if in passing, that he approaches the first aspect, that of contemplation properly speaking. For the chief business of the monk consists primarily in reading the Scriptures, in analyzing their meaning, and above all in making them his own during the course of everyday life. Immediately we think of Dominic as he went his way always carrying with him the gospel of Matthew and the epistles of Paul.

Reading *Conference XIV*, one cannot help but be struck by the fact that the hidden meaning of the Scriptures gives itself much more by means of asceticism than by exegesis. For Cassian, there is no spiritual knowledge without the constant preliminary of practical knowledge, that is to say the battle against the vices and the building up of the virtues. Similarly, when Jordan of Saxony paints us a picture of Dominic at Palencia, he also insists on the precocious, virtuous life of the young student. And he gives us as evidence the episode when, “overwhelmed by the distress of the poor and moved with pity”, he sold his books to make an alms out of them during a time of famine²⁰. Did Dominic know that in this he was imitating the gesture of a Desert Father, Abba Serapion? This Serapion responded to one who asked him why he was returning to Alexandria without the precious little gospel to which he was so attached: “I sold that which had been saying to me continually: ‘sell your possessions and give to the poor’²¹...” To read the Gospel in order to live by it, such is the lesson of the Fathers—as simple as difficult—that Dominic made his own since his youth!

But let us go back a bit to paragraph 7 of the *Libellus*, which concerns Dominic’s *sacred studies*:

There are two ways of keeping the divine word: by the one we store in the memory whatever we hear; by the other we put into practice what we have heard. No one would argue that the latter is the more praiseworthy of the two: just so the grain of wheat keeps better when confided to the earth than when left in a coffer. This happy servant of God failed in neither. His memory, like a divine storehouse, was always prompt to furnish one thing after another, whereas his actions and his works demonstrated in the most brilliant way that which lay hidden in the sanctuary of his heart.

We are always at the school of Cassian, who advocated simultaneously for purification of the heart and making the effort to memorize Scripture in order always to, “call spiritual things to mind” much as would a miller who brings fine grain to be ground by a ceaselessly turning millstone²². We cannot cease the flow of our thoughts and the wandering of our minds, but memorizing the word of God allows us to “improve the character of our thoughts” and thereby enables us to live it. And they say Dominic memorized the Gospel that he carried with him everywhere: “he studied these books (Matthew and Paul) so much that he almost knew them by heart²³.”

Cassian’s *Conference XIV* ends on the difficult issue of transmitting spiritual knowledge through preaching once it has been acquired: To whom? When? By whom? Why so many obstacles...? For Dominic, the act of preaching is certainly not beholden to these pages of Cassian; it is the love of Christ and the Gospel that forged Dominic into a preacher. It is however remarkable that Cassian concerned himself with transmission by preaching even amidst the solitaries of

²⁰ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 10

²¹ Cited by Dom Louis Leloir, osb, *Désert et communion*, Ed. Bellefontaine, coll. Spiritualité orientale n° 26, 1978, p. 244-245.

²² Cassian, *Conference I*, 17-18

²³ *The Process of Canonization at Bologna*, Br. John of Spain, 29

the desert. And it is no less remarkable that Dominican preaching from its origins proposes not the fundamentals of the faith and the rudiments of the Gospel, but contemplation itself. We are then entitled to read the motto *contemplata aliis tradere* (which we owe to St. Thomas) as a distant inheritance of the teachings of Cassian.

If we have nothing but a few of the elements concerning Dominic's contemplation, as with those of Cassian, the same cannot be said of his prayer, however secret and nocturnal. And there again, echoes of the text of the *Conferences* are numerous, and they call out to us.

To begin with, there is the private dimension of this prayer that contrasts it with the liturgy, which is public. This is surely the patrimony of desert spirituality. Of all the private activities of the solitary, prayer was the most jealously guarded because the most esteemed. Cassian, at the end of *Conference IX*²⁴ on prayer, doesn't leave off commenting on the triple counsel of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus exhorts His listeners to go into their inner room, close the door, and pray in the secret of their hearts²⁵. For his part, Dominique reserved his prayer for the hours of the night, at the time when he believed his companions were asleep. During the process of canonization, one question posed to the witness concerning this prayer kept coming back like a refrain: "How did he know that...? How did he see him, considering that it was night?" until finally the witness replied that he had hidden himself to see Dominic at prayer, because his prayer was in fact private. We nuns have preserved in our *Constitutions* the beautiful expression "private prayer"²⁶ to describe our inheritance of this prayer of Dominic that seeks God in a heart to heart, and for which the marked times allotted to the liturgical office in choir do not suffice.

But it is above all the description of the "prayer of fire" in *Conference IX* that cannot fail to remind us of what the witnesses reported of Dominic's nightly prayer. For Cassian, the prayer of fire is that which springs up in a heart that has been purified, when prayer, in all possible forms, has become a veritable *habitus*. So he says here:

*The diverse modes of prayer will be followed by an even more sublime and exalted condition, a gaze on God alone, a great fire of love. The soul melts and loses itself in holy love and converses with God as with its own Father, quite familiarly, in a tenderness of piety completely its own*²⁷.

If the contemplative gaze of this state of prayer is clearly evoked, the register chosen by Cassian to describe it is not that of the intellect but of the affectivity: it concerns a love that burns in the heart like a fire. Cassian makes of himself in these pages less the disciple of Evagrius the "gnostic" and more of Macarius the "spiritual". This is evidenced by the more concrete descriptions he gives a little later:

The soul pours itself out in prayers completely vivid and pure that the Spirit Himself inspires, unbeknownst to us, with incomprehensible groanings; it conceives, it lets such sentiments overflow from within in this sole instance of ineffable prayer, that it would be incapable, in any other moment, I do not say only to explain them, but even to remember them.

²⁴ Cassian, *Conference IX*, 35

²⁵ Mt 6:6

²⁶ *LCM*, n°89. Translator's note: the original French text reads "prières secrètes"(secret prayers) here and in other instances that have also been translated as "private prayer"

²⁷ Cassian, *Conference IX*, 18

For Cassian, the prayer of fire recalls “the groaning of the Spirit” related by St. Paul (Rm 8:23) that he interprets as an overflow in the soul of that which is given it by God, an overflow that makes as if to burst its psychic capacities in hurling the soul towards God:

It is in the soul as a rising tide of all holy affections at once: superabundant source whence its prayer springs to the brim and soars ineffably to God²⁸.

And Cassian then gives a description of different occasions when prayer inflames that cannot fail to evoke Dominic’s vigils:

Often, it is by an ineffable joy and by transports that the salutary presence of compunction springing forth from the intimate sanctuary of the soul is revealed; such that, the immensity itself of the joy rendering it intolerable, the soul bursts into great cries that bring to the neighboring cell the news of our happy drunkenness...Sometimes the soul is silent with compunction and sorrow, so that tears alone are able to relieve it²⁹.

The gift of tears is another trait that connects Dominic and the first monks. From among the different sources of tears and compunction identified by Cassian, we find at least two that are not foreign to the grace of Dominic: the sung office³⁰ and above all tears spilled “over the hardness and sin of others³¹” ...

3 The heights of perfection

Isn’t it clear that the way inaugurated by Dominic was completely new to Christianity at the time? His holiness itself is new and extraordinary. Is it not then timely and relevant to maintain the same parallel with the old monastic author of Marseille? Let us not be too quick to respond in the negative. Among the *Conferences*, there is one of them, the XIXth, that investigates the different end (*telos*) proposed by the solitary and the cenobite, the reading of which may have some surprises in store for us.

During Cassian’s time, the Golden Age of Egyptian monasticism, it is obvious that the vocation to solitude seemed the most perfect, though elders nevertheless advised that life in common be observed for an extended period before embracing anachoresis. Now Cassian chose to give voice to an elder whom he greatly admired, the humble Abbot John. This man, in his humility, abandoned the desert after twenty years of intense asceticism and solitude to return to a life of obedience under a Rule and an abbot. John is justified in his moderation by this definitive decision: “Better fervor in less perfect undertakings than tepidity in ones more exalted³²”.

How could we not think here again of the mixed form of life desired by Dominic, “all spacious, all gladsome, all fragrant”? How could it not evoke anew the compassion with which he encouraged and consoled the young brothers who were tempted or faint of heart? How could it not remind us that he did not wish our rules to oblige “under pain of fault (*culpam*) but only

²⁸ Cassian, *Conference IX*, 25

²⁹ Cassian, *Conference IX*, 27

³⁰ Cassian, *Conference IX*, 26

³¹ Cassian, *Conference IX*, 29

³² Cassian, *Conference XIX*, 3.

of penalty (*poenam*)³³? Authentic fervor requires being, in a certain manner, at ease, happy with life as it is, in order to keep our original momentum intact.

But this same Conference endeavors to highlight that the mature perfection of the solitary, just as much as the mature perfection of the cenobite, is never more than a “partial” (*merikê*) perfection, and that which Cassian calls “true and complete perfection³⁴” escapes one as it does the other. True perfection, extremely rare, supposes to combine in itself that of anachoresis and that of life in common. Only the greatest, the stars of the desert who are as an Abba Moses, an Abba Paphnutius or one and the other Abba Macarius, truly possessed it, they who:

...in their retreat from the world fed insatiably on the secrecy of their solitude more than all the other inhabitants of the desert...but on the other hand they endured admirably the company and the frailties of those who so eagerly sought them out...One would have thought that they had neither learned nor practiced anything all the days of their life but how to render to strangers the ordinary duties of charity; such that the question for all was in which life their zeal showed itself more, and whether their magnanimity lent itself more marvelously to eremitical purity or life in common³⁵.

In reading this text, how could we not think about the nights and days of Dominic, according to what Jordan of Saxony wrote: “he consecrated the night to God and the day to his neighbor³⁶”? Jordan completes his portrait of Dominic on this balance between day and night, between the works of charity and the fire of prayer, between a life totally given to others (*nemo communior*) and the secret of a heart to heart with God. No one could have commented on this alternating rhythm indicating the paradoxical unity of a vocation and its consummate perfection better than the Br. Elie-Pascal Epinoux³⁷, for he knew how to see that this balance between day and night encompassed something more profound, an intertwining and mutual compenetration of two loves:

...Dominic is a man in black and white: black like the middle of the night, white like broad day. Dominic, a man of night and day. Of night: solitude, compassion, tears. Of day: the multitude, the joy, the smile. And Jordan of Saxony to write, “he consecrated the night to God and the day to his neighbor”. The night to God? Yes, but for men: to pray for them, to cry out for them, to weep for them, bringing all their misery to the Mercy of the Crucified God. The day to his neighbor? Certainly, but for God: to proclaim Him, to praise Him, to witness to Him, bringing His Mercy to all the misery of sinful men.

What an admirable dialogue of night and day for Dominic, fulfilling the single and double commandment of love of the Lord, which is all the Law and the Prophets! What an admirable dialogue of night and day for Dominic, where we see the mystery that unified his life, the heart of his being, emerge: the encounter, the union of the Mercy of God and the misery of men—a union that breaks out upon the Cross of Jesus...

Conclusion

³³ LCM n° 186, 1.

³⁴ Cassian, *Conference* XIX, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 105.

³⁷ Br. Elie-Pascal Epinoux, son of the Province of Toulouse, 1959-2009. Homily for the feast of St. Dominic.

If it seems important to us to note a few traits that reconcile the personage of Dominic with that of a monk according to Cassian's concept, it is to highlight that the canonical and Augustinian foundation of Dominican religious life is not the only one. It isn't for nothing that in passing through Cîteaux with his bishop, Diego of Osma, "drawn by the loftiness of their religion, he took the habit of a monk³⁸". The monastic ideal is certainly present implicitly at the beginning of the Dominican apostolic adventure.

But this ideal relies on the words and deeds of the Elders, namely the first Egyptian monks, much more than on Benedictine tradition. The *Libellus*, with its reference to Cassian, testifies to this. But it is not the only testimony. The bull of canonization, *Fons Sapientiae* of 1234, in the brief portrait that it traces of Dominic, who, "led his Order by his example", uses this interesting statement: "while on earth he earned for himself the title and the work of the Elders". Moreover, we know that the first generations of Dominicans cultivated the reading of the Desert Fathers as is recalled by the readings provided for novices in the *Instructiones de officiis* of Humbert of Romans. And when Guillaume de Frachet wrote his work, he gave it the title *Vitae Fratrum*, an evident nod to the celebrated collection entitled *Vitae Patrum*. Later, the lives of the monks and nuns of the Egyptian desert would have an important part in the *Golden Legend* of James of Voragine, who was heir to the same tradition³⁹. In short, the model of the ancient solitaries has contributed to enshroud the face of Dominic in holiness.

Certainly, Dominic is far from having slavishly copied and reproduced the teachings of Cassian. Several very interesting points of focus in Cassian such as spiritual combat, chastity, and the struggle against the vices, for example, are not found at all or almost not at all in a study of Dominic. Yet it seems to us that he confirms, more than eight centuries after its writing, the force of the text of the *Conferences*. We know that Cassian wrote in order to transmit monastic knowledge to the monks of Provence, which they lacked despite the generosity of their zeal and their labors. It was surely a challenge since the monastic mode of transmission is a matter neither of texts nor of writing, but of concrete experience where the elder only ever presents his message orally, in a living relationship and in function of the degree of progress and of resolution of the one inquiring. However, in the preface to the last series of *Conferences*, we see that Cassian is clearly aware of the efficacy of his text, of that which linguists call its performative character: when masters are lacking, as was the case of the Provençal monks to whom Cassian addressed himself., the writing is there and the text can substitute for a real accompaniment and for a living word:

These are the authors themselves of the Conferences, Cassian promises, whom they receive in their cells with the actual volumes, in order in some way to enjoy with them a daily interview, asking them questions and listening to their responses⁴⁰.

It seems to me that this performative force of a text capable of guiding where masters were lacking explains a bit why Dominic "cherished" Cassian so. The "singular grace" that God had given him pushed him on to new paths, on to new trails not yet charted, in the Middle Ages a

³⁸ Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus*, 18.

³⁹ For all of these elements, cf. the Introduction to the "Petit Chronique de l'Ordre" (Little Chronicle of the Order) by Giovanni Fiamma in *Saint Dominique de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs (St. Dominic of the Order of Friars Preachers)*, written testimonies from the end of the 12th—14th centuries, edited by N. Bériou and B. Hodel, Paris, Ed. Du Cerf, 2019, p. 1201.

⁴⁰ Cassian, preface to *Conference 18-24*.

forerunner of modern times. No one could show him the way. But the text of Cassian was there; he could, without anything systematic, question it freely, measure his own call by its standard, and build upon a wisdom that had the double guarantee of antiquity and realism.

And if today we make the effort of this reading and this companionship, we just might receive from it, as did Dominic, the strength to live our vocation to the full in whatever makes it unique...



Sr Marie,
monastery of Langeac (France)

(Original: french)

FACE OF SAINT DOMINIC, in wood, from the 13th century, preserved in the Monastery of Prouilhe (France)



“The strongest and purest love is not the one that starts from impressions, but the one that comes from admiration.”

“Mary my tenderest love, in you is written the Word, from whom we have the teaching of life. You are the tablet that sets this teaching before us.”

(St. Catherine of Siena)



THE ASSOCIATION OF ST HYACINTH IN EUROPE

13 monasteries of the *Europa Utriusque* have reached consensus in favour of establishing the region-wide Association of St Hyacinth. The founding monasteries are located in the countries where as yet there are no federations or associations for the monasteries of our Order: Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland (German-speaking Cantons).



The bonds of sisterly friendship and support between individual monasteries have always been part of our experience. When the International Commission of the Nuns was established in 1992, and the non-federated monasteries of Central-Eastern and Western Europe were grouped as one region, our collaboration gained a new dynamic. We were encouraged to a greater openness and exchange between the monasteries of different languages and cultures. As early as 1992 the German-speaking group had initiated meetings of prioresses among themselves while inviting some nuns from Central-Eastern region as guests. In 1995 similar meetings were organized for the monasteries of Czech Republic, Lithuania and Poland and a few years later Ireland was invited to join this group. As regards communication, most sisters could speak or understand Polish, so we provided translation only for those who needed. These

yearly meetings of the two sub-groups have continued ever since. The themes discussed pertain to important aspects of our spirituality and to the service of the prioress.

Another turning point in the history of our collaboration was the initiative taken by the community of Prague, the Czech Republic to organize the first regional meeting in 2005. It was a profound experience for all participants, showing that in spite of different mentalities and the consequences of the post-war political order in Europe for the life of our monasteries, we have the capacity to overcome these divisions, relying on the power of the Gospel and the bonds of our profession. This experience of communion in diversity led to a decision to organize such regional meetings every three years. These assemblies have always been supported by the successive Masters of the Order, and we have appreciated the assistance of the General Promoters for the Nuns and other brothers from the General Curia. The programmes have combined elements of intellectual formation with sharing on some practical aspects of contemplative life. The first meeting as mentioned was in Prague in 2005, the next one in 2008 was in Germany but since then all our meetings 2012, 2015, 2018 and 2019 have taken place in a retreat house outside Krakow, Poland. Apart from the fact that it is in a beautiful setting with every convenience, it is more economical than in Western countries, it is very convenient for travel, close to the airport and train station and the brothers of the Polish Province are most generous in helping us with travel to and from the airport. These meetings would not be possible without the aid of simultaneous translation Polish/German/English and both friars and Dominican sisters are most generous in providing us with this service – for which we are most grateful.

These regional meetings have borne fruit in a growing sense of togetherness and mutual trust, which allowed for the realization of further projects. One positive example is the programme of common formation weeks for the sisters in initial formation and the novice mistresses of the Central-Eastern sub-group, organized regularly twice a year, since 2014. Many of the younger sisters have also spent some time in the monastery in Ireland to improve their English. Another example worth mentioning was an *ad hoc* assistance offered to the community of Lisbon, Portugal, in 2017 and 2018, before they decided to formally request the suppression of their monastery and transfiliation to the monastery of Fatima - several sisters of Polish, Czech and Irish monasteries were involved.

Before the publication of Vdq and CO all our collaboration had evolved on a voluntary basis. Taking into account the complexity of our situation i.e. the vastness of the territory, the variety of languages spoken, and the differences in civil law, taxation, social security systems, etc., we felt that our communities were not yet ready to establish a formal structure. At our 2015 Assembly the possibility of a formal structure was raised but while we agreed that there had been a gradual growth in our communion and we had experienced the obvious benefits of our common projects, the general consensus was in favour of allowing each monastery proceed at its own pace and level of commitment for the present.

The obligation of VDO and CO that each monastery must belong to a federation/association, has provided us with the impetus to reconsider our situation. At our regional meeting in September 2018, we looked seriously at the possibility of forming an Association to embrace all the monasteries of our region and over the following months all communities were requested to consider the proposal. By March 2019, the majority declared their willingness to proceed and a small working group of 4 sister, (representing the four main languages spoken in our region), was put in place. We met in Drogheda, Ireland with Fr Benjamin Earl who accompanied us with his expertise for which we are most grateful. Fr César was also present. At the end of four days we were amazed that we had completed the first draft of the Statutes with Directory.



Then we needed to allow sufficient time for producing reliable translations from the original English to German, Polish and Czech, and for subsequent consultation with all communities who were asked to send their comments or proposals of amendments by the end of July so that we could prepare the second corrected version by September. In this way the communities had a chance to get involved in further work on this document, to listen to the opinions of other monasteries and discuss it all once again.

In October 2019 another regional meeting of Prioresses was held where there was opportunity for everyone to express the attitudes of their communities. While there were some doubts and reservations, the prevailing option was in favour of the region-wide Association. We went through the whole text of the Statutes and Directory to reach consensus on the final version. Again we are truly grateful to Fr César and Fr Benjamin for being with us for the full 4 days at the end of which we had completed the final draft. Then after the final editing and translations

each Chapter was asked to vote on their willingness to become part of the Association and secondly on their approval of the Statutes and Directory. This process was concluded mid-February 2020 and the documents have been sent to the Holy See and we await approval.



We are aware that the ultimate goal of an Association is the strengthening of communion between the monasteries and renewal of our contemplative life. In this light we recognize the value of our experience of almost thirty years of collaboration at different levels. Together we have been formed to live our unique charism more faithfully. By the grace of God our efforts have borne fruit in the bond of solidarity and willingness to offer mutual assistance. We wish to continue these efforts in the face of new challenges and the various problems encountered by the monasteries.

We have chosen St Hyacinth as the patron of our Association. He is usually depicted with a monstrance and a statue of the Virgin and Child, as if putting himself in the background, drawing our attention to the Eucharist and to the love of Mary our Mother. We believe he personifies the best of our tradition. He was among the brothers who learned the Order from St Dominic himself and shared in the same passion for the salvation of all people. He was a humble

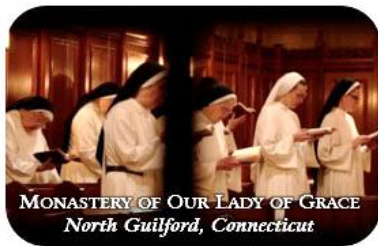
preacher, tender and compassionate for the poor, eager in study, efficient in establishing new convents. He spent himself totally for spreading the faith among those who did not know Jesus and his Gospel and was bold enough to leave his homeland and go to the edges of the world. After all, in our unique situation, for the Association of the monasteries from Vilnius to Fatima we need a patron who knows something about travelling.

Sr. Breda Carroll OP
Sr. Stanisława Pełechata OP

Region Europa Utriusque

(Original: english)





NEW FEDERATION OF OUR LADY OF THE ROSARY USA

We write you with the news of our new federation, Our Lady of the Rosary, erected by the Holy See in July 2019, with Statutes approved for six years *ad experimentum*. Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, OP (Province of St. Joseph, USA) has been appointed as our Religious Assistant. Our first Federal Assembly Meeting was held at the Monastery of the Mother of God, West Springfield, MA, from 6—9 November 2019. Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses—the day was 7 November—we held our elections for Federal President and the various offices. The results of the election are as follows:

Federal President: Mother Mary Dominic, OP (Buffalo, New York)

1st Councilor: Sr. Mary Fidelis, OP (Linden, Virginia)

Other Councilors: Sr. Claire, OP (N. Guilford, Connecticut), Mother Mary of the Precious Blood, OP (Marbury, Alabama), Sr. Mary of the Immaculate Heart, OP (W. Springfield, Massachusetts), Sr. Mary Lucy, OP (Buffalo, New York)

Federal Formator: Mother Mary of the Precious Blood, OP

Federal Financial Administrator: Sr. Mary of the Immaculate Heart, OP

Secretary: Sr. Mary Lucy, OP

We give thanks for the many years of collaboration and friendship among the Dominican monasteries of North America, and we pray that this spirit of sisterly communion will continue among the monasteries of the North American region.

Our debt of gratitude is great to the brethren who have given so generously of their time and assistance in the forming of the Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary, most especially Fr. Benjamin Earl, OP, Procurator General of the Order, Fr. Gabriel O'Donnell, OP, and Fr. John Chrysostom Kozlowski, OP (Province of St. Joseph USA), and for the fraternal encouragement of Fr. César Valero Bajo, OP, Promoter General of the Nuns.

(Original: english)



The community of Znojmo

Moves to Uherský Brod



“And when His cloud rises again and shows us a new direction, His brides will follow Him wherever He goes. For we are the Order of Preachers, an itinerant order, and our homeland is not on this earth but in our future expectations!”

These lines were written many years ago by our eldest Sister Maria Theresa (95 years old), who could not then know that on December 20, 2019 the cloud would rise again, leading us to the town of Uherský Brod. But let's take it step by step.

After the suppression of the contemplative monasteries by Emperor Joseph II, the Czech Dominican Province had no monastery of nuns for 150 years. It was restored in the 1940s. Much gratitude for this restoration go to P. Metoděj Habáň OP and P. Jiří Maria Veselý OP. Our community was approved on April 30, 1948. The beginnings were difficult, we lived in great poverty and in unsatisfactory buildings. Already in September 1950, by the intervention of the Communist regime, all the nuns were dispersed to internment monasteries and assigned to factories, taking various jobs. During the communist period the community moved several times, some nuns up to 10 times in our 70 years of existence. Until recently we didn't have any monastery of our own. After the fall of the Communist regime in 1990 we settled in Znojmo, in the rented premises of our brothers' priory, but the conditions there proved to be completely

unsatisfactory for our contemplative life. In 2014 the brothers decided to withdraw from this site, which was connected with a general re-structuring of the Province. In consequence we were forced to look for another place that would allow us to live the life of Dominican nuns.

After a long search we decided to settle down in a monastery in Uherský Brod, which had been in possession of our Dominican brothers since the 13th century and which recently became unoccupied due to the lack of vocations. Thanks to our arrival, the Dominican tradition continues in this place. With respect to our way of life, however, it was necessary to carry out an extensive reconstruction. For example, due to our elderly and immobile sisters, it was necessary to install a lift to this old building, which was technically as well as financially demanding. The novitiate had to be rebuilt and much more had to be done. There is a large garden connected to the monastery, which is a great joy for us. Another bonus is a guard dog in the garden – a beautiful German Shepherd named Tara.

Although we received the monastery with the church free of charge, the total cost of the reconstruction far exceeded our financial possibilities. The reconstruction could not be finished without a generous support of many benefactors, both from Czech Republic and abroad. However, the most significant financial contribution was granted to us by the *Spem Miram Commission from the Fund for the Nuns*. Without this generous and great



support, we would never have been able to carry out the reconstruction. This material support and help in our need was a testimony of fraternity and love for us. Having received such a moving contribution, we could become more aware of what it means to belong to the family of St. Dominic. Deo gratias!

A few days before Christmas we actually arrived in our new home, along with dozens of banana boxes. Although the Christmas season in the monastery did not match the classic notion of a tidy and prepared house, the Baby Jesus was born and we hope He will grow here with us so that we can create something new together. Currently our community consists of 11 nuns (+ 1 affiliated sister), three of whom are in initial formation. Also, we look forward to receiving Jelena - the candidate from Russia – who will come to join us in May.



In Timothy Radcliff's book *Why Go to Church? The Drama of the Eucharist* he says that Herbert McCabe OP compared the fruit of prayer to the subtle effects of living in a beautiful room. It does not have the immediate breathtaking effect of a glass of Irish whiskey, but it works at a deeper level.⁴¹ We hope that once the reconstruction is finished, even our monastery premises will radiate the beauty that will transform us as well as all our benefactors, the surrounding town, the Dominican Order and, in the end, the entire world.

Monastery of Uherský Brod

Czech Republic

(Original: english)



1- Radcliffe, Timothy. *Why Go to Church?* (p. 6). Bloomsbury Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Solemn Profession of Sister Daniela



When I approached the Monastery I had no idea what it meant to live in common, to promise obedience and "preach what is contemplated"; I had never even heard of St. Dominic. But what I really didn't imagine was the request - at every stage of my journey - to tell my story. I have often told my vocation to young people, to friends, to groups who come to the parlor, even to strangers... each time I added details and saw things in a new and deeper way. Close to my solemn profession I came to give interviews! The daily newspapers published with great diligence columns on columns with photos, the next day they were thrown in the paper basket. Pass the scene of this world!

After so much talk, what remains to be said?

On November 30, the eve of the 1st Sunday of Advent, before the celebration of my solemn profession, when my sisters were already in church and the celebrants were preparing themselves in the sacristy, I was alone in silence.



And, in that silent waiting, I understood how patiently God has waited for me!

Like a little ant, without worrying much about the road ahead, I walked behind Him who got into the game before me and preceded me. My promise "until death" was an accumulation of so many small yeses before me, a concentration of so many small steps, so many doubts and

mistakes, so many fears and expectations, so many consolations and joys, so many discoveries and adventures lived together with my sisters and it is the cradle of my next yeses. I realized that even "my story" does not possess it totally and, more than "mine", it is "ours". I am happy to share it with you all.

After high school I recognized in me the desire to give a deep meaning to my life and it was clear to me that God was involved. The question, however, was not whether God was looking for me, but whether I was willing to allow Him to surprise me and disrupt my plans for "ordinary life", whether I was also willing to set aside my dream of teaching art to children, what I had studied for.

Having met the sisters of the Monastery of Mary of Magdala I asked them to accompany me in this search and, little by little, I let God into my life as a "Person at home" and I sensed that in the Dominican style "I felt at home".

I discovered that God was not at all the adversary and boycottor of my dreams, but he wanted my happiness even more than me!

By wearing the habit I began to grow as a sister, to entrust myself to God and to the Community, and so we were able to "do much more than we asked or thought" (cf. Eph 3:21), in the fragility of the number and in the precariousness of our headquarters.

Like everyone else, when I made my profession I put my hands in those of the Prioress of the Community and, in this way, truly "my story" became "our story".



Choosing to consecrate myself to God as a Dominican gave me the ability to trust, the strength of sharing, the courage to always question myself, the persevering hope. I can say that this bond, with God and with the sisters, opened up to a great ferment: we looked for a more suitable structure and moved to Crea in order to be able to live our contemplative and welcoming dimension more, but we do not know if we will be able to renovate the house entrusted to us; we were close to a sister who joined the Father just before we moved; we accepted the affiliation of a Monastery with only two elderly sisters; we are founding a new Federation in northern Italy; we lived the joy of the Order's international gaze through the eyes

of Sr. Paola; we will see the renewal of the Constitutions... I don't know what the future holds for me, I don't know what mission God is preparing for us, I don't know how I will incarnate Dominic's charism and sometimes I miss the ground beneath my feet.

So what is left then?

The foundation remains, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11).

If I fail to leave here again, any choice I make - capitulate and live - will be madness in the air!

His Promise remains, stable forever.



Sr. Daniela op

Mary of Magdala Monastery

Create, Italy

(Original: italian)



The consecrated Day



On February 01, 2020 the melody of love hymns regarding the consecrated day has been singing in the monastery of the Vietnamese Dominican nuns. The cloistered nuns were waiting for a great day of grace because one of the Dominican nuns would make her solemn vow in the monastery. This was a gift, a joy not only for Sr. M. Magdalene Sophie Pham Thi Quy, but through her, God has also given countless blessings to her family, to the monastery, to the Dominican Order, to the Church and the whole world.

After the days when Sr. M. Madalene Sophie Pham Thi Quy had prepared her heart earnestly, the Lord Jesus Christ celebrated the marriage with his beloved bride. The chapel was adorned with lots of bright roses as a symbol of a strong, faithful love between the cloistered nun and her lover. All rituals and hymns in the Mass have been carefully rehearsed. The banquet tables were set. Guests from many places have also arrived.



In the homily, Father Provincial said about the gift of the consecration. He explained the meaning of "consecration". Thanks to that, Sr. M. Madalene Sophie Quy and everyone who attended the Mass could understand why consecration to the Lord is called a gift and whpeople need to thank God throughout their lives because of this great gift. His shares also helped attendees to gain a deeper understanding about the words, behaviors, and gestures that were performed during the ceremony.



The Mass continued with the Eucharistic liturgy. After the Communion part, the monastery choir sang a chant of sweet consecration. All sisters in the monastery sang this hymn to express their feelings. At the Mass, Sr. M. Magdalene Sophie was the happiest bride because she was united with the Holy One who loves her and she always loves Him. The Holy One who created her, her Savior, her Teacher went ahead of her to choose her and love her and has now become her Spouse.

The end of Mass is the time of the party. In a separate area, the nuns welcomed the priests in their joyful and hospitable manner. Everyone shared their happiness on this blessed day and on the Tet holiday.

Thanks be to God forever and ever!

The Dominican Nuns in Vietnam

(Original: english)



MIRACLE OF COMMUNION AND HAPPINESS IN THE SANCTUARY OF THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE



All of us who formed the International Commission meeting held at the Federal Monastery of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico, from September 26 to October 5, 2019, looked forward to visiting La Morenita de Guadalupe. Thus, on the morning of October 1, we got up early to leave for the Basilica. During the night and part of the early morning, several sisters representing the different places of the Federation of Mexico had arrived, happy and excited to meet the Master of the Order and to have the joy of participating in the Eucharistic celebration in the complex of the Basilica of the Virgin.

We enthusiastically left Lago de Guadalupe, where the sisters of the Federal House had given us snacks so we would not pass out on the way. We sang Marian songs and prayed Lauds along the journey. We observed the great many businesses in Mexico City. When the driver announced that we were nearing the Basilica, there were screams, cheers and sighs of love, like when the daughters go to meet their mother after a long time, the heart beats a thousand times faster ..., what great emotions!

There are several entrances to the sanctuary. We entered through the section where there are beautiful paintings of San Juan Diego carved in wood representing the scenes of his encounter with the Virgin and the great miracle imprinted on his *tilma*. The picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe is jealously protected and surrounded with much honor by the Mexican flag. It was a meeting of glances, between the Mother and her children, a sweet, tender and loving embrace in the lap of the *Guadalupana*. Our gratitude was manifested between smiles, compliments, silent songs of the heart, tears of joy... There she was, saying to each of her children: "*Am I not here, who am your Mother ...*" Time was very apportioned to visit our Mother in heaven, but it was enough to deliver our prayers, full of love and filial trust. One of the most emotional moments was singing the *Salve Regina* as a Dominican family. Tears of love, gratitude and joy rolled down several cheeks, when we met again and again our Mother's sweet and tender gaze.

We had Mass in a chapel next to the Basilica, presided over by Fr. Gerard Timoner and concelebrated by several other brothers, among them, the Socius for South America and the Caribbean, Fr. Javier Rubio and the Provincial of Mexico, Fr. Juan Manuel Hernández. It was a solemn celebration accompanied by the beautiful choir of the nuns of the host Federation. The great surprise we had was hearing the Master of the Order speaking Spanish. Father Gerard, addressed us with laughter and a good sense of humor, saying:

"Most beautiful Sisters, I encourage you to be credible witnesses of the gospel, so that when young people come to the monastery and see how you live, they will say, 'God is truly with you.' Your presence must remind them of God. May it not happen with you as it does with some grouchy Friars when someone comes to see them, 'My God come to my assistance...! The sons and daughters of St. Dominic are invited to rebuild communion and unity in the Church, as did St. Francis and St. Dominic in their time. Today the Body of Christ suffers divisions, our mission as preachers is to be the oil and balm of unity."

We had lunch with our Sisters of the Monastery in Mexico City who welcomed us with affection. We shared pleasant moments of family and fraternity. After this enriching experience, we had to face the problem and tiring journey of returning to Lago de Guadalupe. It took us almost four hours due to the heavily congested traffic. We arrived exhausted, but happy to tell about being in the Basilica of the dear Brown Virgin. Without a doubt, this experience has been etched in the deepest fibers of our hearts, and we will remember it, singing the song:

*Divine Lady of Tepayac
Good little Virgin of this place
Here I am prostrate before you
With a soul full of love
To venerate your image with faith
And with heart.*

*I am also brown
And I come to sing to you
Like the Indian Juan Diego
I bring you roses and a prayer.*

*I am also brown,
And I come to ask you,
That you cover me with your mantle
And everyone in my home.*

*May sorrows go away
May pain not return
And that next year
I will also allow me
To sing to you here.*



Sr. Irene Diaz, OP
Member of the ICN
Region of South America

(Original: spanish)

Nun and Artist: A Way?

At eighteen, when it was time for me to choose my direction in life, I expressed a desire to enter the Fine Arts, but my father was opposed to this and so I had to do 4 years of university studies.

Eighteen was also the age at which I broke with God. In any case, I didn't believe in Him much. And then one of my friends lost his mother, who had 11 children, of whom one was handicapped and the youngest was 2. How could God have permitted such a thing?

So I went into a church to tell him: *"It's all over between us!"* But before I left... I added, *"I will continue to search for the truth, and I will read authors who deny your existence just as much as those who testify to it."*

So I went into a church to tell him: *"It's all over between us!"* But before I left... I added, *"I will continue to search for the truth, and I will read authors who deny your existence just as much as those who testify to it."*

One day, after reading Rainer Maria Rilke and the advice he gave to a young man examining himself over his vocation as a poet: "Ask yourself in the most silent hour of your night, 'Am I truly constrained to write?' ... if you can face such a grave question with a strong and simple, *'I must'*, then build your life around that necessity."

I understood then that this was how it was for me. And I started taking classes in the Fine Arts, in the evening, since I was working.

Two years later, a deciding moment in the course of my life came during a performance of contemporary dance at the opera house of Lyon. In the booklet there was a splendid photo of a dancer with, as the caption, these words: *"To dance is to give all of oneself; it is to speak wholly to the other. To dance is to be naked."* The



absoluteness of this description seduced me, and I said to myself, *“This is truly what I want to live.”*

At once I asked my employer to switch to part-time and I entered the Fine Arts, right into the 3rd year, in sculpture. It was a very powerful and happy time.

Passing by a bookstore one day, I saw in the window a book by a Fr. Varillon, a Jesuit, entitled *The Suffering of God*. Perhaps it would have an answer to my questions. Well, something else happened. I was as though transpierced when I read, *“God has a beating heart.”*

But what was I to do? Speak to someone... certainly, but to whom could I go? I had long since stopped going to church. Then I had the idea of going to a Jesuit retreat house, and I asked the porter, *“Could I see any Jesuit?”* You should have seen his face! *“But Mademoiselle, which Jesuit? You have an appointment?”* *“No, none at all.”* He still called one, grumbling.

Three years later, I read these lines one day: *“That which God desires for us is far more extraordinary than anything we can imagine.”* More extraordinary than sculpture??? At once I sent God this challenge: *“Well, if this is true, show it to me.”* Shortly thereafter, a desire for monastic life arose in me... which threw me into turmoil. I didn't know any monks or nuns!!!

I spoke about it with the Jesuit, who replied, *“The best thing to do is to go and see,”* and he gave me a list of monasteries.

That is how I came to enter at Chalais in 1982.

Very soon I sensed that monastic and artistic life constituted a single and identical reality, a reality I couldn't name. I understood that God reached me through this breach of which He is the origin. In the words of the painter Braque, *“Art is a wound that becomes a light.”* In my free time I painted or sculpted, having as my rule to always give priority to the common life.

At the time of my temporary profession, my novice mistress, Sr. Geneviève, invited me to write a blank check: *“We give no guarantee that you will be able to continue following an artistic path.”* I made an act of faith and surrendered that desire without clinging to it, after the pattern of Christ – Phil 2. I understood that to surrender this desire to the community was to give Him plenitude, to love Him to the extreme. It was neither a sacrifice nor a holocaust, but a response to the impulse that made me say, *“Behold, I come.”*

After my profession, there were no obstacles. Also, I continued to work while taking care not to burden the community.

I skip over the years... In 2009 I celebrated my 25th anniversary of profession, but there seemed to be nothing extraordinary. The only driving force of my life, that sole undefinable desire, remained the initial bedazzlement that comes from God, the place of joy.

At the end of the summer in 2009, fr. Benoit Vandeputte asked my prioress, Sr. Merete, to send a nun to speak of God at one of the December conferences at the convent of the Annunciation. I was sent, though not without some scruples on my part: *“But still, a nun! Is it really my place?”*

To speak for an hour, and of God! in Paris! in front of an important assembly including some friars! What would St. Dominic think?"

In the midst of my uneasiness, the friar told me, *"You can pass around pictures. People like that a lot."* What a wonderful idea! That would take up time and I would do less talking. Not coming across anything suitable to illustrate my talk, I thought of some of my paintings inspired by the bible or inviting contemplation. In the course of my presentation, fr. Philippe Verdin exclaimed, *"You simply must exhibit here in the open Cloister!"*

I received the official confirmation from the convent by a letter from Philippe Verdin on May 24th, 2010. St. Dominic himself was giving the sign I had asked him for! A date was fixed for 2011 and the private viewing was planned to follow 1st vespers of the 2nd Sunday of Easter: the gospel was that of my solemn profession!



At the end of the summer in 2010, fr. Emmanuel Pisani asked me to give an exhibit in the convent of Montpellier ... and guess for which date ... for the feast of St. Dominic in the spring of 2011!

All of a sudden I was going to have 2 exhibitions back-to-back, and everything fell into place on its own, without any difficulty, and in great joy. I was touched and blown away by the magnificent gift of God: joyful communion with the friars, beautiful exchanges with the public. At that moment, I became aware that my painting is a preaching.

In the fall, during our retreat, fr. David Macaire, now a bishop, remarked during a conversation, *"The impetus that you expected from your jubilee you received at the time of your exhibitions. That's where God waits for you."* But I didn't believe it: too beautiful to be true.

In 2012, Sr. Veronique, my prioress, commissioned a statue of St. Dominic for the jubilee of the Order. I began it in October and poured it in plaster in June of 2013. The following 8th of August, a doctor from Dax, having heard of it, asked to see it. But there was a problem: it is within the enclosure. He then proposed that it be poured in bronze so that the public could see it in the chapel.

An important event, our retreat of 2014: While listening to the friar preacher tell me that he would write differently were he not a Dominican, I became keenly aware that my monastic vocation and my artistic vocation belong to one and the same desire. My life with God is

situated in that desire. It is the place of God. The two are inextricably linked and constitute my very being. The one brings the other to incandescence.

The amount for the bronze was collected and even generously surpassed. The statue of St. Dominic arrived from the foundry, 1m15 tall (~ 3ft 9in) and 57kg (~126lb).

At the end of 2012 another exhibition was on the horizon, again at the Dominican convent in Paris, for the "Open Cloister" in the spring of 2015.

On January 1st, 2015, I drew Fra Angelico as my patron for the year. Incredible but true!

During lent in 2017, I sculpted a suffering Christ (1m50, or ~4ft 11in). The experience was very powerful, of communion. The statue astonishes me and leaves no one unmoved.

And life goes on with steady work, of which you can catch a glimpse here:

[http://dax.dominicaines.org/index.php/photos/soeur-marie-bouvet/and a horizon:](http://dax.dominicaines.org/index.php/photos/soeur-marie-bouvet/and a horizon)

"I know not where I am going nor how nor why. That which leads me to the goal is other than me. Yet I walk dazzled by an unknown presence" said Michelangelo.

Art attempts to approach the mystery of invisible reality. It invites one to shift one's gaze, to see differently. The most profound reality of things and beings always lies beyond immediate perception. Art sees what others ignore or misapprehend: not so much what lies beyond things as their very depths, their secret beauty, hidden where life draws itself powerfully yet without violence from the night of beginnings. Art is an experience of the unknown which lies beyond



the reality from which the work was inspired. Exactitude is not the reality.

One could say that it is a word born of silence that leads others into silence. It appears useless, but it is the salt of the earth, in the words of Dominique Ponnau, former director of the School of the Louvre. He says further,

"What is beauty? I don't know. It's very delicate. I like Fra Angelico very much. But I'm not going to say that true art is Fra Angelico. That would be ridiculous.

If I look at the Isenheim altarpiece at Colmar, that Christ who is so terrifying he can't be gazed at, I still can't keep myself from seeing in him a Christ of very great beauty.

Beauty, I believe, is inseparable from truth. If it is not of truth, of what then would be the resplendence?"

Sister Marie op - Monastère de Dax, France
(Original: french)

A little sharing...

of a shared life!

Our community was born with a great dream: to live intensely the contemplative Dominican life open to the dimension of the mission which, for us, as well as expressing itself in prayer, takes the form of preaching and hospitality.

We feel this "mission" as a true "ministry" at the service of people who are searching for meaning in life, who live the doubt of faith, who need a space in which to rest their hearts and minds, a place where they can give vent to the sufferings and hopes they carry within.

With time we have realized the need to offer moments of real formation, both in reference to



faith and to the human dimensions of life such as affectivity, dialogue, silence, emotions....

The first form of this service is expressed in the willingness to listen to the many people who come to ask for prayer, dialogue, spiritual accompaniment. In addition, it is diversified in some specific initiatives.

On the second Sunday of the month we offer a lectio divina open to all. It is an entire afternoon spent listening to and praying the Word of God. We begin with the invocation to the Spirit and the reading and explanation of an evangelical text, followed by an hour of individual silence and, at the end, a time for sharing. The afternoon ends with the singing of Vespers. Participation is good with people coming from different parts of Piedmont, as well as from our Diocese.

We have also made ourselves available to offer five introductory meetings to Sacred Scripture, as part of an institutional journey, organized by our Diocese, for lay people who are forming themselves to be pastoral collaborators.

As far as possible we respond to requests for meetings to deepen our understanding of a



theme. The majority of the questions concern the interior life and prayer. These are mainly groups belonging to Catholic Movements or parishes, young university students, scouts... There is also a request for days of retreats preached by us.

We are thinking for the near future to offer specifically to the young people, paths on the dimension of silence that opens to listening and on other topics suitable for their moment of life.

The various initiatives are guided by a nun, according to the specific preparation of each one. How to say? So, step by step, it seems that we are entering the path of ecclesial life in our Diocese... May the Lord grant us His Wisdom, but above all grant us that our life may become "gospel"!

Sr. Mariella

Maria di Magdala"
monastery
Crea – Italy

(Original: italian)



Federal Days

French Federation

Apart from Federal Assemblies, meetings for Prioresses, Formators and Bursars, how to favour sisterly relations within the Federation, especially for the many Sisters not entrusted with one of the above-mentioned offices? In the French federation Notre-Dame des Prêcheurs, we have over the last ten years organised special federal days approximately every four years, for all Sisters of the Federation who are able to come.

From October 14th – 18th, 2019, 53 Nuns from 11 of the 13 Monasteries in our Federation gathered at the Premonstratensian Abbey Saint Martin of Mondaye in Normandy, to pray and reflect together on the theme of “holiness”, a theme which lately has been promoted both by Pope Francis with the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, and by our Order in preparation for the Jubilee of the death of Saint Dominic in 2021.

We were overwhelmed by the generous welcome of the Premonstratensian community, so close to our own roots, given the fact that they are Regular Canons living according to the Rule of Saint Augustine, and that Saint Dominic adopted much from their *consuetudines* for his own Order. Sharing in their daily liturgy and being invited to share a meal with them in their refectory one evening, gave a special fraternal touch to our stay there. We also had the opportunity to meet with several brothers, one giving us a tour of the house, another a tour of the garden, and the Abbot himself, Fr. François Marie Human, was the first of four speakers offering us insights into different aspects of our theme. In the morning of 15th October, he presented a vision of holiness for the world of today, inspired by the Pope’s Apostolic



Exhortation, pointing to both concrete challenges and possible responses, in general and for us who follow Christ in the Consecrated Life, through profession of vows, in particular. In the afternoon, our Federal Assistant, fr. Denis Bissuel OP, shared with us a profound and inspiring reflection on the Word of God and the call to holiness proper to the Order of Preachers.

After each conference, time was given for personal reflection in silence, prayer and/or some fresh air and contemplation of the beauty of the place. Meals were taken either in complete silence, with music or talking, providing us with opportunities both to savour what we had heard and seen during the day and to discuss it with our Sisters, or exchange news from our different communities, maybe getting to know new Sisters as well.

Wednesday 16th October, we listened to p. Alexandre Siniakov, Director of the Russian-Orthodox seminary of Epinay sous Sénard outside of Paris. He opened up for us the treasure of contemplative prayer, especially the Jesus-prayer, of the Eastern Tradition, and also shared with us from his own experience as a monk, priest and formator.

Thursday 17th October, we had the pleasure of listening to one of our own, Sister Anne-Catherine from the Monastery of John the Baptist, Orbey (Alsace), who has done extensive work on the recently beatified Pierre Claverie OP. Through a selection of excerpts from his writings and her own comments, she presented to us Blessed Pierre's vision of holiness, a most inspiring holiness of encounter, dialogue, of seeing and loving the Other in truth.

In the afternoon there were several proposals for excursions: Lisieux, Bayeux, the D-Day beaches or a walk in the surroundings of the Abbey. Crowning our encounter, was a festive evening gathering, where each community had prepared something funny and entertaining, or simply beautiful and reflective, on the theme of holiness. If a sense of humour and the capacity to make others smile are signs of sanctity, the author can testify that there are saints, at least saints-in-the-making, among the French Nuns of the Order!



These days were precious both because of the input and time given for reflection on a theme that is never out of season, but also because of their fruit in strengthened bonds of sisterly affection and mutual knowledge, support and inspiration to live our call as Dominican Nuns to the full. Those who participated have lived a profound experience together, which they in turn can communicate and make fruitful for their communities and the Sisters who were not able to come.

The most important feeling that remains is gratitude: Gratitude to the federal council with the President, Sister Agnes Granjon, and all those who helped in planning and practical preparation for the meeting, gratitude to the Premonstratensian community of Mondaye for their hospitality, service and prayer, to their Abbot and all the speakers, to each and every Sister who participated for her unique contribution through her presence, to the communities who generously allowed so many Sisters to go – to God, the Giver of all these and all other good gifts. To Him be praise for ever and ever. Amen!

Sr Ingeborg Marie

Monastery of Oslo (Norway) – (Original: french)

2021 Jubilee of the Order



ORDO PRAEDICATORUM - CURIA GENERALITIA
JUBILAEUM S. P. DOMINICI (1221 - 2021)
OCTINGENTESIMO AB EIUS OBITU EXEUNTE ANNO.

Preparations for the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Dominic

The theme for the jubilee celebration is “**At Table with St. Dominic**”, which is inspired by the *Mascarella* table, a wooden table on which the first portrait of St. Dominic was painted shortly after his canonization.



The 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Dominic will be marked by an exhibition in the basilica of San Domenico in Bologna and will enable the public to discover the oldest known portrait of Saint Dominic painted around 1238. The founder of the Order of Preachers is shown at table surrounded by 48 friars.

In addition fourteen banners showing Dominicans at table will be hung in the nave of the basilica. The aim is to show pilgrims visiting the church during the jubilee year, the diversity and universality of the Dominican family using contemporary illustrations.

Those who organise the exhibition on « **Saint Dominic at table**” are launching a request for photographs of nuns, lay Dominicans, Dominican sisters and brothers of the five continents gathered around a table. This table can be a work table, a dining or liturgical table.

Technical specifications:

- Colour or black and white photos, taken after November 1st, 2019 ;
- High resolution digital photos ;
- Copyright free, for written publication, quoting the name of the photographer ;
- Written agreement from all persons on the photo ;
- Offers are to be sent by e-mail to Fr. Alain Arnould OP: s.eursoc@curia.op.org before July 1st, 2020.

These photos will be presented to a jury which will choose fourteen to be enlarged, printed on textile and exhibited in the San Domenico Basilica in Bologna.



The main events prepared by the **Jubilee Committee** will take place in Bologna in the *Patriarchal Church of San Domenico*. Saint Dominic’s itinerant preaching culminated in Bologna where his mortal remains are kept and venerated. This is why most of the celebrations will be in that city.

Stella Cæli Extirpavit is a hymn said to have been composed by the Sisters of the Monastery of Santa Clara in Coimbra, Portugal, during the plague in the early 14th century. Let us implore Our Lady’s intercession during our own day’s pandemic.

s. XV

1. **S**tella cæ-li exstirpá-vit, * quæ lactá-vit Dó-
 minum : Mortis pestem quam plantá-vit primus
 pa-rens hóminum. Ipsa stella nunc digné-tur
 sí-de-ra compésce-re, Quo-rum bella plebem cædunt
 di-ræ mortis úlce-re. O pi- issima stella ma-ris,
 a peste succúrre no-bis. Audi nos, Dómi-na, nam
 fi-li- us tu-us ni-hil negans te honó-rat. Sal-va nos
 le-su, pro qui-bus virgo ma-ter te o- rat.

**The star of heaven, she who suckled the Lord,
 has uprooted the scourge of death which the first parent of mankind planted.
 That very star is now worthy to encompass the world,
 whose wars cut down the people with the sore of dreaded death.
 O glorious star of the sea, save us from the scourge:
 Hear us, for the son, denying nothing, honors you.
 Save us, Jesus! For us, the virgin mother entreats you**

We also join the prayer of the whole Dominican Family, on the feast of St. Catherine, that the current pandemic may cease:

ROSARY RALLY

FOR THE WHOLE DOMINICAN FAMILY

29 April 2020 – **9:00pm** – 5 Glorious Mysteries



“ I exhort the whole Dominican Family—friars, nuns, sisters, laity, secular institutes, priestly fraternities, and youth—throughout the world to pray the Rosary together according to this plan prepared by fr. Lawrence Lew O.P., our Promoter General of the Holy Rosary.”

*– fr. Gerard Timoner O.P.,
Master of the Order.*

On Wednesday **29 April 2020**, let's gather in our communities and homes to pray the five **Glorious Mysteries of the Holy Rosary**, at **9:00 pm in your local time**. If possible, share it live online.

Across the world, on the feast of Saint Catherine, all Dominicans and their friends shall thus unite in praying the Rosary against this pandemic:

We pray for the sick; for the healthcare services; for the families of the sick; for those who suffer economically, socially, and psychologically; for protection and healing. After each decade, please pray the prayer given by Our Lady of the Rosary at Fatima: "O my Jesus..."

The Resurrection of the Lord

is like the first eruption of a volcano, showing that the fire of God is already burning within the world, and will raise it to blessed incandescence.

