

# Monialibus

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“With fraternal affection...”:



Dear Sisters,

I must begin this sharing by telling all and each of you that of course it has been a joy for Fr. Louis-Marie Ariño-Durand, OP, the Promoter General of the Rosary, and for me, to receive and unwrap the rosaries which are being sent to us for interchange and prayer by all the monasteries during the Jubilee of the Order. We have seen the love with which they were prepared. At the time of my writing these lines, one hundred and fifty rosaries have come from the different monasteries – which amounts to 75% of their total number. Many thanks again!

You already know the plan for the days ahead of us: Once you have received the Rosary which has been selected for you, you can prepare a good schedule of prayer, calling together as many persons as you can (especially from the Dominican Family and from among young persons), to share with them those times of Gospel-prayer which we have received from the hands of the Virgin Mary. You will remember also to be in touch with the monastery from which you received a rosary. In this way we will help each other to feel more truly like a family, throughout the length and breadth of the world.

We now find ourselves, Sisters, at the gates of the celebration of two great jubilees: that of the Order, and that of Mercy as convoked by Pope Francis for the whole church. The content of the two jubilees crisscross each other for us, called as we are to renew our preaching and to make of it a real gift of the mercy of God the Father. We will hear much about mercy during the coming months!

We are always attacked by the danger of being pleased by words, without letting them transform

our lives. We would truly like to commit ourselves to be a preaching of the Love of God, to being a gift of His mercy which will free us from oppression, from suffering, from blame. And we would wish to be like that in the first place with each one among ourselves. This is a moment so filled with grace, so full of the presence of the Mystery of God offered to each one of us as pure and overflowing Love that the first task we ought to fulfill may be that of being in His Presence as open and receptive to His unimaginable gift, and loving our selves and each other in his Love and with His Love; loving ourselves and each other in our personal weakness, in the limitations in which we live, in the moral failings which humiliate and sadden us; loving ourselves in His Love and with His Love, and hearing His sweet whisper which tells us: “I love you, just as you are. Courage, keep on walking. Don’t feel that you are alone. It is I. I am with you. Let your joy be reborn. Share it. Enlighten your life and other lives with the fire of my Love”!

We would like to be always a preaching of the Love of God and a gift of His mercy, for the sisters and brothers that He himself put by our side to be family for us. To be a parable of love and communion, the ferment of a new humanity! For that we need to take ourselves by the hand tenderly, accepting each other’s reality made up of lights and shadows, of successes and failures, of what is most noble and what is most lowly, without judging or criticizing ourselves, without allowing ourselves to distance ourselves from, or depreciate, ourselves, looking ourselves in the eye with understanding and sweetness, and with delicacy encouraging ourselves to give the best that we have within us. Do you not believe, dear Sisters, that we still have great capacities for loving that we have not yet used?

We would like in the same way to be a preaching of the Love of God and a gift of His mercy for the whole great human family (beginning with our own familiar group), today so varied in its forms and expressions that at times understanding is difficult.

How can we draw near, as preachers of mercy, to a startling world of sorrow, of injustice, of emigrants and refugees, of the desolate and the frightened, of those who, without any compass, flee from destructive violence and terror?

How to reach with Love's invitation those who share our faith? How to be salt and light of God in this world forgetful of Him?

How can we make part of our lives those who are different from us? How to meet and dialogue and share, without losing our own identity?

What risks are we willing to run, in order to be an expression of the mercy of our God and Father?

I know, Sisters, that you as well as I would like answers, but I have only questions to share. I know that in Dominic de Guzman, our much loved Father founder, we encounter enlightening glimpses of paths for us to travel: in him we discover the risk of embracing the new, the daring to break molds and structures which have become unserviceable, the radicalness of the Gospel-made-life, the longing to reach ever farther by the gift of grace, of salvation, of mercy. He always calls us, as a preaching family, to live the truth of the charity that we must preach. Then our monasteries and also our convents will be transformed into beams of light, into oases of peace, into being the much-desired transmitters of hope. That is where we feel and touch the beauty of the Love who recreates our life and fills it with Life.

With brotherly affection,

Fr. César Valero Bajo, OP  
Promoter General of the Nuns

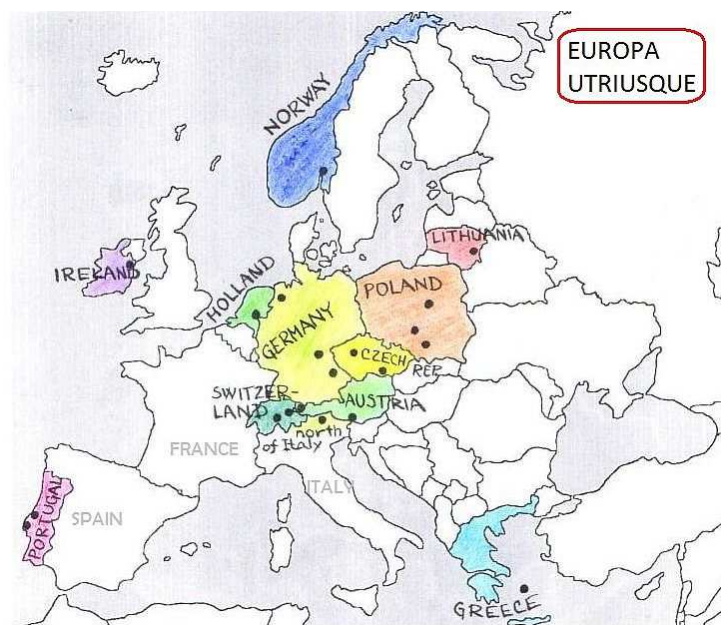
Original: Spanish

## Getting to know Europa Utriusque region

The region Europa Utriusque is a region of great diversity. It covers a large part of Europe: stretching from Norway in the North to Greece in the South, from Portugal in the West to Lithuania in the East, it embraces 20 monasteries in 12 countries: 3 monasteries in Germany, 3 in Poland, 2 each in Austria, Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Portugal, 1 each in Ireland, Norway, Greece, Lithuania, Holland and the German speaking northern Italy.

The region Europa Utriusque can also be defined as a region of the non-federated European monasteries; with two exceptions: Oslo in Norway was founded from France and is part of the French federation; and Santorini in Greece is part of the Olmedo fraternal union. And, strictly speaking, there are some non-federated monasteries in Europe that are not part of this region.

The name Europa Utriusque means: *both parts* of Europe, the East and the West. It covers ***the rest of Europe*** – or what remains of the continent when you take away the three countries with great numbers of monasteries: Spain, France and Italy.



## CONTACTS IN TWO SUB-REGIONAL GROUPS

Twelve different languages are spoken in our region. Nevertheless, many monasteries keep in touch, especially those who belong to two groups that have much in common geographically, linguistically and culturally. It is thanks to the late Master of the Order, fr. Damian Byrne, and the first promoter of the nuns, fr. Viktor Hofstetter, that the prioresses of these two groups now meet every year. Meetings of the novice mistresses as well as the sisters in formation are also held regularly. The two groups are the following:

- the **German-speaking** group, consisting of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the German speaking northern Italy;
- the **Central-Eastern European** group consisting of Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania and – because of vibrant contacts – Ireland. Also Norway sometimes comes to these meetings but not always since they have their own in the French federation.

Each sub-regional group includes seven or eight monasteries. In the first group everybody speaks German. In the second group most sisters can speak or understand Polish, so when we meet, we only provide simultaneous translation individually for those who need it.

## MEETINGS OF THE WHOLE REGION CALLED 'EUROMON'

Meetings of prioresses and representatives of the whole region are held every third or fourth year. These meetings have been nick-named **Euromon**. The first meeting was prepared in collaboration with Fr. Manuel Merten, the second promoter for the nuns, in 2005, exactly ten years ago. I will return to these Euromon meetings in the end of this article.

To show you how we have learnt to collaborate as a region, I would like to share with you what we did together quite spontaneously last year.

## AN UNEXPECTED CHALLENGE

Last year we had the two sub-regional meetings in August and September. A report on them was

included in the previous issue of *Monialibus*. As a member of the ICN, I was invited to both. The day before I left for the first meeting, I got a surprising e-mail from a Carmelite nun from Australia. She asked me about our collaboration as nuns of the Order of Preachers. She said she wanted to draw inspiration for their response, as Carmelite nuns, to the questionnaire from the Sacred Congregation for the Religious in Rome. I asked: What questionnaire? Could you please send it to me? She was greatly surprised I did not get it. As you may know, there were some problems in distributing the questionnaire. Only some monasteries got it, mainly those in federations. But most of the non-federated monasteries didn't get it.

As soon as I came to the meeting of **German-speaking prioresses**, I asked them if they got the questionnaire, but none of them had even heard about it! Fortunately a German friar who was present had a German translation of it (he got it from some other nuns, not knowing his own sisters did not have it). I asked the prioresses if they wanted to discuss it, and not only did they want to discuss it, they wanted to respond to it together! So we talked about it, then the prioresses returned to their communities, had it discussed, wrote down their answers and sent them to me. All this within a week. They asked me to invite the Central-Eastern European monasteries to join them and send our responses together as a region.

The **Central-Eastern European prioresses** met barely ten days later in Poland. Also at this meeting we spent many hours discussing the questionnaire. The Polish and Irish sisters had got it but the Czechs didn't. I proposed to them what the German-speaking nuns suggested, to send our answers together as a region. They agreed. So we discussed the questions, one sister noted down the discussion, each prioress brought the notes back to her community, had them discussed and sent the result to me the next week. Everybody confirmed what was said at the meeting and four monasteries made some additions. I put it all together, not mixing the answers but putting them side by side with the names and addresses of the particular monasteries. Of course I stressed each monastery was absolutely free to send their responses on their own; I know some did. All this was done in agreement with our promoter, fr. César.

In the complex process of responding to the questionnaire I had two collaborators: a sister from Germany who collected the German answers, put them to English, organized them and sent them to me; and a Czech sister who did the same with the Czech and Polish answers. I added the responses from two other monasteries from the region which I received by e-mail.

So finally I got all the answers, put them all in English, printed them out and sent them to the Congregation in Rome at the last minute. It was all done within a few weeks. I think the story shows clearly that our region – although so diverse – is able to, and wants to, collaborate.

### HOW CAN WE WORK TOGETHER?

Divided by many languages, different cultures and great distances, you may wonder: how can we work together? The answer is simple: because we have learnt to know each other. How? Back in 1996 the German sisters got the idea of inviting some of us, from Poland and the Czech Republic, to their meeting. Later we invited some German sisters to our meeting. Step by step, we discovered that even though our problems were different (due to various historical circumstances), we studied the same questions and it seemed we could enrich each other immensely. First we were thinking of a meeting of the two groups only. But finally the idea of a meeting of the whole region was born.

### EUROMON

The first meeting took place in the Czech Republic. When we were sending out invitations to all the monasteries (most of whom we didn't know), we were not sure how they would react. Would they want to come? Would they leave the enclosure for such a meeting? Would they trust us, a small newly founded monastery? We waited. What a lovely surprise it was when almost all the monasteries of the region responded, were interested and many of them came! In the letter of invitation we stressed that the meeting was approved and encouraged by the Master of the Order. Our sharing at that first meeting was so good that everybody wanted to meet again. The next meeting was organized three years later mainly by the German nuns and

took place in Germany in 2008. The third meeting was organized by a mixed group and took place in Poland in 2012. The fourth meeting is being prepared now by a mixed group of six nuns from five countries (Ireland, Germany, Poland, Norway and the Czech Republic). It will take place in September 2015 in Poland.

At these meetings, simultaneous translation is provided into the three main languages of the region: German, Polish and English. We have to use translation equipment and we need six or seven interpreters. Thank God we have been always blessed in finding enough Dominican brothers and sisters willing to help us in this way. We have been grateful to some provinces of friars and other benefactors for their financial help.

We celebrate the liturgy each day in one of the three official languages; some parts are sung in Latin (the Benedictus, Magnificat and the Ordinary of the Mass). Booklets with the liturgical texts are distributed to everybody so that all can participate. The Mass readings are printed out in all three languages. The homily is translated into one other language.



*On the picture: Nuns from Norway, Germany (one of them is a Hungarian), Poland and the Czech Republic at the Euromon in Poland, 2012*

We are happy that the Master fr. Bruno Cadore has accepted our invitation to come to the next Euromon as he had already come to the last one. Our dear promoter fr. César Valero will come, as well as fr. Vivian Boland, the Vicar of the Master, who will be our main speaker. The theme is: ***Itinerantia*** – a challenge for the Nuns of the Order of Preachers. And because of the

Jubilee of the Order, the theme continues like this: **Jubilee as *metanoia***. We entrust ourselves to your prayers.

I hope this article has been helpful in bringing closer to you the region with the mysterious name – Europa Utriusque.

Sr. M. Josefa Strettiová OP, ICN member for  
Europa Utriusque  
Monastery of Nuns of the Order of Preachers,  
Prague, the Czech Republic

Original: English

### **France, Federation of Our Lady of the Preachers – 800<sup>th</sup> Jubilee: the nuns bring their special touch**

If there is a particular contribution that the nuns can make to the forthcoming celebrations of the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Order it must surely be one centered on prayer.

In these days of internet, in partnership with [historia.op.org](http://historia.op.org) and backed by [www.retraitedanslaville.org](http://www.retraitedanslaville.org), the Federation of Dominican nuns of Our Lady of the Preachers (France, Switzerland and Norway) is preparing to launch between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> November 2015 a week of prayer for the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Order of Preachers on [hozana.org](http://hozana.org). This is a young social network that initiates prayer chains. “Seven days with the Dominican nuns, in order to pray for the proclamation of the Gospel and the new challenges faced by the Dominican Order today, in France and throughout the world.” Having reflected, together with fr Cesar Valero Bajo, on our contribution to the Jubilee Celebrations, at our federal meeting in June at Fanjeaux, we are offering a seven day cycle based on Christ as he communicates himself to us in everyday life:

- Christ in the mystery of encounter
- Christ in my personal prayer
- Christ in the sacraments
- Christ in the psalms
- Christ in fraternal life
- Christ in study
- My life given to Christ for ever!

Registrations for the week of prayer are already open in <http://i.hozana.org/1K5CGay>

This proposition is geared for all the branches of the Order: Please inform widely around you!

This initial week, which seeks to place the 15 months of the jubilee under the protection of the Holy Spirit, will be a lead in to a series of local events within the 12 monasteries of the federation. In response to the appeal from Fr Bruno MO we are offering to young people resources from the Dominican platform, in the conviction that the synergy between the various branches of the family provides a joyful and complementary opportunity for evangelisation:

15 week-ends of PRAYER, FORMATION, ENCOUNTER with the challenge “I’ll come and I’ll bring a friend”.

Here are the details of the Federation’s new website: <http://moniales.dominicaines.org>



List of the week-ends:

**17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> October 2015 in Paray-le-Monial**  
*St Dominic and his sisters the nuns*

**6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> November 2015 in Prouilhe**  
*800 years of the Order of Preacher : week-end to begin the jubilee*

**21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2015, Christ the King of the universe in Orbey**  
*Who reigns in my life?*

**31<sup>st</sup> December 2015 to 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2016 in  
Sainte Baume and Saint-Maximin**

*Announcing the Gospel of mercy.*

**1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2016 in Estavayer-le-Lac  
(Switzerland)**

*Time of crisis: Good News! The book of  
Revelation unveiled.*

**6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> February 2016 in Beaufort**

*« The compassions of the Lord never fail. »*

**21<sup>st</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2016 in Paray-le-Monial**

*« Your Word, a light for my footsteps. »*

**26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2016 in Orbey**

*« At night his song is with me – a prayer to the  
God of my life»: the Psalms.*

**5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> March 2016 in Chalais**

*The prodigal son: go on living when everything  
else has been tried.*

**6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016 in Prouilhe**

*Come and pray like St Dominic.*

**7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> May 2016 in Saint-Denis de la  
Réunion**

*Saint Dominic, a saint of mercy.*

**20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>th</sup> May 2016 in Langeac**

*« The notes of Mercy »: about Chris Kraus'  
movie "Four minutes".*

**29<sup>th</sup> October to 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016 in  
Taulignan:**

*Love with all our intelligence.*

**Dax:**

Week-end in preparation

**Lourdes:**

Week-end in preparation

In conclusion, on January 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017 there will be a lightning pilgrimage to Rome organised by Fr. Joël-Marie Boudaroua and Fr. François-Régis Delcourt for those young people who wish to be present with the Master of the Order at Saint John Lateran for the closing of the Jubilee Year and to visit the Dominican holy

places in Rome. Registrations starting September 2016.

We invite you to join us in prayer for all of these plans in the hope that the proclamation of the Gospel will be truly fruitful!

**400 Years of Porta Coeli  
Monastery, Valladolid, Spain**

At the Monastery of Our Lady Gate of Heaven, in Valladolid, we celebrated in May 2015, four hundred years since the foundation of our monastery by Don Rodrigo Calderón, Marquis of the Seven Churches and Count of Oliva.

In the evening of May 7<sup>th</sup> His Eminence the Most Rev. Ricardo Blázquez, Cardinal Archbishop of Valladolid, presided at the Eucharist, with numerous Dominican and diocesan priests concelebrating. During the Homily his Eminence pointed out that this anniversary was being celebrated during the Paschal season:

*The Lord made no mistake with you, he said. Let us put the future into the hands of our Provident God and not in our human power and strength. In the face of uncertainty, we must draw our attitude to God from the deepest place in our hearts. Let us rely humbly on the Lord's promise that he will always be with you. He never disappoints. We have united ourselves to the generosity of those who have preceded us here. Your monastery bears the title: Gate of Heaven.*

*By the help of the most holy Virgin Mary who is the Gateway to Heaven for our society, may you be mediators of graces for people. Be bright gleams showing that Heaven remains open. Open our world to Heaven.*

*By your consecration may you be able to be a community established on God's love. Love is no vague feeling. It calls for works which express love. Your life is a history of salvation and not of chance.*

*The Virgin of Joy whose image you have in your monastery church puts aside her dark mourning*

*garments when she meets Christ the Risen One on Easter morning. We were not born to be sad. True joy has its foundation not in our character or our temporal well-being; no, not even if we can be joyful in sorrow. It is the nearness, the closeness, of God which sustains us in joy.*

Porta Coeli Monastery, Valladolid, Spain

Original: Spanish

### **Cultivating the land, an ecological and theological challenge**

The priority of a monastic community is for a simple life, as unified as possible, respectful of the gifts of the Creator and his children, all mankind. So when in 2009 our community of Dominican nuns in Taulignan, France, nourished by the theology of the Creation, made the decision to use part of our land to grow aromatic plants native to our area (Provence) using organic techniques, it seemed we weren't far from being in line... and yet the work we were taking on was to prove extensive.

A number of people encouraged us to carry out our project, the justification of which seemed clear. But we had to put it into practice. Obtaining the certifications required, registering with various partners of the organic farming network, which is very dynamic in our area, opened doors for us towards an ecological commitment that was both deliberate and progressive and yet, at the same time, had to fit in completely with our call to a monastic way of life.

Our bishop gave us support and encouragement; he is concerned that progress should be made in terms of ecological, theological, philosophical and anthropological thinking within the diocese and the Church. A group was formed around the community and has today become a Christian, oecumenical association called OEKO-LOGIA.

Once the decision had been taken, we went for a walk around our garden with a few friends who had taken part in developing the idea. We were walking round the edge of one of the plots when one of them, a market gardener, took a handful

of earth to smell it. It had no odour. The earth was in agony, having been badly treated by erosion and conventional remedies for vines that had only just been removed. In order to cultivate the aromatic plants we intended to plant where previously there were vines, we first had to learn to "repair" the earth, to nourish it so that in turn, it would be able to nourish plants once again. Basic agro-ecological techniques were used to encourage the fauna and microbial life to return to the soil and thus prove the good health of the earth, and also guarantee its fertility.

Our firm resolutions:

- Plant and harvest by hand.
- Reduce the work of the soil by mulching the rows and growing grass in between them.
- Use natural input (manure, vegetable compost produced on the spot).
- Use plants to cure plants and associate plants that go together.
- Alternate species on each plot.
- Allow ourselves to be amazed!

In just three years we began to observe under the straw all sorts of small animals which had suddenly come to appear quite friendly to us, and the earth was now much more pliant thanks to a lot of worms, which are such wonderful workmen. The earth had returned to life. And the smell of the earth too... We got to know the many virtues of the wild plants we encountered (or eliminated) previously in perfect ignorance, the influence of the moon, the patient rhythms of nature, which are also our own. All that the wise farmers knew and ecological science is rediscovering.

The ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis. We are convinced that if we do not treat the earth with respect, this leads to a lack of respect for human beings and therefore for God.

This can also be read the other way round: if we do not respect God, this leads us to a lack of respect for human beings and for the earth.

Our commitment is therefore also a social one. Our spiritual obligation gave birth to the project, and we cannot be concerned about the earth without being concerned about those who live on the planet and count on it for food. The project came to life thanks to a new sign of Providence in the person of a benefactor who enabled us to



carry out a dream we had at the very beginning of the project: a small distillery to enable us to extract essential oils from our plants. Such equipment on a small scale is quite rare, nonexistent in our geographical area and gave us the opportunity to add to the field of organic culture. Once the distillery was installed, we could put into practice our commitment to employ people in difficulty for seasonal agricultural work, using local institutions because we do not have the competence or the vocation for management. Providence again was generous quite recently in financing such services until the crops themselves can generate sufficient funds for their upkeep.

We offer the possibility to anyone who asks us to learn about work on the land by helping with small gardening tasks. It is often an efficient way for them to discover the ecological approach, the reasons why and its benefits. It is also a path amongst others towards new evangelisation, a path of conversion which begins with ourselves. Like the humming bird, we try to put into practice our humble contribution using means which today attempt to fall in line with the serious and real questions of human life and the planet.

Monastery « La Clarté Notre-Dame »  
in Taulignan; France

Original: French



## Grace upon Grace

Thanks be to God for His grace bestowed on us, the Dominican Monastery of our Lady of the Holy Spirit in Vietnam, which was officially approved as an autonomous Monastery among other monasteries all over the world on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

In succession to this great grace, numerous graces from our Lord have followed, from habitual to special; from natural to supernatural. Indeed, *our Lord is good, whose love endures forever*. We would like to keep our Dominican family informed, particularly the nuns around the world, about the graces of Religious Vocation which God gave us in the past year, so that all the brothers and sisters join us in giving thanks to God and keep praying for us.



- On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015, Sister Mary of the Holy Child Phuong Oanh advanced to a new phase for a two-year novitiate.

- On February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 Sister Marie Madeleine Sophie Kim Quy made her first profession.

- On September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 we will have three new novices who receive the habit: Mary Trinh Nguyen, Mary Nghe and Elizabeth Kim Ly.

Besides, we've currently got 5 aspirants in their trial period.

We now would like to share with you good news for our Monastery. We hope to get official permission from the government to begin building our Monastery at Ngu Phuc, Dong Nai, Viet Nam in 2016 after 14 year of patient waiting. Please keep praying for our plan to be completed in God's loving providence.

We realise love can only be answered by love. We always remind and encourage ourselves to live our religious life worthily and happily according to God's will and the expectation of the Church and the Order.

May our Lord bless every brother and sister in our Dominican family, so that we steadily walk on the path that our Father and saintly brothers and sisters have taken throughout 800 years.

The Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of  
the Holy Spirit in Viet Nam

### A Sister From Shawinigan (Quebec) In Switzerland And In France

It was one great adventure that I embarked on on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2015: leaving Quebec on my own in order to travel to Switzerland and elsewhere in Europe for the meeting of the French Federation being held in Fanjeaux and Prouilhe. A number of questions troubled me, but the challenge was too fascinating to refuse to accept it. I was going to meet lots of Dominican nuns with whom I would be both living and exchanging ideas. I had better explain first of all that we are the only French-speaking monastery in Canada! Hence my delight at the prospect of meeting other French-speaking nuns!

I'll begin by describing briefly our community's recent adventure in transferring from Berthierville to Shawinigan! It was only after a long period of reflection that we unanimously decided to leave our lovely monastery, the one which our older Sisters had taken so many years to build. For each one there were different causes of grief to be lived through. The sharing and the discussions between us during the various stages of our venture proved to be a source of energy and of communion. The Lord went ahead of us at each stage. The first was the invitation we received from our apostolic Sisters of the Trinity to come and live with them. What a blessing for us! After a very full year of tidying up and sorting things out, packing things up and two "garage sales", we at last arrived in our new home on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2012. We received an

incomparably warm welcome from the Sisters. They worked with us in thinking out and preparing quarters suited to our monastic life. How very much we continue to appreciate the changes that were made to enable us to feel that we were in a monastery. They knew how to respect the fact that our approach to things was different from their own. As time went by, we gradually adjusted to things and today we are finding great richness in living under the same roof. We are adapting ourselves to the needs of the two communities. They join us for Lauds, Vespers and the Mass. Dominican feastdays are always privileged moments for meeting together over a good meal. When difficulties occur, our mutual support is greatly treasured. We continue to thank God for this decision which we do not regret. Life goes on and is good for us.

This year marked the second visit I was paying to the Monastery in Estavayer le Lac, so I was on familiar ground. I was meeting again the beloved sisters that I had first met seven years ago. What joyful reunions! I felt as if I were at home, and felt completely at home with them. To be living day by day with them enabled me to savour the beauty of the Dominican life. I felt a real appreciation of the richness of the common life: praying, singing, preparing meals and the Word, working together, all this imparts an incomparable richness to the whole of our lives. Our closeness brought to life in me the joy of being together, which set glowing in me something of God's intimacy with us.

I then went by car to Fanjeaux with four of the sisters from Estavayer. There were flowers blossoming everywhere in this magnificent countryside. To say the Office and have a picnic close to the ruins of a Carmelite monastery was yet another grace-filled moment. My stay in Fanjeaux thrilled me to bits. I had not anticipated all the blessings that I would get from it. The meeting of this large group of Sisters and Brothers of our Order touched me deeply. All these fraternal moments enriched me with yet more bonds and contacts. The lectures made me appreciate the dynamism of the Order. The lovely relationship between the Brothers and the Nuns helped me to see that Dominic's original plan was still very much alive. I was struck by the quality of the lectures and I very much

appreciated the collaboration between the nuns and the Friars.



I was especially struck by three things in particular.

To begin with, listening to the Sisters from our communities was extremely enriching. The subjects discussed led to reflection, provoked questions and opened new horizons. The sharing of the various ways in which both Sisters and Brothers had approached things made me realise once again what a vital place study occupies in our lives. It is by this means that God guides us and speaks to us. The witness of Sr Claude Pierre from Orbey was particularly revealing. The same is true of both Sisters and Brothers who have chosen art as their way to God. The times for sharing were especially precious times. Each community is coping with difficulties of various kinds, but always in an atmosphere of joy and hope.

I was especially interested in Jean Michel Maldamé's talk on the theme of wonder as an approach to life. The unexpected happenings that occur in our lives challenge us to take yet another step into the unknown. The way he explained the paintings of Rembrandt was very stimulating. It is in the way in which people look at one another that we discover the mystery of their lives. Rembrandt's art is a true communion in people's lives. He managed to express the depth of what they have lived and shares with us his understanding of this. His pictures are also a source of meditation.

Fr César's theme of communication also spoke to me, making me reflect on what we [in

Shawinigan] might do in order to make ourselves more visible in our region. I felt challenged by the importance he attached to *time*: time for personal prayer, for work, for community life, study, community prayer, looking after the sick and rest. The time given to God must never be sacrificed to our many other tasks. It is in this very time that we are given strength and grace.

What a lot I had to share when I returned to Shawinigan! I am so very grateful, my dearest Sisters, for the very warm welcome you gave to "Quebec".

While I was with you I felt like a tiny seed buried far away and receiving a downpour of rain to make it germinate and produce its flower. To plunge into Dominican life has been for me an astonishing time of returning to my roots. Thanks to you all, I have been showered with kindness, joy and friendship. All my meetings spoke to me of God, the God of Love. What a joy it is to be a Dominican!

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Original: French

## Meeting One's 'Adversary' in Truth and Charity



*The cross of the sicarius with Fanjeaux in the background.*

The Year of the Consecrated Life and the 8<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the founding of the Order of Preachers call on us to undertake this pilgrimage, since we are gathered here in the places where it all began. Pope Francis urges us to reflect on the past with gratitude in order to take from it the spark that inspired our Founder.

The title of this little talk that our Federal Counsellors have asked me to give is "Meeting One's Adversary in Truth and Love". The word 'adversary' here is a very general term to denote anyone who is opposed, hostile or indifferent to our faith, anyone we may meet among the people around us, our neighbours, and even among the guests who come to our monasteries, and to whom we have to bear witness of the hope that is in us. I have chosen to base my discussion of this subject on what we learn from the life of St. Dominic and I will do it in the form of a conversation with our Beloved Father. I will pay a lot of attention to the inspiring or founding spark, because it is this that must set us on fire once more today.

"It all began in Toulouse", yes, though not in 1215 but round about 1203.

*"The Bishop of Osma, taking with him a retinue suited to the requirements of his religious status and taking with him also the man of God Dominic, his sub-prior, set out on his journey and arrived in Toulouse.*

*When he discovered that many of the people there had for some time been heretic, his heart*

*was moved to pity at the great number of souls being so wretchedly deluded. At the inn where they found shelter in Toulouse, the sub-prior spent the entire night fervently exhorting and zealously arguing with the heretical innkeeper. The heretic was unable to resist the wisdom and the Spirit (Acts 6, 10) that spoke, so much so that, by the grace of the divine Spirit, Dominic won him back to the faith." (Libellus, 14-15).*

Father Dominic, Brother Dominic, the Lord heard your prayers that morning, didn't he?

Yes, with tears and frequently, I had asked God to give me a true and effective charity to enable me to cultivate and secure the salvation of all.

Father Dominic, in Palencia you were moved to compassion for the victims of famine, and you saved them from death by the sale of your precious books and manuscripts. Tell me, in Toulouse you wanted to save the innkeeper from eternal death, from hell, didn't you?

Yes, at that time it was believed that very few people were saved. In a sermon, Pope Innocent III had said: "Not everybody believes in Christ's Gospel. Those who do not believe are already judged. Hence, since those who do not believe are far more numerous than those who do, there can be no doubt that 'Many are called, but few are chosen'. But among those who do believe, too, many are damned, that is to say those who deny their faith by their works. For 'it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than, after knowing it, to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them' (2 Peter 2, 21)."<sup>1</sup> How could one not be filled with compassion for people who were clearly in danger of damnation?

Brother Dominic, in the eight centuries that have intervened since then, the world and people's mentalities have changed a great deal. I find your zeal for the salvation of souls admirable, your charity and your compassion were not confined only to believers but extended also to unbelievers, to pagans, and even to the damned in hell. No-one can deny that the thought of a great many people suffering damnation arouses com-

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<sup>1</sup> PL 217, col. 357: Sermo X in Septuag., quoted in Jean DELUMEAU, *Le péché et la peur*, p. 318, Fayard, 1983.

passion and is a powerful stimulus for wishing to rescue souls, but today such an idea is quite a rare one; far greater emphasis is placed on the mercy and goodness of God who wishes all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. In a document issued by the Secretariat for Non-Christians, published in 1967, we read the following: *“No-one can judge whether or not a person has incurred such a misfortune [hell]. God alone knows who such people are and whether there are any.”* (Doc Catholique, n° 1491, 2.4.1967; L’esperance qui est in nous, p. 614). That would be the prevailing conviction nowadays.

Yes, Frère Henri-Dominique Lacordaire already had this to say: *“That few people are saved is not a dogma of faith, but a question that is freely discussed in the Church (...). Christ made all things good, blessed everything, overcame everything, and his generous hands hold the whole world in his embrace.”* (Sermon in Notre Dame, 1851, quoted in DELUMEAU, op. cit. p. 321). I was moved to compassion at the sight of the spiritual wretchedness people were enduring and compassion aroused in me the longing to come to their aid. This experience can be repeated in every age in other ways.

From your point of view, the heretics had distanced themselves from the truth of the faith, they were walking in darkness and you wanted to bring them light, you wanted to bring them back to Christ. Our world is disorientated, much of its wretchedness is that of intelligent people with no landmarks and hearts devoid of hope. Conveying the Word of life to them, leading them to Christ must be our constant concern if we wish to follow you.

You will tell me that in the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was much easier to discuss the faith even with heretics than it is for us today. There were disputations to which each party to the discussion brought his dissertation with his arguments in defence of his faith. The winner was deemed to be the one whose system of belief was deemed by the judges to be the one best based on reason. However, if the judges were unable to reach agreement, recourse was had to trial by ordeal. We were all agreed on the fact that there is a truth and that it can be based on

reason. The purpose of the disputation was to convince the adversary.

Today, there are people who question the existence of an objective, transcendent truth. They maintain instead that there are only subjective truths, all of which are relative and even changing. Anyone who claims to have the truth is accused of intolerance, fanaticism, totalitarianism, arrogance. Jesus said “I am the Truth”. The truth is not a series of dogmas to be believed; it is a person, a divine Person. God is Light, God is Truth. If that is how things are – and that is what we believe – the truth is always beyond our limited understanding. It seems to me that the first attitude to have when we encounter ‘an adversary’ is that of humility. Pope Francis has written: *“One who believes may not be presumptuous; on the contrary, truth leads to humility, since believers know that, rather than ourselves possessing truth, it is truth which embraces and possesses us. Far from making us inflexible, the security of faith sets us on a journey; it makes possible witness and dialogue with all.”* (Lumen Fidei, n° 34). The adversary, too, may have lights which can enrich me, for seeds of the Word are scattered everywhere. Moreover, with Bishop Osma, you did not hesitate to begin using the Cathars’ methods in order to make your own preaching more fruitful.

Yes, my bishop had enquired about the customs and conduct of the heretics and realised that their usual way of attracting people to follow them was to confirm their arguments and their preaching by the example of a holy, evangelical and austere life. If one wanted to drive out a false holiness, one needed to have a truly religious spirit; only a genuine humility would be able to overcome the haughtiness of these pseudo-apostles. Having given this advice to the papal legates, Diego sent his retinue and means of transport back to Osma. However, he kept me with him and we began to preach the faith, on foot, carrying no money, in voluntary poverty and humility, endeavouring to be men of the Gospel, in word and in deed.

Brother Dominic, you used to show yourself friendly towards all, rich and poor, Jews and pagans, and you were loved by all, except by the

heretics and the enemies of the Church. But you addressed them with great charity in order to encourage them to repent and bring them back to the faith.

I had made it a law for myself that I would always rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep, but to see people in a wretched state whether material, moral or spiritual always distressed me and awoke in me both compassion and mercy.

The fact that the heretics had gone astray was a great affliction in your eyes. The Lord asks us to love our enemies...

Saint Augustine has written: "Be merciful like people who are sensitive to the misfortunes of others for, even when those you love are enemies, the ones you love are, in fact, your brothers (or sisters). Why do you love your enemy? (...) Wish for him or her to share eternal life with you; wish for him or her to be your brother or sister. When you love, it is a brother or sister that you are loving. What you love in your enemy is not what he or she is, but what you wish him or her to be. (...) And what do you say in your soul? 'Lord be merciful to him; forgive his sins; instil fear into him; change him.' You are not loving in him what her or she is, but what you would like him or her to be. Hence, when you love your enemy, you are loving a brother." (Homilies on the 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of St John, Homily VIII, N° 10).

Father Dominic, God gave you the special grace of praying for sinners, the poor, those in trouble:

you bore their misfortunes in the hidden sanctuary of your compassion. Would you speak to me a bit about your prayer?

I used to spend the day with others, and the night with God. In my prayer, I used to call out to God: "*Lord, have pity on your people! What will become of sinners?*" Little by little, Christ's own attitudes entered into me, they became mine. Night after night, I used to open my heart to receive the love of God, his compassion, his mercy, for myself, poor sinner, but also for all those whose misfortunes I was bringing before our Saviour. Slowly, I was transformed into the image of Christ, from one degree of light to another. It was no longer I who lived, but Christ who was living in me. But you are getting rather far from your subject!

Not so much as that, because you have left us your special grace as an inheritance, and we have to keep it going. If I have understood things properly, it is not so much a question of seeking to enter into Christ's attitudes as allowing them to enter into our own hearts.

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Original: French