



Monialibus

Nuns of the Order of Preachers International Bulletin

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“With fraternal affection...”:

Dear Sisters,

While preparation for this issue of your bulletin *Monialibus* is being completed, we are in October, a month traditionally marked for us—the Order of Preachers and the Dominican Family—by the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and by the praying of the Rosary prayer, “a compendium of the entire Gospel,” as the Montini pope, now Bl. Paul VI, expressed it in his day.

I must do no less than renew here my admiration and thanks for the beautiful prayer celebrations of the “Pilgrim Rosary” of the Order’s Jubilee Year in our monasteries throughout the world. I have had opportunities in recent visits to the sisters for commenting among them that in the future it might be interesting to organize similar celebrations every year, perhaps in October as was previously done. I leave this to your consideration, dear sisters. I think it could be a beautiful act of preaching by each monastery. Those who commit themselves to making the arrangements would doubtless report also many heavenly blessings for their own communities.

In recent months we have lived through some great and beautiful events: the General Chapter in Bologna; the annual meeting of the Nuns’ International Commission, held also in Bologna by the express wish of the Master of the Order, fr. Bruno Cadoré, OP; a meeting with the friars during the Bologna Chapter; an audience with Pope Francis; and the Eucharistic Celebration which closed the General Chapter. There is no doubt that these were

times of grace, and I think that you have already been well informed about them.

All of this calls us to move ahead in a renewed way on the path of following and of self-offering to the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that this time of grace urges us at least to consider in a threefold way some aspects of the conversion which the graces include. There are feelings and ideas, questions and personal uncertainties, which at times occupy me and which I now share with you.

The first question that stirs me is: How can we help each other to be better preachers? I am sure that the answer will include the renewal of our fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ, by our constant attention to making his Word the life of our life, and by way of the good example of Christian life that we need to offer constantly to each other.

Also, sisters, the task of communion keeps attracting my attention. The fraternal communion and unity of the Order in these 800 years of history is a magnificent gift that the Lord has offered us and within which he keeps us. If we think about it, we know that fraternal communion and the very unity of the Order are extraordinarily valuable and delicate realities. Because that is so, the effort to live them and strengthen them must always reclaim our attention and effort. Given a certain carelessness, a hasty or unreflecting decision—that is enough to weaken the priceless richness of communion for all of us.

I feel also, with equal force, a call to compassion. Suffering is always there, and in our own communities too. There are sisters and brothers who suffer: loneliness, sadness, lack of understanding, the penury of being ill. There is even a tendency toward a diffuse bitterness, of unknown origin...! And the suffering of the great human family, which can even break our hearts with grief... these call repeatedly and sharply for our attention. How can we not

disturb ourselves, how can we not act with determination, as our father St. Dominic did, in the face of these hard realities?

In recent weeks we have been also sharing and speaking, in several different registers, about Pope Francis's Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere* [*Seeking God's Face*]. The papal call is strong: to center our attention on the Lord Jesus Christ, without whom life has no direction and would run to its end without happiness and joy. At times it can happen to us that, when we are called by other desires, HE may become only a far-off echo or a vaporous illusion. I pray him to make himself present in the life of each one of us, as He did long ago in the lives of the Twelve, so that we may renew in Him our hope and our love.

With brotherly affection,

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

ECHOES FROM THREE MEETINGS

Message from Dominican Nuns at Santa Sabina for: out of the silence of the cloister, go and preach

On the fourth of February, 2016, feast of St. Catherine de Ricci, while the Federal Mothers and their Companions from Dominican monasteries of various places throughout the world were in Rome at the invitation of the Congregation for Consecrated Life in order to participate in an International Meeting on the Consecrated Life (Jan. 28 – Feb. 3), we met at Santa Sabina—having been called together by the Promoter of the Nuns, fr. César Valero. This meeting was presided over by fr. Bruno Cadoré, OP, Master of the Order.

We experienced it as “*wonderful to be here, in this place where St. Dominic strengthened what we are.*” Fr. César told us that fr. Bruno, in spite of his weariness—he had just returned from Colombia—wished to be present at this meeting

in order to draw closer the bonds of communion within the Order—which is for him a priority among all his services as Master of the Order. “Communion is a demanding task, and we must be careful to strengthen communion by having ‘only one heart and one soul in God.’”

Having been welcomed, the sisters were invited to give a simple presentation of themselves, and of the Federation they were representing, indicating briefly its lights and shadows. These were the nuns who responded:

- Mother Carmen Rodriguez, Federation of St. Dominic, and Sr. M. Iglesia Aristegui, vicarress of the Federal Mother of the Fraternal Union “Mother of God”.
- Sr. M. Angeles Martinez, substitute for Mother M. Teresa Gil, Federation of the monasteries of Argentina and Chile.
- Sr. Vicenza Panza, Federation of St. Dominic, Italy, and Sr. Ana M. Acampa, her companion.
- Sr. M. Emilia Baratta, Federation of St. Catherine (central and southern Italy) and Sr. M. Natalia Colaianni, her companion.
- Sr. M. Rafaela Catena, Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary, Spain, and Sr. M. Teresa Guzman, companion.
- Sr. M. Christine Behlow, President of the Association of Dominican nuns of North American monasteries, and Sr. Anna Marie, Association Vicepresident.
- Sr. Rosa Luz Manrique, Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary of Peru and Sr. M. Celestina Canari, companion.
- Sr. Véronique Laforêt, Federation of Our Lady of Preachers; President of the French nuns' Information Service (SDM).

The meeting continued with the topic “Points stressed at the Meeting organized by the Congregation for Consecrated Life, and their repercussion on the life of our monasteries”:

It was the first time that the Congregation (for Consecrated Life) invited the nuns to participate in a meeting of this kind. It was an event which qualifies as *historic* in that the Congregation wanted the nuns to become involved in their own development, taking

personal responsibility in the steering and management of their own consecrated life. One of the sisters described the meeting with the Congregation as *“very interesting for the experience it gave of a universal communion; the Church in the past gave to Federations the role of offering counsel, but now they are considered a communion–entity to which attention must be paid (even though there are many monasteries, in all the Orders and locations, where the step of federating has not yet been taken).”* It seems that not only will more authority be given to prioresses to negotiate quickly in respect to the monasteries, but that Presidents of Federations and of Associations will be able to resolve certain limited cases.

Another sister said: *“The meeting really fulfilled its goal because there we lived a universal communion within a great diversity of charisms. That enabled us to see the necessity of Federations as organs of communion and of fraternal assistance.”* Surely in the bringing together of distinct charisms within Consecrated Life, we could contemplate the beauty of the Church – which is nothing other than the beauty of the Face of Christ.

Then Fr. Master Bruno spoke to the participants in words which may be summarized as follows: He thanked all those present at this meeting in Santa Sabina. He said that in the Order *mission* is important but that none of us by ourselves can either define ourselves or be defined; for that we must be in communion: friars, nuns, laity. And if we do not have a clear Dominican identity we will not be able to collaborate.

At the heart of Dominican identity there are two ways of preaching: itinerant preaching and preaching by stability. A part of the Order remains in one place to await the coming of the Word; another part proclaims it. There are two complementary dimensions in the Order: what is fundamental is that preaching of the Word needs both an itinerant life AND the life of the monasteries which awaits and welcomes the Word. There is no preaching without the silence and stability of the nuns of the Order who await that which impels us toward itinerancy.

At mid-day, we took our lunch with the Santa Sabina community. There, in the refectory, we enjoyed a magnificent meal with our brothers.

At 2 p.m. we had a guided tour of the Basilica and the convent. Our marvelous guide was fr. Javier Maria Pose, former Socius for Latin

America and now Provincial in Argentina—who can sometimes be found at Santa Sabina. With expertise and fraternal affection he explained to us all that we wanted to know about the Basilica, including where we could venerate the marble steps where our Father prayed at night, the little window from which the curious friar watched him pray, the different floors of the convent, the museum with its magnificent works of art, the splendid views of Rome from the terrace, and—of course! —the cell (now an oratory) of our Father St. Dominic.

The topic in the afternoon session dealt with: *“Drawing Closer the Bonds of Communion”*. Those attending offered their suggestions which we summarize as follows:

- Utilize the means of communication which new technologies offer us for being present to each other and participating together in formation courses; for example, Skype.
- The bulletin *“Monialibus”* is a bond of union among all the monasteries of the Order and was described very positively.
- Hold meetings by regions in order to increase mutual knowledge and formation.
- Hold Inter-Federal meetings.
- Concretely, Sr. Vicenza Panza [with Sr. M. Emilia Baratta] spoke about their experience as two Federal Mothers who participated in a course organized for all the religious of their Italian dioceses, and in which they presented the formation project of their Order.
- Sr. Anna Marie, for her part, told us of mutual sharing among the monasteries of Trinidad/Tobago and Texas. She described them as very rich, especially the interchanges for immediate assistance.
- Other sisters argued that though it seems logical to think of small efforts of assistance as helpful, they do not resolve many problems when the needs are so great.

Fr. Bruno said: “We need to speak also of some monasteries needing help now; there is neediness which calls out to other monasteries of the Order, asking their concern for its mission in those needy places where they are located. In this way **the monasteries of Cuba and Brazil are calling on the attention of the whole Order.**”

He proposed “*a generous speediness in some monasteries helping each other for a time.*” Fr. Bruno described this fraternal help as a “spiritual experience: we have to live a departure from our own monastery, he said, as a spiritual path for being strengthened, or in which we are strengthened by others. This spirituality, which uproots the heart, *puts us on the road* in the service of our sisters, puts us in a *constant going out in fidelity to the mission of the Order.*”

Also, fr. Bruno underlined that this “*fraternal assistance*” has its priority. “***Without its being given priority, he said, it is almost impossible; and for giving priority we must have criteria.***”

“*The Holy Preaching has to be present in the whole world; and in this Holy Preaching are the sisters, the brothers, the laity. It is at the level of family that we must choose our priorities. Together, he continued, we can better be what we wish to be.*”

In the ensuing dialogue some **challenges were proposed for our contemplative life.**

- Living on mission. Our monasteries have to be enwrapped in silence but the nuns do not have to be mute. From our contemplative silence we must offer the Word.

- Apostolic Creativity. Our offering of the Word, the Gospel message, we can bring about more fully by: ---

- sharing *Lectio divina* with the faithful who come to our Churches and our visiting parlours.

- opening our Churches so that the faithful can participate in our Liturgy and prayer.

- making our vocation known, using the means at our disposal. For this our communities should be places that are open, fitting, fraternal—from which the Lord may become known; joyful places, resplendent with holiness.

- Living the Jubilee with enthusiasm; creativity in carrying out the “Rosary Pilgrimage”.

- An important challenge now and always, is care for fraternal life.

- Making known our Order, our monasteries.

To complete our dialogue, fr. Bruno said that “all religious life is on mission, a mission which

inserts us into the mission of Jesus Christ who came *that they may have life and have it in abundance.* The mission of the Order is to preach the Name of Jesus Christ—each one in his/her own specific way, but united together we complement each other and fully express the mission of the Order.”

He also brought up the theme of vocations, in these words:

“Sometimes when we receive vocations we think that we are blessed, that the Lord is recognizing our merits. But that is not the way it is. The fact of receiving vocations is a message that is a gift of God to us and that we must try to understand, try to decipher what HE wants to say to us, and how we should respond to this word of his, and what we are doing with it. Really most vocations come to us from situations and countries of poverty, countries forgotten by the rest of the world, from families which often are living in precarious circumstances. And with this God sometimes reaches us with the message: Your Order is coming from the forgotten world. Don’t forget that.”

Certainly the future in regard to vocations is not clear. What we must hold as clear is that vocations are a message. What does God want to say to us today? We need to pray, to listen to God.

Lastly, the Master insisted that the nuns must continue taking steps toward involving themselves more in the life of the Order. They must work in a more united way at the level of the Commission of the Nuns and of the Federal Mothers – perhaps with some organised structure such as a Council of the Master. He too needs the help of the nuns in carrying out his role of caring for the unity of the whole Order.

At 7 p.m. on our final evening, and as the final touch in this Jubilee Year meeting, we celebrated Vespers / Eucharist combined, in the little cell of our Father Dominic. It was a celebration which filled us with emotion; there were present to us the whole Order, all the monasteries and nuns of the whole world, so that our Father St. Dominic might achieve bringing us to live in Jesus Christ and to be faithful to his Spirit in our time, in our here and now. May that be so.

Sr. Maria Rafaela Catena, O.P., Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary, Spain;

Sr. Maria de la Iglesia Aristegui, O.P., vicarress of the Fraternal Union “Mother of God”, Santorin, Greece.

Original: Spanish

My Experience at the General Chapter

Dear Sisters,

I have been asked to share with you my experience of the General Chapter, to which I was invited along with Sr. Juliette Kilanir OP, a member of the International Commission of Nuns. I do so with pleasure. I won't dwell on the particular details of the events but will simply describe how I experienced this event which is so important in the life of our Order.

I must say first of all that when I received the letter of invitation from the Master it came as a great surprise to me. I was left speechless. I then let him know that I felt awkward, especially on account of the language, but he reassured me saying that that wasn't a problem and, in fact, it wasn't—even if the question of language did surface among the Capitulars.

The arrival, fixed for Friday 14 July, foresaw a pilgrimage that evening and, for this occasion, many Dominican students arrived from all over the world as well as a large group of young sisters belonging to various Dominican Congregations.

After sung Vespers there followed the evening meal in the cloister of the Convent of St. Dominic—for which it was necessary to wait calmly for precise information on how and where to move.

At 8.30 pm some buses brought us to Sta Maria del Monte Villa Aldini on the hills of Bologna. The fresh and breezy climate told us that that was indeed the ideal place for St. Dominic to go in order to recover when he was sick.

After a guided visit to the Romanesque church, we all gathered in silence on the huge promontory with torches in our hands, and we listened to the account of the last days of our Holy Father Dominic given in the three official languages of the Order. At the end we walked towards the city and, singing and reciting the Holy Rosary, retraced the steps of Saint Dominic on his last journey as he was dying. I leave it to you to imagine that moment in all its suggestiveness: the long white procession crossed the city, as people looked on in wonder, going towards the Basilica of St. Dominic where we concluded the pilgrimage with sung Compline. At the end, moved by the experience and in silence, we reached our accommodation.

The following day, Saturday 16, the Master of the Order presented his Relatio, thus officially beginning the work of the Chapter.

Sunday 17 was a day of retreat. After Holy Mass we gathered in the assembly room and the Minister General of the Friars Minor, Fr. Michael Perry OFM, gave two meditations on the contemporary relevance of the charisms of our respective founders, Francis and Dominic. At the end of the retreat there was an exchange of gifts between the two General Superiors: a picture and an icon depicting the historical meeting between Francis and Dominic. A long applause accompanied the embrace of Fr. Bruno Cadoré OP, and Fr. Michael Perry OFM.

On Monday 18 the work began. Divided into language groups we commented on the Master's Relatio and later on all participants met again in the Commissions that had been organized previously. The languages used in the Commission I was on were Spanish and English with translation provided for each of them.

For more days we were busy discussing the various points in order then to elaborate the proposals to be presented for approval by the Assembly. The work in the various Commissions was indeed demanding but also very stimulating and rich in sharing, in human and spiritual growth. Tensions and tiredness were not lacking but I saw and experienced the joy of working together and at times of deciding, always in unanimity, to start again from the beginning what we had put together with much effort. I noticed both eagerness and annoyance. A beautiful witness to how our brothers know how to work. Wonderful!

Towards the middle of the second week the reports of the various Commissions began in the Assembly hall. The presidents, secretaries, and moderatos took turns as chairman, all of them most able in carrying out their task. The method followed and the perfect organization were interesting. In the room one could perceive serenity and much attentiveness. Each point, projected onto a giant screen, was examined closely by the Capitulars before the final vote. Listening to the proposed modifications or emendations was most enriching for me. The work went on until Wednesday 3 August, including the Sunday.

The role played by the organizers was truly noteworthy and they really deserve our thanks. Thanks in particular go to the Secretary General of the Chapter, Fr. Robert Giorgis, OP, for his untiring work. The students of the Patriarchal Convent were praiseworthy: always silent in the midst of all their activity, they accompanied us with their service. They prepared the cloister with particular care for the concert by the famous pianist, Chiara Bertoglio, offered to the Capitulars by the Province of St. Dominic in Italy.

The time of prayer was a beautiful experience for all. The liturgy, prepared each day in a different language and executed with care, was a moment of intense spiritual life for all. The group of French with their polyphonic repertoire edified us all. The liturgy in Spanish was also carefully presented. The English one, led by the great liturgist, Fr. Max Cappabianca, was in an appropriately sober style. As always the procession accompanying the *Salve Regina* to the Chapel of Our Lady of the Rosary and the *O Spem Miram* to the chapel of our Holy Father Saint Dominic was enchanting.

Everyone cut out free time for prayer. I was edified to see so many Brothers praying for a long time at various during the day, especially the Master. Yes, Sisters, I was truly edified and for this I praised and thanked the Lord!

Monday 1 August, at the invitation of Fr. Master, the International Commission of Nuns arrived at the Chapter. At that time they were holding their annual meeting with our Promoter, Fr. Cesar Valero Bajo, OP. The Sisters listened to the Capitular Fathers and answered their questions. The following day I was pleased to hear positive comments from the Brothers.

Then there arrived the big day on which we met Pope Francis. I leave aside the details which, without doubt, you already know. To find ourselves in the presence of the Holy Father was a great gift from the Lord obtained for us by St. Dominic. After listening to his words and receiving his blessing, we were received individually by him. His clear, welcoming, expression remains with us. He looked us all in the eye and shook hands with each of us. It's impossible for me to tell you more.

In the evening was solemn Mass in honor of our Holy Father Dominic, presided over by the

Archbishop of Bologna, Mons. Matteo M. Zuppo, whom we met previously on his visit to the Chapter. This Mass crowned an unforgettable day in the history of the Order and for each one of us.

You are no doubt wondering about the presence of the nuns at the Chapter. I think that it was on the same level as the other members of the Dominican Family invited to be there. From what you can read in the Acts, a hint of the nuns' presence appears only a few times. Our interventions in the Assembly were limited whereas we were mostly involved during the work of the Commissions. Yet we can testify with Sr. Juliette how we felt very welcomed: it was for both of us a most beautiful experience that will always remain with us. A most wonderful memory of true fraternity remains with me. So many brothers confided particular prayer intentions to us. Times, names, and places of origin will remain with me forever.

A particular word of thanks to Holy Father Dominic for this gift of grace and to Fr. Master, fr. Bruno, for his wonderful gift in this jubilee year of the Order.

Sr. M. Vincenza Panza OP, Italy
Original: Italian

Meeting of the International Commission of Nuns in Bologna, from July 31st to August 7th, 2016

The Nuns' Commission met this year at Idice, near Bologna in a guest house run by Imeldines, a Dominican congregation well known for the excellence of their teaching. We can indeed report that their hospitality and their sisterly generosity are more than up to standard!

As usual, we began with a presentation of our regions. Each region has been extremely inventive in the ways they celebrate the Jubilee. Perhaps we should mention in particular the pilgrim rosary which has enabled us to pray with the families and for the family and that in some places this prayer will continue on a regular basis

even beyond the Jubilee year! Another feeling experienced in a thousand different ways is that the links between the different branches of the Dominican family, as well as within each branch, have become much closer “as if the Holy Spirit seized us and forced us to unite”, according to Fr. Cesar.



Vespers in the choir of the patriarchal convent of Bologna with friars of the Chapter.

From the first day of our meeting, we were invited to Vespers with the friars in the magnificent patriarchal convent of Bologna: with about a hundred Dominican brothers and sisters in these ancient stalls decorated with marquetry. We joined the brothers for a meal and then met with the friars from the Chapter. The atmosphere was full of kindness. The first question put by one of the provincials was: “How can we help you?” Another asked: what are the criteria that make a monastery Dominican? We replied that our lives are centered on Christ and our prayer is based on the Word of God that we ponder, study and celebrate in liturgy. Our liturgy invites the participation of the People of God. Another friar said: “In every monastery I visit I experience such kindness from the nuns that I would like to ask you: how is it that you love us so much?” The reply to his question was: “We love you because you are our brothers, it is as simple as that!”

Our visit this year was devoted to the monastery of Castel Bolognese, another very fraternal community, where we were welcomed with great affection.



Meeting the brothers of the Chapter in the convent library.

Brother Bruno was able to arrange an audience with the Pope for the brothers and those invited to the chapter, as well as the sisters of the commission.

On August 4th, at dawn, two railway cars full of Dominicans left Bologna for Rome. Most of us took time to pray, then it was like musical chairs as one and another swapped seats to meet each other fraternally. When we arrived in Rome, we climbed into two buses escorted by Italian police to take us to the Vatican. We had taken our black capes, which we had to wear to meet the Pope, even though the temperature was 35° C!

We were taken along corridors which usually we only see on the television and were installed in the Clementine Hall to meet the Pope who arrived almost immediately. For the Pope it was “a day of friars” because he was going to Assisi on the same day. Amongst other themes, he mentioned *Contemplata aliis tradere*: “The Word of God burns within us and encourages us to announce Jesus Christ.” You will find the complete text in IDI.

Then each one of us was greeted by the Holy Father in the spotlight of many cameras! We got back into the buses and were taken to Santa Sabina where a sumptuous buffet lunch awaited us. There were waiting times and most of the nuns went spontaneously to pray in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and Saint Dominic’s cell. We were also able to meet provincials from the whole world and share our concerns. The return

to Bologna was quite different from the journey in the morning: the whole of one car slept, exhausted... In the other there was a Latin American atmosphere thanks to the Spanish sisters of the commission!

Apart from these important and very symbolic events, we worked hard: we drafted statutes for the ICN OP, then we continued our reflection on initial and on-going formation in the monasteries and also started to study the new apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere*, bearing in mind that we have not yet received the new norms from the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life.

The Master of the Order, Brother Bruno, came to join us for the morning session of the last day. He hopes to meet with us for a few hours every year to work together.



The 5 sisters whose mandates have come to an end:

Sr. Margarita, Mexico region;

Sr. Anna Marie, North America and USA;

Sr. Inmaculada, Bética region;

Sr. Isabelle, France and Romandy Switzerland;

Sr. Josefa, Europa Utriusque.

This meeting was the last for five of us. “How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?” asks the psalmist, and this is also our thanksgiving. It was a great joy for each of us to experience real unity among sisters from such different regions, to be able to speak and be heard with kindness about our lives as

Dominican nuns, to feel we are really sisters. The joy to be able to share with Brother Brian first of all, then with Brother César, both of whom are so different and yet so profoundly Dominican and a brother to each one of us.

We give thanks to each sister for such a wonderful and rich experience!

Sister Isabelle Lepoutre, o.p.

Estavayer-le-Lac monastery, Switzerland

Original: French

ECHOES FROM THE REGIONS

North American Association of Dominican Monasteries

This past February it was my first opportunity to experience the beauty of participating in an international gathering of nuns representing Federations and Associations from around the world. When in Rome, with my Vice President Sister Anna Marie Pierre, O.P., who is also the ICN representative for the North American region, we enjoyed sharing our Dominican charism with delegates from the many different Orders around the world. I discovered we are amazingly similar and again very diverse in our needs and approaches of addressing situations. Some federations/associations are stylized to be hands-on with all their monasteries and others are simply supportive, and only if requested. For us in Northern America we would best be described as being “supportive” because our Association has no direct authority over the member monasteries. We are designed to be an instrument of support, by sharing resources, organizing programs of ongoing education for the monasteries, developing programs of monastic theological studies for those sisters nearing the time of solemn vows, publishing a tri-annual inter-monastery newsletter, and an annual journal of contemporary writings from the nuns entitled *Monastic Search*.

The companionship of our Dominican representatives was particularly beneficial because it afforded opportunity to share our

cultural differences, difficulties and our particular styles of leadership within our many federations/associations. The many similarities between our Dominican monasteries are striking. We shared our common problems but the stronger power of “communion” that bonded us together was church, our faith and our vocation to the monastic contemplative life. The love for Dominican life was obvious and we could see that everyone is trying their best to faithfully maintain the four pillars of Dominican life, namely prayer, common life, study and preaching.

For us Americans, who primarily speak English, this gathering brought to mind the gospel narrative of the first Pentecost, everyone spoke in their own language yet all could understand. Walking together through these days of international togetherness, we quickly and creatively overcame the language barriers and everyone enthusiastically embraced the new Italian customs.

On one particular day when the nuns divided into language groups to share their personal stories, I realized North America is a territory immensely populated and geographically larger than most of the tightly knit countries that compose the European nations. However, even though we are separated by vast distances, cultures and oceans, nothing separates us from one another.

The unique features that are blessings and challenges for our monasteries located in what is often referred to as the “new world”, North America, are rather simple. The blessings are that we have one common language, English, and our fifty states are easily crossed and no special visas are required for entering into Canada or Mexico. Now for the challenge! When Fr. César Bajo, O.P. visited North America for the first time he quickly realized that for us to meet together as prioresses, novice mistresses, or for other programs, it requires long hours of travel. It takes six hours to fly non-stop across the USA and when Fr. César took his first flight from coast to coast, landing in San Francisco, his only comment was, “Oh Sister, I could have flown back to Rome and I’m still in the USA!”



With that thought let me explain. Our North American region is composed of four Provinces in the USA, one Canadian Province, one Vietnamese Vicariate in British Columbia (western Canada) and included in the Association is the monastery of Trinidad (Port of Spain), under the Province of the Irish Dominicans. Our Dominican monasteries populate each of these Provinces, and we are separated into four time zones. Distances between monasteries range from a short 25 miles to a lengthy 3,000 miles (4,800 km).

The first Dominican friars arrived in North America in 1805, the first congregation of sisters arrived in St. Catherine, Kentucky, in 1822 and the first nuns arrived in 1880 to establish the first American monastery founded in Newark, New Jersey. This is all rather new when compared to the fact that our Order is now celebrating the 800th Anniversary of its foundation. Our monasteries represent the traditions of both the Perpetual Rosary and Perpetual Adoration. In the beginning years, the new foundations were relatively close to one another but with time bishops requested new foundations in their regions. For many years these new monasteries were isolated because of the travel difficulties. Once air travel became more accessible, we formed an unofficial “Conference of Monasteries” to bring everyone together and facilitate a new means of inter-monastery communication.

Following the request of the Congregation for Religious we reorganized and became a canonically recognized and approved “Association” on May 26, 2006. Now ten years later, we form an umbrella of seventeen monasteries of prayer (thirteen belong to the Association) that support the friars and sisters in their mission of serving and saving souls, preaching and teaching. We maintain a strong

bond of fraternal rapport among ourselves and with all branches of the Order.

May our Jubilee Year of celebration draw down abundant blessings upon our communities and enrich our Order in the vision of St. Dominic.

*Sister Maria Christine Behlow, OP
President of the Association
Original: English*

NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITIES:

The “Pilgrim Rosary” in Caleruega, August 8, 2016

We were very glad to join in the Pilgrim Rosary on the Feast of our Father St. Dominic. The celebration had begun at Santa Sabina in Rome with the inauguration of the jubilee of the order, and reached Caleruega on the eighth of August, in time to join the whole Order of St. Dominic on his feast day and among his own people.

We were united with the Master of the Order, who wrote to congratulate us and tell us that he would be praying with us at Caleruega on August 8, 2016. We were in communion also with all Dominican men and women around the world.



Many people in the city, aware as they were of the importance of the Pilgrim Rosary to the nuns—and to the friars who were with us—came

to join us in prayer for the Order and for Caleruega. The idea was to ask our Mother, the Virgin Mary, and our Holy Father Dominic, to intercede for us for many blessings during this special year.



We are grateful to Fr. Luis Miguel Garcia Palacios, OP, with whom we have had good experience and great success in our own house with the organization of the Rosary prayer of the Virgin. We know him also as a brother closely united to us. The prioress, Sr. Margaret, and the Community, fully counted on him to plan and direct this celebration of the Pilgrim Rosary in Caleruega. The result was so beautiful that we are considering repeating the event in coming years.

This was the form of our prayer service:

The Blessed Sacrament was exposed for veneration as we sang the *Pange lingua*. Each mystery of the Rosary was announced from the ambo, and the Word of God pertaining to that mystery was read. The nuns sang a hymn to the Virgin. There was a brief commentary on each mystery after it had been prayed, before beginning the next. Also, at the beginning of each mystery, a candle was lighted on a small table before the Blessed Sacrament exposed. At the side had been placed the Rosary sent to us at the Caleruega monastery and made by the nuns of the Monastery of Saint Margaret of Savoy in Alba (Cuneo), Italy. Next we prayed the Litany of the Virgin Mary. The hymn *Tantum ergo* accompanied the Solemn Reservation of the

Blessed Sacrament by the Prior of the Caleruega Friars.

After this prayer service, those attending were invited to feel free to stay and pray Vespers of St. Dominic's feastday with the nuns and the friars.... And everyone present wanted to stay, which resulted in a wonderful celebration on a great feast, full of devotion and feeling for everyone.

At the end of Vespers, many came to thank us for the fruitful time of prayer they had experienced. In peace and joy we gave God many thanks for the fraternity reigning among all who were present. A great love for St. Dominic united us—those present with us in Caleruega, the Master of the Order and the whole Order—in the “communion of saints” on this special August day in 2016.

(Our thanks to Fr. Louis-Marie Ariño, Promoter General of the Rosary, and to Fr. César Valero, Promoter for the Nuns, for this wonderful Jubilee Year initiative.)

*Monastery of St. Dominic
Caleruega, Spain
Original: Spanish*

700 years: The Estavayer Dominicans Launch their Jubilee

by Pierre Pistoletti (with the permission of Cath.ch)

On Monday, 15th August, the Dominican Nuns of Estavayer-le-Lac celebrated the opening of their Jubilee. Several hundred people joined them to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the foundation of the Monastery in Fribourg.

“We’ve been living here for 700 years! We don’t really look it, do we?!” At the entrance to the Church, Sister Marie-Christine welcomed the people with a joke. Her community is celebrating seven centuries of praise and intercession. Seven hundred years of a praying and welcoming

presence in the heart of the medieval town of Estavayer-le-Lac.

The inhabitants came in droves on this Monday in August to pay homage to this centuries-long history. Let us begin by quoting the mayor, André Losey. “The monastery is part of the history of Estavayer. Today, too, the Sisters fully belong to our town. It is fantastic that they are still here”. The people, too, speak highly of their discreet and faithful presence. “They are part of our day-to-day lives,” said Raymonde, as she waited for the ceremonies to begin.

“And then one knows that one can always come here, ask for prayers for a particular intention, or about something upsetting that has happened. The door is always open”.

The Sisters themselves chose the Feast of the Assumption as the day on which to begin celebrating this Jubilee. It begins, then, on this Feast of Our Lady, with Mass whose chief celebrant is Mons. Alain de Raemy, auxiliary Bishop of Lausanne, Geneva and Fribourg. A Mass “to thank God for the inexpressible grace of our vocations as nuns”, explained Sister Monique, the Prioress, to the 500 people who were present in the monastery’s recently restored Church.

A highly symbolic occasion for an Order of Preachers, this Mass was also the moment when the new ambo in the Church, created by the Fribourg artist, Jean-Pierre Demierre, was blessed. “I am delighted to be the first to preach from it”, said Mons. Alain de Raemy smilingly, at the beginning of his sermon. “From the high point of your Jubilee, you must be the first to recognize God’s signs in the young, as Elizabeth recognized the Saviour of the world within the youthful Mary.



Mons. Alain de Raemy blessing the monastery's new ambo (Photo: Pierre Pistoletti)

The entire Dominican family was represented at this celebration, thereby denoting a “fraternal friendship” which was borne witness to by the Prior Provincial, Fr. Guido Vergauwen. “By your prayer, you support our preaching and our apostolate. We all share the same mission: you are the source, we are the river!” The Master of the Order himself, Fr. Bruno Cadoré, joined whole-heartedly in the inauguration of this Jubilee. “It is a grace for all of us to celebrate such a long history of fidelity to St Dominic’s charism”, he declared in a message which was read at the start of the celebration by Fr. Franklin Buitrago Rojas, the general secretary of the Order. “Your community has been bearing witness to the preaching of the Gospel for seven centuries. Today we express to you the deep gratitude of the Order”.



The new ambo made by the artist Jean Pierre Demierre
(Photo: Pierre Pistoletti)



Mons. Alain de Raemy blessing the community and the 500 people in the congregation (Photo: Pierre Pistoletti)

The celebration was so solemn that the discreet act of inauguration was almost unnoticed when it happened. “The great Jubilee is open. Go in the peace of Christ”, proclaimed the Dominican deacon, Jacques-Benoît, at the conclusion of the Mass. The celebration, which will last for a year, had begun. Ceremonies, retreats, lectures and

colloquia will mark its passage until it comes to an end on 15th August, 2017.

Sister Monique’s hope for this Jubilee year is that “it will keep the community firmly rooted in the faith, right to the end”. As she sees things, it is “an opportunity to give thanks for the present and for the future”. In the midst of the excitement that followed the celebration, while shaking hands and making announcements, she spoke of the difficulty in renewing the community. She also shared her deepest wish, the fruit that she hopes for from this Jubilee year. “That we remain firm in the faith and that we can continue to give our lives joyfully”. *(End of article taken from cath.ch-apic/pp)*



The Jubilee cake displayed by Sister Monique, with Mons. de Raemy on her right and Fr. Guido Vergouwen, prior provincial of Switzerland, on her left.

P.S. from the Community: The Community then received approximately 200 people, members of the Order, friends and benefactors of the monastery for a celebratory meal in a huge tent that had been set up in the monastery courtyard. A local choir improvised a little recital of local songs in an atmosphere of joy and good humour. The afternoon ended with a lecture by Sr Marie-Christine on the various kinds of hospitality that have been offered in the monastery over the seven centuries of its existence. The efficient team of friends of the monastery which had set up the tent and helped in the preparations, also helped us to tidy things up at the end ... prior to yet more preparations for the ‘open door’ sessions planned for 20th August and 10th September! The nuns, assisted by the student Brethren and an apostolic Sister, will be providing a guided tour of the monastery,

concentrating not so much on the works of art but rather on the nuns' life with God. People are often deeply moved when we explain the Chapter to them, our way of reaching communal decisions and also the time when we ask one another for forgiveness. "We ought to do that in our own families", they say. We ask you to pray for our community.

Your Sisters in Estavayer-le-Lac, Switzerland.

Original: French

The Holy Gate in the Monastery Church in Znojmo

Dear Sisters,

We would like to share with you how we as Nuns of the Holy Cross Monastery in Znojmo, the Czech Republic, celebrate the Jubilee of the Order. The Master, fr. Bruno Cadoré, in his letter for the opening of the Jubilee highlighted the "happy coincidence" of this great Dominican Jubilee falling precisely on the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis for the whole Church. We recall the words of fr. Bruno that it is the task of each member of our Order, through preaching, to bring to all people the divine Mercy revealed in Jesus Christ.

This "happy coincidence" acquired an unexpected meaning for our community when our Monastery Church of the Holy Cross was appointed as one of those in our diocese where the Holy Gate of Mercy would be opened. The local parishioners at once approached us with a plea for collaboration. They asked us for our prayerful presence during the days of pilgrimage which are on every Friday. Of course, such a participation asks for a certain sacrifice on the part of the whole community. However, as both jubilees have reached their second half by now, we are quite sure that our participation has been the source of many graces both for the pilgrims and for our community and the Order. During the Friday pilgrimages at the Holy Gate we lead the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at 3 p.m., the liturgical prayer of None and the Rosary at 5 p.m. before the Mass. Elements proper to our Order and to our mission in it as Nuns are in this way happily joined with the possibility of participation offered to all arriving pilgrims. The pilgrimage Mass always

culminates in the Eucharistic procession to the Holy Gate in which we take part with much gratitude. Keeping faith with our Dominican vocation, we pray in this way for many graces for others. Many of these pilgrimage days are thematic, for example, we had a pilgrimage of consecrated persons, of mothers and fathers, of farmers, of the sick... There is usually an accompanying programme (a talk, a testimony, refreshments...) in which we normally do not participate but which takes place in the part of our monastery that is open to the public. This is yet another way in which the pilgrims can come into touch with our Dominican "preaching".

On 7th September, the pilgrimage at the Holy Gate will be devoted to the Dominican Family. Our provincial Fr. Benedikt Mohelník will preside at the Mass. For this occasion we are preparing a talk on the Rosary. A lively Dominican lay fraternity in Znojmo helps us to prepare this Dominican Jubilee.

Another way of being united with the Jubilee celebrated in the whole Order is the prayer of the pilgrim Rosary. The Jubilee Rosary beads have arrived to us from Spain, made by the Sisters of the Monastery of Santa Maria del Pilos in Zaragoza. We have quite simply made this Rosary a pilgrim Rosary in our own community. Each month it is entrusted to one of the sisters who can use it during our daily prayer in common. Thus we can, together yet also personally, experience our spiritual union with the community in Zaragoza and with all our monasteries in the world. The pilgrim Rosary has in this way become a meaningful, tangible symbol for us.



As the Rosary pilgrimage makes its way from one monastery to another, our community took

hold of the “baton” on the 3rd and 5th of July. Because we practise our “Rosary apostolate” every week in our church during the Friday pilgrimages to the Holy Gate, we have decided to celebrate these two days in a quiet way within our own community. Both days we meditated together on all mysteries of the prayer of the Rosary.

Finally, we would like to ask your prayers for an intention which Divine Providence also in some mysterious way joined with the Jubilee Year of the Order. After several years of searching for a more suitable building for our community we finally have the possibility of moving to a former monastery of our brothers in Uhersky Brod, about 150 km away from our present house. However, before we can move the house has to undergo a major and expensive reconstruction. The reconstruction is to about to start, please God, quite soon. The whole project and the subsequent move will be very demanding on our community, so we ask you to accompany us on our way to the new site with your prayers. We hope that in this way, too, we can accomplish the aim of the Jubilee: to touch the roots of our charism and to meet new challenges with a renewed enthusiasm.

Thank you for your prayers! We pray for you, too.

*Holy Cross Monastery, Znojmo, the Czech Republic
Original: Czech*

St. Dominic de Guzman Monastery in Bolivia

Sisterly greetings to all the nuns in Dominican monasteries in the whole world, in this Jubilee Year of the Order. Thanks to the invitation of Sr. Irene, member of the International Commission of Nuns, we come to share with you our experience in the new foundation in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

We have been here in Bolivia, a sister-country of Peru, since November 21st of 2008. This great challenge received a generous response of five sisters from different monasteries of the Federation of Our Lady of the Rosary, of Peru. Their presence was essential, in spite of the

difficulties of adaptation and of health which go along with a foundation.

In 2013 the foundation took a new turn in its internal structure. The Holy See asked that, instead of federating as a monastery with Peru, they become part of one of the six monasteries of Peru. After a Federal Assembly decided that the monastery of St. Catherine of Arequipa would take this on, five sisters from two former Arequipa communities were re-integrated into the present community on Feb. 11, 2013, giving a new impulse to the community. During these years, some sisters returned to their houses of origin and so at present we are six members.



The foundresses were settled at first in a house belonging to our Dominican brothers in the center of Cochabamba. Thanks to their generous welcome the nuns had time to acquire property, which was done with effective help from the Order. It is situated in a farming area 9½ km from the city of Cochabamba. (We see it little by little becoming urban.) As soon as the land was bought, a little house on the property was enlarged so that we could all move there and live there. And so it is that our house was blessed on March 2nd of 2014.

Those living in the area welcomed us with much kindness and expectation. They asked us for catechesis for the children who had not yet made their First Communion; we took on this task as a way of beginning our mutual acquaintance, and on the 12th of April, 2015, twenty-nine children (boys and girls) made their First Holy Communion—a precious experience for us. This

year we did not continue this work, but what fills us with joy is that now it is particular faces and real situations that we can present each day in our Offering.

Since last year we have had under way the project of constructing a Church, and with great hope we carried out the ceremony of laying the first stone on Nov. 3, 2015, in the welcome presence of sisters from all the monasteries of Peru. But the resources of the builders then in charge were incomplete and we could not begin in that way. Now we thank God and can tell you that the work has begun again: this month a new contractor has taken up the reins of the project; we ask your prayers that it may continue to go forward. A Church has been begun in this place where God wants to bring about His work of Salvation.

We want to thank God, and all the Order, for much spiritual and material help on which we have relied from the beginning. Also we thank our brothers of the Vice-Province of Bolivia, who accompany us day after day, celebrating the Holy Eucharist, and we thank our sisters of all the monasteries who, we know, hold us in their prayers. THANK YOU!



We would like to tell you also that a Rosary reached us from the Monastery of St. Blaise (Lerma, Burgos, Spain), and the Rosary we sent from Bolivia went to the Monastery of the Blessed Sacrament in Farmington Hills, Michigan, USA.

The “Pilgrim Rosary” event (our assigned days of prayer in Bolivia, Feb. 2-3) was an unusual experience. We organized Feb. 2 as a prayer day with the Friars and with the religious sisters of

our Order and of other Orders; Feb. 3 was dedicated to praying with the families of our area. What we needed to do was to make the Rosary known to them and pray it with them! This “well-known prayer” was new to many! We gave them rosaries, and also booklets explaining how to pray the Rosary, what are its Mysteries, what is its history, and so on.

Besides, we decided in community to accompany daily, at Lauds and Vespers, whichever monastery is hosting the Pilgrimage Rosary that day. It seems valuable to do that; it allows us to be transported far away in spirit, and also to understand that there are monasteries of our Order in countries of which we have not even heard.

Another of our activities connected with the “Pilgrimage Rosary”: we have been sending it, with a picture of our Father St. Dominic, throughout Bolivia, wherever there is a presence of our Friars. In the month of March, it was in Tarija, in April, in the Convent of St. Jude in Cochabamba, in Santa Cruz in May... And so it will continue on to Santo Domingo. The idea has been to make known the prayer of the Rosary (so Dominican!), and we hope that our brothers will pray it in community, and that they too in their various houses will teach the faithful how to pray it.

Well, dear sisters, thanks to this Bulletin we can share our news with all of you, and we can also thank those who will share their experiences of the Jubilee Year. That is really something fraternal and enriching.

*Your Sisters of St. Dominic de Guzman Monastery
Bolivia*

Original: Spanish

Rweza, Burundi

This monastery has been a special mercy shrine during the current holy year. We hope to have an article in the next issue of Monialibus. Here is a picture of their *Mercy Door* opened in the church of the monastery of Rweza, Burundi (Africa).



There are two ways of approaching this psalm. One can consider it from the perspective of one who has just arrived at the temple, or from the perspective of one returning from the celebration of the feast of Tabernacles, the great New Year festival when people gave thanks to God for the fruits of the year's harvest.

In this reflection I would like to present the second approach, that is, the pilgrim is on the way back home.

The central theme of the psalm is “**the Temple of God**”. This is what the psalmist wants to highlight. He wishes to make us realize that the temple is the source of life and happiness for everyone in whatever situation we may find ourselves.

We can divide this psalm in four parts:

84:2 : Jerusalem is present before his eyes

84:3-6 : Jerusalem is present in his thoughts

84:7-12 : Jerusalem is present in his every step

84:13 : Jerusalem is present in his daily life.

1. Jerusalem is present before his eyes (84:2):
As he starts off on his journey home, the psalmist turns to take a last look at the temple. All of a sudden he utters a cry of admiration:

*“How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD almighty!”*

This is the language of love poetry. Lovely is a word used for human beings rather than places, but here, the psalmist considers the temple, the dwelling place of the One whom he loves so much, the Lord, God of hosts. As a result, Jerusalem also becomes the object of his love. Why? Because the almighty and living God has chosen to dwell there with Israel for ever and ever.

2. Jerusalem is present in his mind (84:3-6):
Although he is on the road, making the journey home, his heart is laden with memories of the Feast: his mind is imprinted with the beautiful images of the temple. He lets his heart turn towards to the temple:

SPIRITUAL CORNER

Meditation on Psalm 84 (83)

Prayer of a Pilgrim to Jerusalem

[Psalm 83] Israelites made three pilgrimages to Jerusalem annually. This Psalm shows the sentiments of the pilgrims longing for the divine presence.

This is an excellent psalm about the pilgrims heading to the temple in Jerusalem, the holy city of the Jews. Thanks to the way it is structured—the concentric style, in addition to many rich images—it is easy for readers to share the psalmist's innermost sentiments.

*“My soul yearns, even faints
for the courts of the LORD.”*

Why did he yearn and pine? Because of love! He loves Jerusalem but now he has had to say good bye! He would like to remain there longer, but now he is forced to be far from it! The love of God burns like a fire causing his soul to pine and makes him exclaim:

*“My heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.”*

Thinking about it, he is jealous of even the restless birds that make their nests nearby the altar of God. They are blessed! They are wiser than he!

*“Even the sparrow has found a home,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young
—a place near your altars, LORD almighty,
my King and my God.”*

Then he desires the vocation of the Levites, the ones who serve in the temple. They are blessed to live under the roof of the House of the Lord and to praise Him day and night:

*“Blessed are those who dwell in your house;
they are ever praising you.”*

However, on reflection he realizes that not only are they who have been living in the temple privileged to praise the Lord, he too may sing God’s praises. These thoughts make him feel less bitter and increase his fervour. The temple of the Lord is the place destined for us, and the God of hosts is the “strength” of the pilgrims. The Lord is present not only in the temple but also in the hearts of those who carry heavy burdens:

*“Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.”*

3. Jerusalem is present in his every step (84:7-12):

The life of God’s people is a pilgrimage towards the Lord’s House. The psalmist recognizes that Jerusalem is now present in his mind, his heart and each step of the way back home.

“As they pass through the Valley of Baca”

According to most translations, “*the valley of Baca*” means “the valley of lament” (*bo’êmeq habaka* in Hebrew). The Lord’s presence can be found in the “spring of water” or in “the early rain” that make the soil soft for the sake of the coming harvest. In the Feast of Tabernacles people begged God for rain for the coming harvest. With every step he takes, the psalmist seems to step on dripping wet fields which symbolize God’s mercy:

*“They make it a place of springs;
the autumn rains also cover it with pools.
They go from strength to strength
till each appears before God in Zion.”*

In every situation of life and each stage of the pilgrimage, God is always present, likewise in Sion. Trusting in God’s providence and care, the pilgrim walks in communion with God, in persevering prayer and in union with God’s people:

*“Hear my prayer, LORD God almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.
Look at our shield, O God;
look with favour on your anointed one.”*

The psalmist’s meditation then leads him into a reflection on the people’s hope for the Messiah, the anointed One. The Messiah is the chosen one of God, guiding people to live by the covenant. He contrasts the reality of his present situation with his hopes for the coming of the Kingdom. This perplexes him and makes him want to return to Jerusalem immediately:

*“Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere.”*

The psalmist recalls the joyful atmosphere in the temple when he was gathered with God’s holy people to celebrate the Feast. It grieves him to be so far away from the liturgical community and to have to involve himself once again in daily life with all its sordidness:

*“I would rather be a doorkeeper in the
house of my God
than dwell in the tents of the wicked.”*

He has, however, to accept this reality. But thanks to God’s grace, having attended the celebration, he now has a new and profound vision, like one who discovers the goal of his life:

*“For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.”*

Indeed, the Lord becomes “a rampart”, and “a shield” to protect him. God himself will bring glory and boundless happiness for those who faithfully walk in His covenant.

4. Jerusalem is present in his daily life (84:13):
In the final verse of the psalm we find a summary of the theology of the pilgrim that the psalmist wishes to share with us:

*“LORD almighty,
blessed is the one who trusts in you!”*

Prayer and Reflection:

Lord Jesus, you are the new Temple and the High Priest of the New Covenant. We, as Dominican Nuns or Christians, share the same longing and yearning for the Church, the place in which we meet the living God, the Risen Lord, present in the Eucharist. You are very close to each of us, protecting and defending us from our enemies; at the same time you refresh us on our journey to the Father’s house. You are God’s Anointed, the One who intercedes for us before the Father. We adore you, we love you, you are our strength!

“The Lord Jesus is the same
yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

*Sr. Theresa Bui Tam, OP
Dominican Monastery of Our Lady of The Holy
Spirit, Viet Nam
Original: English*

The Healing Power of Forgiveness

One of the most beautiful titles of God in the Bible is “God of Forgiveness” (Neh 9: 17). He is not a vengeful and cruel God, but rather *a merciful and compassionate God, loving and faithful, whose love endures forever and who pardons evil and sin* (Ex 34: 6-7). However many may be the infidelities of a person or of a nation, if they recognize their sin and sincerely repent, God forgives (Dn 9:4-19; Ps 103:1-14; Wis 11:23-26) because he does not will that the sinner should perish, but rather that he be converted and live (Ez 18:21-23). This divine will always to forgive whenever one sincerely seeks forgiveness becomes spectacularly present in the life of Jesus Christ, as he reveals to us the Father’s infinite capacity to forgive (Lk 15: 11-32), as he himself pardons without accusations or limitations (Lk 5:20-24; Lk 7:47-50; Lk 23:34), as he commands his disciples to forgive with complete generosity, and as he grants to the Church the power to forgive.

Often we meet persons whose lives are very difficult and complicated. They have alienated their family members or their closest friends. The ties that once united them have all been snapped through misunderstandings or simple actions which, when considered calmly, shouldn’t have caused a total break or which simply aren’t important enough to lose all family connections. Often I have stopped to reflect and to ask myself why do we struggle to forgive? Why are there persons who are incapable of forgiving? What sense does it make to “remember” that resentment, sorrow or memory of things long past when remembering still wounds us? We have all seen persons who keep alive the offenses which they have suffered, leaving them no peace and tranquility.

We cannot forget that God forgives us each day; and that man, similarly, is also obliged to forgive. To forgive allows us to see the glory of God, since forgiveness allows love to govern our heart; while the lack of forgiveness or resentment leads us into aggression and bitterness. Forgiveness does not interrogate, it does not ask questions about the past, because that past no longer exists. It doesn’t matter what happened, because it is done. But it *is* important what we do in the present because this will

determine the future. Open your heart to forgiveness, free yourself from all the weight which is making you heavy and keeping you from advancing. We have to forgive from a loving understanding, but not in order to change those who have hurt us or to justify the actions that have happened. In forgiving we can be happy and recover peace. For we come to understand that after every event, however sad or destructive, there is always a profound meaning, if we look through the lens of grace and mercy.

Evangelical forgiveness, such as Christ lived and proclaimed, is more than simple sympathy which pities the misery of mankind. Gospel pardon makes us see that we may live in a *conscious* manner in each of our acts and thus we become conscious of our need to ask for pardon from those we have offended: “So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:23). In order to be pardoned one must have in mind the actual offense and circumstances. But we recall these offenses not to increase our guilt, nor to lock ourselves into our miseries, but rather to help us to live before the face of God with the grace of his mercy. His mercy lives in our own lifetime in a thousand ways, because God always provides us a refuge, pardoning us and loving us with his limitless love, and hoping that we will do the same with our brothers. Because our hope of salvation comes from God who is mercy, we his creatures must show that same merciful attitude toward our neighbors. God prefers mercy and fraternal love to all religious rites, offerings, sacrifices. And the true fast pleasing to God is that which moves us to mercy for others. Most of all, the richest forgiveness may come from one who has experienced thanking Christ for his forgiveness, because it is not possible to forgive truly as Christ asks us without having been personally forgiven. And by “forgiven,” we mean not from this or that sin, but rather from the misery and poverty of life into which we fall so often. Because if all sin is love wounded, misspent, refused, lost, then all our faults are in actuality against God who is true LOVE. If we could calculate our offense against love, we would see that no penitence could atone for this offended love.

Forgiveness is nothing else but a mystery of gratitude, which does not place us in an attitude of dependence, because forgiveness, the fruit of gratuitous love, is an invitation to live, to grow, to love as God loves. Forgiveness is also one of the strongest manifestations of the salvation which God desires to grant to humans from the beginning of salvation history: “And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy” (Lk 1:50, 54).

Forgiveness is an authentic liberation, and for its sake we must be always disposed to take the first step and approach the brother who has done us harm, to begin to love first the person who perhaps does not love us. For “where sin increased, grace abounded all the more,” says Saint Paul in one of his letters (Rom 5:20). When Adam through his sin broke his relationship with the Creator, it was God who took the first step: “Adam,...where are you?” (Gen 3:9)

“Blessed are the merciful!” (Mt 5:7) Blessed indeed those who know how to forgive. Forgiving is considered by Jesus as a beatitude, because it permits us to participate in a certain measure in the very being of God. With this gesture we become a little more like him. Those who live distanced from God should focus at first on how we love ourselves, because we do know how to forgive ourselves. He who forgives frees himself from a negative chain, ending a sorrowful personal situation and opening the possibility to be pardoned. Forgiveness does not justify, put neither should it judge. Forgiveness frees us and opens us to the present, and this happens when we forgive ourselves and others.

The present is the time of God, and from Him we are able to love, to understand, and learn, because forgiveness does not wait to ask questions. An open heart frees us from all the heavy burdens which prevent us from moving forward. We forgive in order to be happy and to recover our peace. After every event, however complicated it appears to us, there always exists a profound meaning which should take us to see the will of God and his plans of love for each one of us. Long ago He taught us the greatest lesson about forgiveness and love bestowed as his gift, when He said “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...” (Lk 23:34), for

the lack of forgiveness causes more harm to the person who was offended than to the offender.

Forgiveness and Mercy

Have we thought sometimes about the patience God has with us? He is always patient, He awaits us, He understands us, He loves us. That is the mercy of God. I think of the physical posture of Jesus in the Gospel of John 5:1-16, the scene of the paralytic at the pool [of Bethesda]. When Jesus sees the paralyzed man, He takes pity on him. The mercy of God bends down to the need of the man. He takes pity on him as He has done so many times with us. His question: "Do you want to be cured?" seems unnecessary since the answer is obvious, given the paralytic's situation. However, in the spiritual realm, we sometimes do not want to be cured. Even when we suffer from our situation of separation, our spiritual estrangement, we cling to that very estrangement, because we fear the plans of God may be very different from our own plans; He wills us to leave our idleness, our spiritual paralysis. The will to leave our spiritual illness is also a gift from God.

The faithfulness to grace which is in our heart ought to lift us to do all the good we possibly can. We cannot pass by; we are called to be merciful like the Father, as He said to us: "Do you the same." The Lord has bent down to us and has given us his mercy. Now we must give witness to the mercy that God has shown us. His mercy heals our sick hearts and helps us establish the civilization of love, which makes us live, dependent on his love turned into mercy: disposed to help, to do the good, to serve, to humble ourselves before our pride, to divest ourselves of all our egotistical robes in order to be truly witnesses to the merciful love of God.

And this merciful love of God leads me to think of the mercy which always moved our Holy Father Saint Dominic. His deepest sorrow was the separation between God and man, between

his merciful love and the crushing sin that separates us from goodness, the most precious gift. Dominic lived from that place of mercy, pouring out love where there had been suffering. Because he understood perfectly the fruits of living in union with God, he could see the suffering of the man who pays the price of sin, trapped by all that is not God. God knows how to fill us to overflowing, so that our whole life may be a song to the grace which makes forgiveness come from mercy. Living thus we will truly become gracious and merciful, as our Father always wanted us to be.

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