



# Monialibus

*Nuns of the Order of Preachers*  
*International Bulletin*

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**“With fraternal affection...”:**

Dear Sisters,

**HE HAS RISEN! LIFE HAS BURST FORTH!  
WE FEEL OURSELVES WRAPPED IN THE  
LIGHT OF LIFE-UN- EXTINGUISHABLE!**

Along with my Paschaltide good wishes, Sisters, I want to offer you the gift of a witness from a man of the church whom I admired [+2012], a religious like ourselves, a student of Sacred Scripture as we too should be; a professor, an archbishop, a cardinal, a *papabile*: CARLO MARIA MARTINI. I am thinking of an experience of his which goes far back – to June of 1959 – and is shared with his readers in one of his last books, the one entitled “*My Three Cities*.” He says:

*“I was going alone that morning. We were being given hospitality by the Franciscans of New House. Jerusalem had been divided, and I remember what it cost us to use the Mandelbaum Gate; even on the road to the Cenaculum, rifles were sticking out of the walls. The Jesuits’ house was beside ‘no man’s land,’ and after our house there was the French Consulate, still inhabited, and then began those 300 or 400 metres of empty spaces where a bomb had fallen, and from there extended the wall with its Jaffa gate. Times had been very hard and were very difficult still.*

*I had gotten up about 3:30 and set out by way of the deserted back streets of the city for the basilica [of the Holy Sepulchre]. From the Mass there, I remember only that I had a very strong sensation of “life,” of what “life” means. Praying and celebrating by myself, alone on the rock of the Sepulchre, with very few persons assisting from outside, I seemed to understand in an extraordinarily clear way that life is the crucial theme of all religions, the desire of all humanity. And that it is in that place that all the hope, all the certainty, all the confidence in life are concentrated.*

*It is difficult to describe the experience I went through, the intuition I had of a life that never ends, not ever, but that bursts out, erupts, embraces the universe; the feeling that all religions deal with the theme of ‘life forever,’ of resurrection, and so we have to understand and judge everything from there.”*

[Fr. César continues in his own words:]

As I write these lines, in an afternoon of intense light which announces springtime hurrying to arrive, the train in which I am traveling has crossed the city of Avila in Spain, city of “songs and saints,” to which my life was bound when the door of youth opened. Here I finished my baccalaureate studies and from here I went to the novitiate. Here I began to get to know “the Holy Woman,” as the townspeople called Teresa of Jesus Cepeda y Ahumada. Woman of confidence in the Beloved, she always moves me to renew my confidence. They say that on her deathbed she gave thanks to the Beloved for her dying in His Church, she who always felt herself scrutinized and fearful of condemnations. They say too that in a final sigh, and with the old spontaneity, she said: “*Now comes the time, Lord, when we will see each other!*”---she who, like Paul of Tarsus, had so spent and wasted herself for Him.

The sun continues to descend over these plains of Castile. I enjoy the moment when the light glazes everything and invades the broad spaces of far horizons, and when whispers of immensity let themselves be felt. Not very far from the point where the train is now going, at the right, is Caleruega. It is easy to imagine that the darkening light visits again the stones of the old tower of the Guzmans, and at this hour will be embraced by the melodious murmur of the Vesper prayer of the contemplative sisters and the friars who live here. Here, more than 800 years ago, fresh life began to bury itself deeply, confident in the Mystery. It also equipped itself with the courage and strength to long vehemently for other areas and cities where the Grace of the Beloved would come to be known. At another death-bed, confidence was made word and message of hope: “*Do not weep because of my departure. I will be of greater use to you from Heaven*” – the house of Love.

The sun goes on hiding itself. Soon the shadows will invade everything and the silence will become more dense, and perhaps the suffering more bitter. But there has now burst forth, and forever, the Bright Star which-knows-no- setting. He brings it about that Life, so fragile and vulnerable, threatened by repeated violence and wounded by death, still is indwelt by the Pasch and called to Resurrection.

It is Easter! Let us feel confirmed in our certainty of the meeting in which Life embraces us, and makes us fully and forever His.

Happy Eastertime, my dear sisters.

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

## **ECHOES FROM THE REGIONS**

### ***General Assembly of the North American Association of Dominican Monasteries***

The North American Association of Dominican Monasteries held its General Assembly at the motherhouse of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia, Nashville, Tennessee from September 13-23, 2016. The Dominican Sisters generously hosted the Assembly in celebration of the 800<sup>th</sup> Jubilee of the Order.

The theme selected for the Assembly was “In the Joy of Dominic: a joy ever new, a joy which is shared.”

We began with a day of retreat on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Father Walter Wagner, OP, our Religious Assistant, provided two conferences which focused on the Holy Cross and the idea that in the Cross itself God shows us how He transforms the limitations of the frailties of human life so that they serve our sanctification. Thus we can befriend the vulnerability of monastic life, and make living at this time fruitful for our own spiritual growth. When fear has been named and befriended it

becomes possible to live an undefended life after the pattern of our Holy Father, Saint Dominic.

Father César Valero Bajo, OP, promoter for the Nuns of the Order of Preachers, spent two days with the Assembly. He posed this question to the nuns, “How do we Dominicans preach in a world and a society where people are indifferent to religion? He thought this question vital for Dominican Order and stressed that Dominican contemplative life is submerged in the abyss of God’s love. The joy of God always shone in the face of Dominic and the joy of Dominic is itself a wonderful preaching.

Father César challenged the nuns to reflect on what kind of reality shines forth from their faces. He told the nuns that they always have to look for the light of hope that comes from God. Quoting the Holy Father he said that every monastery must be compared to a light house for someone lost at sea. Father César begged the nuns to have a spirituality of beggars. Always to be attentive, humble and persistent.

Guest speakers were Brother Herman Johnson, OP, province of Saint Martin de Porres and Father John Paul Walker, OP, province of Saint Joseph.

Brother Herman spoke about the vocation of the cooperator brothers and the joy he has experienced in his vocation. He witnessed to the powerful intercession of Saint Martin de Porres and how he continues to be loved by so many, Dominicans and non-Dominicans alike. As part of his afternoon session, he reenacted the life of St. Martin de Porres to the great delight of the nuns.

Father John Paul Walker, OP gave two conferences. The first was entitled, New Beginnings. He listed six characteristics of a new beginning, emphasizing that they cannot take place without first the willingness to allow the death of the old. Quoting from the *Libellus* of Blessed Jordan in the Lives of the brethren, Father made the comparison of the brothers who were sent out to preach on August 15, 1217 without any preparation but Dominic’s trust in God’s grace. Another example was the trust in God’s Providence and the brothers’ joy in spite

of their lack of success during a whole day of begging.

The afternoon conference focused on “Trust, Confidence and Joy”. He began with the story of the early brethren being fed by angels when they had no food. Their joy was such that observers thought them drunk on one such occasion after a long day of begging without any success. Father also emphasized qualities of this JOY such as passion, benevolence. He cautioned us about taking ourselves too seriously. Father John Paul emphasized that true joy is an effect of love.

The prioresses and delegates then moved on to the business portion of the Assembly. A day was spent in the spirit of true Dominican government. The proposals submitted by the member monasteries as well as changes to the statutes and directory were discussed and voted on by the Assembly body.

The Assembly elected the new officers of the Association. President, Sister Maria Christine, OP, Corpus Christi Monastery, Menlo Park, CA; Vice-President, Sister Mary Catharine, OP, Monastery of Our Lady of the Rosary, Summit, New Jersey; First Councilor, Sister Mary Rose, OP, Monastery of the Infant Jesus, Lufkin, TX; Second Councilor, Sister Marie Tersidis, OP, Queen of Peace Monastery, Squamish Valley, BC, Canada; Third Councilor, Sister Mary Jeremiah, OP, Monastery of the Infant Jesus, Lufkin, TX.

Toward the end of the Assembly a day was spent in the beautiful Tennessee countryside at the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia’s Bethany Retreat House. The nuns thoroughly enjoyed a relaxing day and the company of each other and the gracious hospitality of the Dominican Sisters.

*Original: English*



## ***St. Dominic de Guzman Federation of the Monasteries of Dominican Nuns – Ecuador***

In the midst of the Church  
their growth in charity is mysteriously fruitful  
for the growth of the people of God.  
By their hidden life they proclaim prophetically  
that in Christ alone is true happiness to be found,  
here by grace and afterwards in glory.  
(LCM, V)

### **A Brief Summary of the History of a Little Way of Fraternity and Communion**

Quito is a city nestled in the Andes mountain range, that with its snowy peaks, makes of its irregular geography a range of unique landscapes. The history of this colonial city is wove with legends and events mainly colored by the religious atmosphere that from the beginning of its existence was sealed with the Dominican and Franciscan spirit of its first missionaries, who worked tirelessly to sow and maintain the faith in the hearts of all faithful settlers and natives.

By the year 1592, a group of devout women gather to found the Monastery of St. Catherine of Siena. They were spiritually directed and cared for by the Friars of the Order of Preachers, who were foundations of virtue and holiness that forged the first nuns who decided to live in community. The nuns embodied within their lives and whole beings the project that Our Father Dominic designed for the contemplative nuns of his Order.

Since then, the Monastery of Saint Catherine has been present, generation after generation, throughout the Church and the Order with nuns who lived in community within a colonial structure, with its long cloisters and outbuildings. These works and environment were adorned with art painted by artists who put their religious souls in their brushes, and testifying to so many lives given to the regular contemplative observance. According to history they were always concern to praise the Lord with their songs and liturgy carried out well in Latin. Many distinguished themselves by their remarkable natural and spiritual gifts.

Dominic's ideal when he founded his Order also extended here within the cloister with his criteria and decisions: "Wheat, if dispersed, becomes fruitful." On August 15, 1959, the Monastery of St. Catherine made its first foundation with the Monastery of Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary. This new monastery is located in the Imbabura Province on a property of approximately 12 acres of land, which was the heritage and inheritance of two of the foundresses: Sister Maria Angelica and Sister Imelda Espinosa de los Monteros. The country setting of the monastery was situated on the slopes of Mount Imbabura. Records say that the construction of the house was with the direct collaborative work of their neighbors, in masonry, carpentry and more. Every year at harvest time the inhabitants of the area who were celebrating took everything they harvested to the monastery. From its beginning, the Community has always enjoyed the affection, closeness and welcome of all the people. Discipline and regular observance were, and remains, the key to the community journey.

In the year 1980, the Monastery of Saint Catherine founded another Monastery, located 30 minutes from the City of Quito in the Chillón Valley with the name, Monastery of the Holy Family.

On August 8 of this same year, 1980, the Monastery of the Most Holy Rosary also founded the Monastery of Venerable Jesús Herrera de Catalina, in the Guayas Province in Durán, 15 minutes from Guayaquil. (This venerable was a Guayaquileña nun who was sanctified in the Monastery of Quito.) It is a place with a totally tropical climate. The history of this new monastery is like daily enjoying the pure mercy and love of God. The spiritual presence of our Father St Dominic is the gentle breeze that accompanies the community's daily journey.



### Lives of Close Sisterly Communion

The relationship of communion is the manifestation of that love which wells up in the heart of the Father.

Fraternal communion is a reflection of God's own way of being and bestowing himself; it testifies to the fact that 'God is Love'.

*(Vultum Dei Quaerere, 24 & 25)*

In the events that life presents us, there are always circumstances so that the paths can be reach the only final goal which is the definitive ideal—the love of the Father's house.

The Federation is consists of four monasteries. Each in its own have followed their normal schedule of choir, study, work and community life seeking day to day to do God's will. It seems that this is everything, as when the sun is born from a previous sunset. But in the real life of our communities, without being very aware, we have lived an atmosphere of unity and fraternity like the grains of the same wheat spike. Sometimes interspersed with short periods of natural separation and distance, but then reunited again by the gift of friendship.

This spirit of harmony and sisterhood has not only been experienced among our four monasteries. The sense of family in the Order has also been present in other places of which we have continual memories of gratitude and love. For example, the Federation of the Immaculate at Torrente has been, and is a house of open doors from which its help and example of communion has shown the way for our small federation.

The Monastery of Catherine J Herrera de Durán has at the beginning benefited from the fraternity of other monasteries such as: Santa Rosa de Puebla for three years and Most Holy Rosary of Duitama, Colombia. All the events gave rise to a sisterly spirit and communion among the nuns to expand. It raised our awareness to see more clearly that the world of our monasteries does not end at the walls of each one. This relationship goes much further and becomes alive when we help one another. The path of our

fraternal communion is enlightened by the light of hope that gives us unity, because the spirit of the Order has no borders. This reality is a grace; it is a gift.

For approximately 18 years the two young communities of the Holy Family and Catherine Herrera de Durán have lived this shared fraternal life more closely by the exchange of Sisters, the Liturgy, and also in the wonderful sharing they have enjoyed and experienced. They share what there is of even "a single loaf of bread, broken for two poor sisters" who love each other and walk hand in hand so as not to faint on the road.

The two monasteries were born in the same year of 1980. Holy Family Monastery is situated in the countryside, with a wonderful climate. It is a residential area and the properties of the neighborhood are spaced apart from each other. This enabled the monastery to enjoy the monastic silence, with the added aroma of eucalyptus in the air. The disadvantage is that vocations are not easy in a middle class place. In its beginnings, the community was supported by the help of its benefactors, who in the course of time passed to a better life or moved to other places. To remedy this economic situation, the two communities joined to begin wine-making. We called it "Benedict," not for the Pope's name, since John Paul II was still alive. The name "Benedict" was only an attractive coincidence with the incoming Pontiff, who, in choosing this name, was for us a sign of gratitude to the Lord, for the few inconveniences in realizing this project. This work partially improved the economic situation of both Monasteries, especially that of Holy Family.

Our fraternal union did not remain there. We always hoped that, at some point, our dream be realized that the other two monasteries could also opened their doors to embrace and enjoy the same protection of Our Lady and Dominic, our Father, as a formal federation. We have lived for many years in friendship and periodic help, especially when some need has occurred.

There were long years of "pre-federation" as we call those times, until finally in 2015 there began to be regular meetings together with the Vice Provincial and the Priest Assistant. They wrote draft-statutes to be studied and approved by the

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respective Chapters, and then sent to Rome for approval. Meanwhile, as expected, criteria differences arose, so it was necessary to leave them for a while and to be in constant prayer for the Lord to work in the heart of each sister, until at last, acceptance prevailed.

On July 19, 2016, the approval of the Federation came from the Sacred Congregation. The Lord our God has deigned to grant us this grace for so many dear and desired years. May He be forever Blessed and Adored for this good! We are convinced that united in a federation our bonds

of sisterhood will be strengthened to seek a better common future according to the thinking of the Church and the spirit of the Order.

We trust that this little seed planted in the earth will develop and bear fruit for the glory of Our Lord and good of many souls.

*Sor Catalina Almeida, O.P.*

*Priora Federal*

*Federación de Sto. Domingo de Guzmán - Ecuador*

*Original: Spanish*





## *About the Federation of St. Dominic— Spain*

### WE ARE THE MOST NUMEROUS REGION OF DOMINICAN NUNS IN THE WORLD

The first Meeting (or “first Federal Assembly” of the nuns) took place in Valladolid in August of 1957. Two years later, our Federation was canonically erected. From this first experience of sisterly collaboration fifty or more years ago up until the present moment, we have continued to support one another in the living of our contemplative life. During the intervening years we have witnessed many changes. Some monasteries have been born, while others have discontinued, but all of them have helped bring us to where we are now and we remember with gratitude all that we have been given through their faithfulness.

At present, the Federation of St. Dominic is composed of 40 monasteries. Of these, 30 are on Spanish soil; the 10 others are spread out in 10 different places in America, Africa, Portugal, Greece, and Taiwan/Korea. Forming part of our Federation, the Sisterly Union “Mother of God” came together in 1981; its members are directed by federal statutes as well as by their own and depend on the Monastery of Olmedo.

Except for unusual cases, Federal Assemblies are convoked every six years. Often there have been more than one hundred nuns present. The challenges they present to us are very great: the closing of some monasteries, the aging of the communities, the shortage of personnel for relief of one generation by the next, mutual assistance, formation, interchanges, and so forth. The situations we come from are very varied. Because of this, sometimes we focus in differing ways; but that is good because the differences are real.

A Bulletin, “Bond of Union” (Lazo de Unión), has been published periodically; now about three times a year. More than a hundred issues have been produced, containing announcements, events, special celebrations—the joys and sorrows which we all wanted to share with each other.

Interfederal meetings with the two other regions of Dominican nuns of Spain have great significance for us. Already by the spring of 2007, the Master of the Order, fr Carlos Aspiroz had called together the Federal Prioresses, with their respective Councils and Religious Assistants, to celebrate a meeting at Caleruega. Formation courses and spiritual exercises began to be offered. The respective Bulletins were shared, putting in common the matters which were worrying us all, and the dreams which were inspiring us ...including, it seems, that in the near future there may be an Interfederal Novitiate.

Here we can think of Number 257 of the Acts of the 2016 [Dominican] General Chapter at Bologna: “*We recommend to the Master of the Order that, assisted by the Promoter General of the Nuns, he be concerned for the well-being of our contemplative sisters in the historic Monasteries of the Order in Spain (Caleruega, Segovia, and the Royal St. Dominic Monastery in Madrid), so that they may continue to shine with spiritual and communitarian life.*” These three monasteries, real sanctuaries for the Order in Spain, are located within the territory of our Federation, and the three have “St. Dominic” (Santo Domingo) as their title.

The “Royal Monastery of St Dominic, Caleruega” has the privilege of being at the birthplace of the founder of the Order of Preachers. A star in the depths of the water of the little well in the de Guzman Tower points out exactly where that was; and Blessed Mannes knew. In Caleruega is preserved also the wine cellar of our holy grandmother Blessed Jane of Aza—and of course, the Guzman Tower.

In the Royal St. Dominic Monastery in Madrid is kept the font at which our Father was baptized; it is taken to the palace whenever there is the baptism of a son of the royal family of Spain. The nuns of Madrid also preserve lovingly their only letter from St. Dominic himself. [It includes this sentence:] “*We greatly rejoice and give thanks to God for the blessing of your holy life.*” Once the Madrid Monastery was founded, Dominic left the nuns in the care of his brother Mannes, “a contemplative and holy man,” according to fr Gerard de Frachet.

The Royal St. Dominic Monastery of Segovia brings to our heart's memory Dominic's private prayer, and the shedding of his blood before an image of the Crucified. The place in the old city of Segovia called "The Cave of St. Dominic" (it happens to be at the center of the university) is profoundly revered by all who live his charism. In the silence of the night, Dominic the preacher used to withdraw to a dark cave, bringing to that inhospitable place his desire to suffer in order to become like the Beloved of his soul.

The weight of our history forms part of the life of the Federation of St. Dominic of Spain. We continue to try to be open and free, and to transmit as a living message our daily existence and the beauty of our consecration.

Thank you for reading these words.

*Sr. Maria del Mar Castro, O.P., Member of the ICN  
(International Commission of Nuns)  
Monastery of St. Catherine, Alcalá de Henares –  
Spain  
Original: Spanish*



### ***Young Sisters in Regensburg: Ongoing Formation for Novices and Novice Mistresses A Report from a Joint Meeting***

A meeting for novices and novice mistresses took place at the Dominican monastery of the Holy Cross in Regensburg between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> July 2016. Eight sisters from five monasteries and four countries took part. Sr. Anna the novice mistress from Lage and Sr. M. Marina the novice mistress from Regensburg were responsible for the organisation of the meeting. Sr. Consiglia from the Swiss monastery in Weesen and Sr. Maria the Prioress in Prague also attended. The young sisters comprised Sr. Katharina from Lienz in Austria, the two simply professed novices Sr. M. Benedikta from Regensburg and Sr. Diana from Lage, as well as a novice Sr. Klára from Prague.



The meeting began on the evening of July 25<sup>th</sup> with a roundtable of introductions in which our guest friar from Belgium, Fr Mark de Caluwe took part. Tuesday morning began with a lecture for all participants. Then we broke up into two groups. While the young sisters exchanged on the subject of mercy and its significance for St Dominic, for the Order and for our own daily life in community, the novice mistresses reflected on the experience of crisis and its potential for challenge in the life of a Sister. This discussion was prompted by a talk they had heard on “crisis in Religious Life from the theological/ethical perspective.” In the afternoon we went over to the former Dominican convent of St Blaise

where the exhibition “More than Black and White” was being held to mark the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Order. We were guided through the exhibition by the curator Dr Susanne Biber.

The other two days (26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> July) were devoted to the significance of the Beatitudes in Matthew’s gospel. Mr Hans-Ulrich Weidemann, Professor of New Testament exegesis at Siegen University gave us four lectures, each comprising a unit of work on the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. At the first session he made the Catholic position clear in accordance with *Verbum Domini* (2010). The historical critical method on its own does not suffice for a complete explanation of the biblical text, for the Bible conveys to us the inspired and living word of God. In order better to understand the Beatitudes in their textual, cultural and historical context, we busied ourselves first and foremost with the cultural and historical setting of the Sermon on the Mount within the context of the gospel, and then the next step was to look at the structure of the Sermon on the Mount itself. To conclude we had the opportunity to ask questions, to meditate on the Holy Scriptures and to let the Word of God speak to us.

On Wednesday evening (27<sup>th</sup> July) we were able to exchange with the Professor in an informal group about what seemed to us difficult, worthy of note or particularly important. We not only talked about the Bible but also about the current situation of theology students in Germany, and also about our daily life with its lighter side. On Thursday evening we finally had a recreation together with all of the Regensburg sisters at which we were able to express our joy at seeing them again, as well as our gratitude for this meeting. The next day, after breakfast, we set out on our respective journeys home.

The meeting was a very enriching experience for us, giving us much food for thought. We were also delighted to meet members of the Order hitherto unknown to us, as well as seeing again those we had not seen for some time. It was a great opportunity to get to know and support one another. The shared Dominican identity facilitated exchanges on subjects of deep significance, as well as during the breaks, on the

problems and joys of our daily life. There was a definite interest in holding further meetings.

*Sr. M. Klara (Prague) and Sr. M. Benedikta (Regensburg)*  
*Original: German*

## NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITIES:

### *Living In Community*

As Augustinian spirituality is at the very foundation of our Dominican life we need to reflect on it often to be true to our calling. In this Jubilee Year of the Order it is good to consider again the way of life chosen by St. Dominic and the first friars. St. Augustine's Rule was familiar to Dominic who had lived in its embrace as a Canon regular in Osma. As the new community developed it was obvious that the same way of life would be the best foundation for the contemplative preachers of the Word.



As he begins his Rule, St. Augustine tells us that we have come together to live *harmoniously* in the monastery. For the first ten years of his priesthood Augustine seems to have been of the opinion that detachment from material goods would bring about unity. However, after the year 401 he places the accent on *anima una* and *cor unum*. As Father William Hinnebusch, OP says in his book *Dominican Spirituality*, "Community life goes much deeper than holding material

things in common". More important is the sharing of the spiritual riches of soul and mind. This harmony is the fruit and also the visible sign of charity. Augustine considered monastic life as a reflection of that of the apostles. The following of Christ means that Christ is the head of the house and the apostles are his friends. He saw the monastery as a community of friends and this is reflected in Thomas Aquinas who called charity "the love of friendship". St. Thomas teaches in the Summa that the more closely a thing is related to the end, the more perfect it is. This means that Community is supposed to be a clear reflection of the life of the Trinity and therefore it is a most important observance. It is an essential element in Dominican life, and in the first formula of Profession used among the early Friars they promised common life. Community is where we train; become fit to live with God. The life of the Holy Trinity teaches us how we are to **be** for one another. Just as the Son is toward the Father, so the basic stance of the member of community is self-giving, placing self at the disposal of the other members.

Community is not a simple question of cohabitation, and it doesn't just happen. We have to work at it. We are meant to be as fully engaged as possible: constantly giving up my preferences, my plans, my convenience, my comfort, my time - to fill the needs and even the wants of others. According to Augustine the sign that we are learning about the perfection of charity is that we learn to love our enemies with whom we have already learned to live harmoniously. The perfection of charity is when you are willing to die for others as well as to live for them. This dying is to our own thoughts, prejudices, tastes, caprices. To live for others means to organize my life in the interest of those I least like or that don't seem to like me. When we begin to feel the burden of common life it helps to remember Fr. Don Goergen's remark, "If only we could view our problems from the perspectives of those struggling with death, hunger, or hopelessness". Remembering the situation that the Dominican Sisters in Iraq are experiencing at this time will help us view our problems from this perspective. Unity calls for giving in. It is an expression of charity. This charity is a gift from God and we must untiringly beg for it. In his *Confessions*, St Augustine says

that “there is true friendship only when it is you (God) who strengthen its bonds between persons attached to you by the charity poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”. We must each be constantly on the alert to assist the other.

In his book, *Monastic Practices*, Charles Cummings tells a story told about a man named Thor Heyerdahl who sailed from Africa to South America in a papyrus boat. “It was not the ocean waves or the primitive vessel that worried him most, but the question of how the seven men aboard would get along with one another. They came from seven different countries and were of different ages, different religions, different professional skills, different native languages; they would be living shoulder to shoulder on a small boat for four months. In fact, there were difficult moments but all the men on board were genuinely committed to the expedition’s goals, and so their voyage ended successfully, on a note of fellowship.”

Our monastic life is much like Heyerdahl’s papyrus boat. Our observance of cloister prevents us from freely leaving the “boat”. Our journey from our monastery to Paradise can be a joyful one or it can become a hell of loneliness, bickering and suspicion with a disastrous end. I cannot seek God as if I were a hermit. My way to holiness lies through and with my fellow travelers. If I am to attain holiness it must be in THIS house, at THIS time, with THESE people. Both they and I have been called by God to live this life together and I will be faithful to my vocation and will experience the living God because of them, not in spite of them. My words can make or break the fellowship that is needed for charity. I must be on friendly terms with everyone I live with, even though the level of mutuality and sharing will not be the same with all.

St. John of the Cross teaches that common life is a consolation and support in religious life. That is certainly true as we can all attest, but it also tries and tests us. As Father William Hinnebusch has pointed out, “It is impossible to live day by day, year after year, in community, standing beside the same person in choir, sitting beside her in the refectory, without being tried in many ways.” A perfect community does not exist, and so I cannot wait for the other sisters to reform before I live with love. I can find the presence of

God even in the midst of those other imperfect souls that form my community. This is where God has placed me, and it is here that I can always find Him. God has called me here to prepare me for heaven and this is where I find the Way.

Being faithful in this less-than-perfect setting calls for a generous measure of self-forgetfulness and self-discipline. Community can be enriching and fulfilling, but it is also a form of asceticism: I must patiently bear the infirmities of others as they bear with mine. As we strive together to resolve problems and reach decisions while respecting differing opinions, we all grow in holiness.

Father Donald Goergen, OP, in his book *Letters to My Brothers and Sisters* offers some good questions to ask ourselves about common life:

“Do I expect too much of my sisters?  
Do others have to meet my expectations?  
Can I be more accepting and understanding?  
Whose conscience am I examining?  
What do I sacrifice for others in community?  
What is the level of my investment?  
To what degree am I trying to make community work?  
Which comes first - my interests or the community?  
If I have little positive to say about my community, what has gone wrong in me?  
How can I begin to remedy that?  
To whom can I turn to help me?”

Community life is how we contemplative nuns preach the Gospel. Let us preach the truth. In this effort we have the assistance of St. Dominic who promised, “I will be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life”.

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### ***From Eucharist to Eucharist—Toro***

The year 2016 was a threefold blessing for the nuns of the “Royal Monastery of the Holy Spirit” in Toro, Spain. To the joy of celebrating the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the confirmation of our Order, and to the Jubilee of Mercy, was added our happiness for the 700 years of life of our monastery. Such great reasons to give God thanks... for everything! for so much! All the celebrations, activities and meetings we organized were to remind ourselves of the need for continual thanksgiving and to encourage others to join us.

In a context like that, the best “marker” for the series of events which had been happening in our house as we passed through some really extraordinary months, was the Eucharist. All our celebrations took place between the opening Eucharist of our seventh-centenary birthday and the Eucharist with which we closed the year 2016. All the celebrations and activities expressing our gratitude for our Jubilees were taken up into the Giving-of-Thanks *par excellence*, which the Eucharistic Celebration is.



The initial Eucharist of the monastery birthday anniversary was presided over by the Bishop of the diocese, Bishop Gregory Martínez Sacristán. With him were the Vicar for Consecrated Life, our chaplain, priest-friends and priest-acquaintances of the community. In his homily

the Bishop earnestly urged us to make a family among the contemplative communities of Toro (of which there are five). On this our jubilee opening day, two of our sisters from Zamora were with us, and two Premonstratensian nuns of Toro. Our community (cloistered) celebrated the jubilee birthday on the Feast of all Saints of the Dominican Order, November 7th, with the Dominican, Fr. Angel Almarza of the Rosary Province, presiding, and Fr. Salas, OP, and several diocesan priests accompanying him. On every joyful day, a great number of the faithful, familiars, friends, and benefactors were with us, and in this way made clearer to us the closeness of the Lord and His mercy.



Whenever the primary focus of a celebration was the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the confirmation of our Order – as we were doing in Toro also – reference was always made to the 700 years since the foundation of the monastery and likewise each celebration chiefly of the monastery birthday, recognized also the great Jubilee of the Dominican Order, and was an outstanding occasion to make known our Father and his Order.

On April 30<sup>th</sup>, the book *Un Deseo que pervive (A Desire which Lasted)* was made public. Each person attending the event received a copy. As for concerts: there were several during the year. The first was on that same day in April and it was given by the “Mens’ Choir” (el Coro de Voces Graves) of Madrid. It was a real marvel, an authentic celebration for everyone present.

The especially “Dominican Day” during the year was the Solemnity of Pentecost, May 15th. The Promoter of the Nuns, Fr. César Valero, O.P.,

presided, accompanied by many Dominicans coming from various convents.

In his homily, Fr. Cesar recalled the words of a contemplative nun who described her vocation, not as a flight from darkness but as a search for light. He summed up the years of the Toro Monastery as **“700 years of light over the Duero River, on behalf of the whole world.”** He emphasized the importance that contemplative life continues to hold today for the Church and for Society: *“In a world which thinks that after this life we can hope for nothing, the vocation of contemplatives announces instead that that ‘nothing’ is indwelt by love.”* Toward the end of his homily, Fr. Cesar turned to the nuns of Toro, encouraging them to thank God because they have much to tell others from their 700 years of history --: much for the present in which we are living and much for a hopeful future in which we can immerse ourselves more deeply in the mystery of light. Also on Pentecost Day a delightful concert of organ and violin was given by two friars, Sixtus and Jaime. Fraternal sharing of a light meal completed the day.

As the months went by, there were other concerts. There were cycles of conferences. There were presentations of various kinds. And on various themes, e.g., “On the sepulcher of our Father in Bologna”; “On the high altar of the monastery church in Toro”; “On the Middle Ages and the influence of kings in monasteries”; “On illness in the Bible”.....

And there were many encounters with the Virgin, teaching and praying her Rosary. There was a “pilgrim Rosary” in many Dominican places. In Toro, we were assigned May 16-17 to devise the Rosary celebration and, in October, the Feast of the Virgin of the Rosary. These were convivial days around the Word of a God who is mercy, and gave opportunity to make known our life and mission in the Order of the WORD.

Let us tell you also that on August 8, the Feast of our Father St. Dominic; we had the joy of inaugurating a new chapel so that the faithful can participate with us in the Liturgy. The Eucharist of the Solemnity of St. Dominic was celebrated at seven in the evening, and the inauguration ceremonies took place after that. A great

number of priests and of the faithful accompanied us.

Everything we planned for the celebrations worked out well, thanks to the collaboration of all the nuns and the participation and help of friends, familiars, benefactors and Toro neighbors of Toro. For this we give thanks to God who sustained us with his grace throughout that precious year, so special in regard to many aspects of our consecrated life. With these lines we wish to thank all the monasteries of the Federation which were in one way or another united with us.

How many anecdotes we will be able to tell about having seen the mercy we try to live and preach come alive! How many persons drew near to us in 2016 because of the anniversaries! To those who are already an extension of our community by their kindness to us, demonstrated in infinite detail, there have been added others whom we had not known and who now are part of our life.

Everything, everything, happened between Eucharist and Eucharist. So from Eucharist to Eucharist, our thanksgiving has ceased to be ours only – and has become the Lord’s. We pray Him to continue to present to the Father the whole year. We wanted it to be, above all, a worshipping of the Trinity for the immense gift to the world of a man who after 800 years of history continues to enlighten consciences with the Truth who is Christ, and to preach the Grace who is the Word made Flesh.

Your sisters of Toro

*Holy Spirit Monastery – Toro, Spain*  
*Original: Spanish*

