

THE VINE AND THE BRANCH

(THE CHURCH AND THE ORDER)

THE growth of the Church was phenomenally sudden; so also was the growth of the Dominican Order. In 1217 St. Dominic was the head of a little band of sixteen missionaries—truly a “little flock”—four years later, he died, the Patriarch of an Order whose influence extended from Russia to Spain, from Great Britain to Greece. Well might he have applied to his Order the words that St. Paul referred to the Church, universal even in his own day: “Their sound hath gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the whole world.”

According to the order of nature one might expect such a rapid growth to be only the thing of a day. And so it would have been had it not contained in it a divine element. St. Dominic did not deposit the seed of his Order in the sterile garden of the world, which bringeth forth naught save thorns and thistles, but he engrafted it on the true Vine, which is Christ. In the Vine it has ever abode, and the reward of its fidelity has been the fulfillment of Christ’s promise that its fruit should remain.

Thus closely allied with the mystical body of Christ, the Church, it is from the Church that the Dominican Order has taken its whole tone and complexion. Indeed, before many pages of its history had been recorded, the very marks of the Church itself became the



Meeting of Saints Francis and Dominic

Order’s own distinguished traits. These characteristic notes of the Church as reproduced in the Order, we believe, have been the sources of Dominican vitality, and the unfolding of them will form the burden of our theme.

In more ways than one St. Dominic proved himself an original thinker; but especially in the matter of unity was his original genius manifest. St. Dominic was the first among the founders of great religious bodies to unite all the houses of an Order under one government and one head. Up until his time each religious house was independent

of every other, and each had received a separate charter from the Holy See. St. Dominic, however, appreciating the strength that is in unity, sought and obtained from the Pope a writ of confirmation for his whole Order. As a result, therefore, of our Father's foresight, we have the unique privilege of being the first religious Order, as such, that was ever confirmed by the Holy See.

Nor did the sons of St. Dominic fail to grasp his spirit. The first paragraph on the first page of our Constitution shows this. There, all are earnestly exhorted to be of one mind and heart, to cherish interiorly that unity of spirit which is outwardly expressed by the uniformity of our observances. This desire for unity seems to have increased with the years.

The severest penalties are repeatedly launched against any who should dare attempt to disrupt the Order. We see Chapter after Chapter confirming and reiterating these ordinances, until finally they are placed before the Supreme Authority of the Pope and Alexander VII declares them confirmed and valid forever.

The result of this legislation has been a solidarity unsurpassed by any other Order. True, during times of universal stress and confusion, such as those of the Western Schism and the Black Plague, when even the saints of God, in all good faith, were set one against the other, the Order lapsed; true, we have suffered periods of debility, when the allegiance of the Order was, for a season, divided. These disturbances, however, were not lasting and were always healed from within. No permanent break ever occurred in the Order; to-day we are as united as we were in the days of St. Dominic. The word Dominican has but one interpretation.

Another characteristic wherein the Order bears a marked resemblance to the Church is its holiness. The development, however, of this phase in the Order's life may be seen in a following article.

Catholicity is another mark that every institution, laying claim to resemblance with Church, must certainly possess. When mention is made of the Catholicity of the Church, we usually revert to that vast organization, the members of which are spread over every nation of the earth. But there are other ways in which the Church is Catholic: she



St. Dominic's First Convert

is Catholic in her sympathies; to every creature under the sun she addresses these words, "how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth her chickens under her wings." It is to the Catholicity of the Church under this aspect that we would liken the Order of St. Dominic. This generous, Catholic spirit of the Dominican Order is nowhere more evident than in its relations with other religious bodies. There are few institutions of the regular clergy, which have come into existence since the days of St. Dominic, that have not experienced the fraternal influence of the Friars Preachers. This is especially true in regard to the founders of religious societies. It was the inspiration of St. Dominic and St. Francis, sustained by the grace of God, that made Ignatius of Loyola a saint. Later, during that precarious stage in his spiritual life at Manresa, Ignatius lived in the Dominican Convent, and it was a Dominican confessor that directed his unbounded zeal.

St. Philip Neri, the founder of the Oratorians, was a child of the Dominicans. It was in the Dominican Convent of S. Marco that he received his early education. In after years he used often remark to the Dominicans in Rome: "Whatever good there has been in me from the first, I owe to your Fathers of S. Marco."

The Carmelites, also, have felt the influence of the Friar Preachers. Had it not been for the Dominican Fr. Pedro Ibanez, the reforms of St. Teresa, humanly speaking, might have failed; and, as Bishop

Currier remarks, "what they (the Dominicans) did for St. Teresa may truly be said to have been done for the Order of Discalced Carmelites."

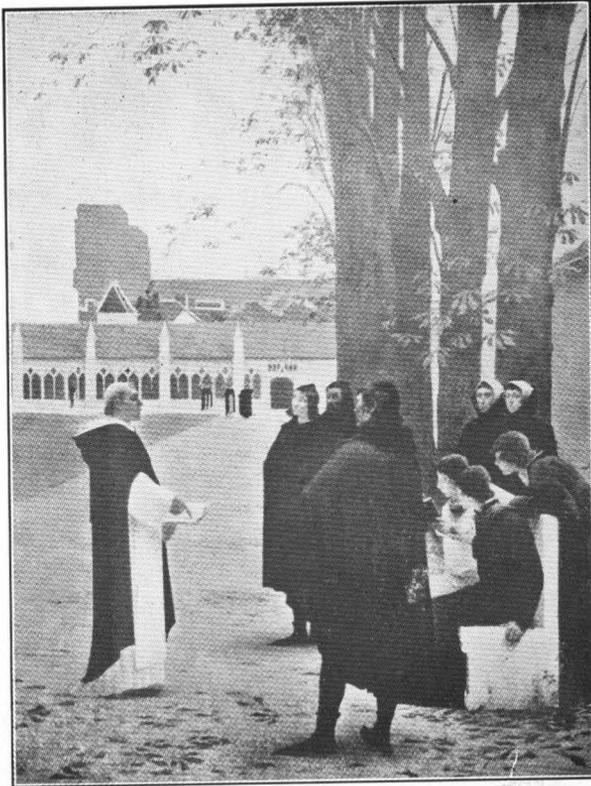
The Passionists were at one time proteges of the Dominicans. On his death-bed, St. Paul of the Cross, their founder, manifested his confidence and esteem for the sons of St. Dominic by placing his infant congregation under the protection of Fr. Boxadors, Master General of the Dominicans, and recommending it to the whole Order of Friars Preachers. The account of this all-embracing spirit of the Order could be continued to a much greater extent, but limited space forbids any further digression.

The apostolic character of the Order should not be difficult to estab-



Saint Dominic Instructing a Recluse

lish. The very name Order of Preachers gives a claim to the distinction. Our Lord Himself gave us to understand that preaching is the proper office of an apostle when He said to the Twelve: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature." And since the days of the Apostles, no other body of men, except the bishops, who are the direct successors of the Apostles, have received such an explicit commission to carry on the apostolic labor of preaching as the Order of Friars Preachers. This name was given us by Innocent III,



Blessed Albert Preaching

it was approved by Honorius III and confirmed by Gregory IX, but it was won long before by the prayers and tears of St. Dominic. For it was to St. Dominic, as he knelt one day in the old basilica of St. Peter's, that the two Prince-Apostles, Peter and Paul, appeared, and, giving him the one a staff and other a book, exclaimed: "Go thou and preach, for unto this art thou called."

And now as we look back seven hundred years, we see that the Order of Preachers has been apostolic not only in name but in very deed. When obedience bade St. Dominic forego the ambition of his life, which was to die for the faith, he seems to have transmitted to

his sons that same burning thirst for souls with which he himself was consumed. And if Dominic's holy enthusiasm be measured by the apostolic zeal of his sons, ardent must have been the furnace that raged within his breast, for there is not a land under the sun that has not been either watered by the tears or bedewed by the blood of a Dominican.

To go into details here, on this subject, would be altogether beyond our scope, but to show that the apostolic spirit of the Order is not on the wane, we can only remark, that the largest province in the Order to-day devotes itself exclusively to the foreign missions, and every province considers itself in perfect accord with Dominican ideals when it has a goodly number of its sons sacrificing every comfort and even life itself in this yeoman service of the Church.

Finally, the characteristic of the Order that cannot be overlooked is its inseparable adhesion to the Apostolic See. Indeed there is a rea-



Sisters' Choir, Prouille

son for this. "The Order of Preachers," says Pere Mandonnet, "is the work of the Roman Church. She found in St. Dominic an instrument of the first rank. But it was she who inspired the establishment of the Order, who loaded it with privileges, directed its general activity, and protected it against its adversaries." As a result the Order has ever made the cause of the Holy See so completely its own, that its career may be said to run on parallel though on a lower plane with that of the Church. With the Church it registers its periods of light and darkness, joy and sadness, adversity and triumph. Far be it from us, therefore, to attribute to any human agent the phenomenon of our seven hundred years existence. We gratefully acknowledge that one has planted, another has watered, but, at the same time, we do not forget that it is God Who giveth the increase.

—**Brother Luke, O. P.**