

DOMINICANA

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THE LAY-BROTHERHOOD

Looking down the vista of seven centuries at the Institute of the Friars Preachers, the eye is apt to become dazzled by the fame of its theologians, scripturists, philosophers and canonists; and while we contemplate with awe the learning of an Albert, a Thomas, a Raymond, a Hugh, a Cajetan, dwell on the heaven-inspired eloquence of a Peter, a Hyacinth, a Vincent, or read in the pages of secular and religious history of the masterly executive powers of a Pius or an Antoninus, it is only natural that we judge the entire Order by these intellectual and oratorical victories, thus placing its standard far above the reach of the ordinary man. However, this is only one side of the picture, and by a mere turn of the page we have in exchange for the successes of the lecture hall and the pulpit, the lowly vision of many saintly lives far removed from the noise and bustle of the world, whose toils and labors, known to God alone, are redolent with all the charm of evangelical simplicity.

Its saints are not all great men in the world's reckoning, for Dominic Guzman was not content to open the doors of the religious life to the learned and eloquent alone, but desired also to number in his white-robed family many a simple, pious soul whose slender intellectual attainments would never gain for him a reputation in the eyes of men. True it is that university doctors, princes and princesses or royal blood and celebrated characters in religious and civil life eagerly donned the white woolen scapular of the Preaching Friars; but along with them, in the simple garb of the lay-brother, came the shepherds of the Spanish hills, the beggars of Italy and even the poor despised and persecuted slaves of the New World. Varied, indeed, were their stations in life, vastly different the personal gifts they brought into the Order, but one and all they were animated with burning zeal for the salvation of souls, and each in his proper sphere found among the ranks of Dominic's children adequate chance to

carry on the glorious mission inaugurated by the great Apostle of the thirteenth century.

Even in the little band of sixteen men who set forth from the Convent of Prouille to spread the Order throughout the world, we find the name of a simple lay-brother, and the subsequent account of the success of these holy missionaries fails to mention the fact that the one unlettered friar did not accomplish his task with as much success as the more learned and eloquent preachers. And why should it? For if the Almighty inspired Saint Dominic to accept as his disciples men who should never aspire to the sacerdotal state, that same all-provident God certainly intended to supply these lay coadjutors with sufficient means, apart from the professorial chair and the pulpit, to carry out with good result their vocations as Friars Preachers.

The glorious apostolate carried on by the missionaries and teachers of the Dominican Order has been of lasting and unmeasurable benefit to the holy Church of God, and yet when we attempt to account for these marvelous accomplishments for the welfare of souls, we at once discover that the credit must be equally divided between the priests and the lay-brothers.

Some of our readers, remembering the active missionary life which forms an integral part of the Order, may imagine that it is practically impossible for one who cannot teach or preach to carry out the spirit set forth by Saint Dominic; but we must remind these that example, too, plays no little part in the spread of Christ's holy Gospel, and many a holy lay-brother quietly accomplishing the manual labor allotted to him, or piously telling his beads in the chapel or cloister, has proved a powerful support to some more learned brother, to say nothing of the edification given to the faithful by such an example of simple and unaffected piety. Furthermore, the lay-brothers of the Order, caring as they do for many of the temporalities of the convents, have in this way removed a heavy burden from the shoulders of the clerical and priestly friars, allowing these more time and liberty for the active exercise of their sacred ministry. Thus we see how the holy, disinterested cooperation of the lay-brothers plays such an important part in facilitating the labors of their more learned confreres. And shall any one say that when the Almighty metes out to the children of Saint Dominic glorious rewards for their missionary accomplishments He will not be-

stow in equal measure remuneration to these servants of the servants of Christ?

Nor must it be concluded that all the Dominican lay-brothers were ignorant and unlettered, for many men of high rank and station, well educated and thoroughly versed in the various arts and sciences, not feeling called to the priestly state, chose rather to don the black scapular of the simple lay-friar and spend their lives ministering to the temporal wants of the brothers whom God had selected to be His ambassadors to men. Others, and these in no small number, have been painters, sculptors and highly skilled artisans who continued to display their talents even after they entered the cloister, only purifying and elevating them by dedication to God's service. Thus it came to pass that while university students gathered knowledge from the lips of Dominican professors, and vast audiences listened spellbound to the magnificent discourses of some Preaching Friar, lay-brothers of the Order, conscious of how to apply the other and lighter kinds of instruction, laid strong hands on the magic of the arts.

How many a sermon in oil paintings, frescoes and stained-glass have Dominican lay-brothers left us on the walls and windows of their convents, while the very edifices themselves, the work of these black-scapulared friars, stand even today as glorious specimens of noble Christian architecture! Witness the celebrated Church of Santa Maria Novella at Florence, erected entirely by the hands of the Brethren, "without" as Marchese tells us, "the aid of a singular secular." Its architects and designers were the two celebrated lay-brothers, Fra Sisto and Fra Ristoro. It is not fitting here to speak of the beauty of this wonderful structure, which Michael Angelo was wont to term "his gentle and beautiful bride," for its merits have even been celebrated, as we learn from one of Savonarola's sermons, in a treatise entitled "De Pulchritudine Sanctae Mariae Novellae," and many of our readers have probably long since heard of the far-famed church which gave to the celebrated artist, Cimabue, his first inspiration.

Again, we find the lay-brothers engaged even in catechizing and instructing, a notable example being that of the saintly South American negro, Blessed Martin Porres. This holy man used to gather the little children about him on the street corner, and spend hours each day planting the seeds of Christian doctrine in these young and innocent hearts.

Five times have the names of lay-brothers been inscribed in the calendar of the Dominican blessed, and the Friars Preachers the world over celebrate Mass and recite the office in honor of Blesseds John Massias, Simon Ballach, James of Ulm, Garcia of Aura and Martin Porres. These men, indeed, have received the honors of beatification, but God alone can estimate the number of other holy lay-brothers of the Order whose lives of heroic sanctity have won for them glorious crowns in the Kingdom of Heaven.

We cannot do better than conclude this brief article by quoting the words of Père Mannes Jacquin, O. P., taken from his excellent little volume entitled "The Friar Preacher Yesterday and To-day": "A Friar Preacher, then," he says, "the lay-brother most certainly is; for he not only works for his own salvation, but also strives to obtain through the ministry of others, the salvation of a great number besides himself. What matter, then, if he be ignorant of learning? What matter if even his devotions are shortened by the demands of his manual work? For he has devoted his whole life to the apostolate, the supreme object of the Order to which he has consecrated himself without reserve."

—Humbert M. Palmer, O. P.

THE AFTERMATH

Faries, not flowers, under the coral skies
 Our garden-beds inhabit. After the snows
 The chaliced lily, and the rathe primrose,
 The gypsy pansy,—a late-spring paradise!
 See, through their leaves the violet soft arise,
 Where through the grass the creeping ivy goes
 Peeping out daisy-flowers; upon tip toes
 All swaying to and fro in happy-wise
 Greeting Our Lady,—wingèd Gabriels!
 So long ago the valley-lily bells,
 The gorgeous poppies too, and hyssops pale,
 Aloes, and spikenards, all through Nazareth
 In irised tremor lighted hill and vale,
 —Our Mother visiting Elizabeth.

—Gabriel Knauff, O. P.