

THE MASS OF ST. DOMINIC

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NO ONE thinks that the liturgy of the Church is a perfect masterpiece. But even those who know only a little about it must acknowledge it to be little less than a miracle of selection and compilation. Not a few of those who know the liturgy regret that particular selections were ever made. Yet no one thinks that he can compile a Missal or Breviary. In its parts the liturgy has imperfections; but in its entirety its compilation is little short of inspired.

And yet the Mass of St. Dominic is one part that is well nigh perfectly selected and applied. It is fitting that he who was so devoted to the Scriptures should be so accurately described by the words of Holy Writ. However that may be, it is delightful to find that the Mass offered in his name follows in every word almost the whole of his life.

The Introit¹

He was not a young man by any means, this Dominic de Guzman, when the call came to him from on high. But he was known in heaven as a man "of wisdom and understanding." It was "in the midst of the church," in the sanctuary of God, that he spent thirty years of his life in prayer and service. It was there that he learned to relish the taste of heavenly things and there that he penetrated ever more and more beneath the veil of the mysteries of faith. So wise was he that he spoke rarely save to God or of God, so understanding that God chose him to wrestle with the mightiest intellects. His wisdom brought men to God, his understanding God to men. When the last call came, he was ready to be "clothed with a robe of glory." Buried at his express wish beneath the feet of his brethren under the choir of the convent, his body was later transferred to more glorious surroundings. In the removal of his remains his robe of glory shone forth radiantly beautiful, for the holy body gave no evi-

¹ Eccl. xv, 4-5.

dence of death's corrupting influence but rather bespoke the holiness of this erstwhile temple of a great soul.

Among the numerous little dogs that sit at the feet of innumerable statues of the Saint, there is one—at least one—outstanding. When first you look at this little fellow, you feel that he is hopelessly inadequate, not at all the type to represent a mother's dream of her yet unborn son. The little dog's expression is much too wistful; he seems to invite you for a jolly good romp rather than inspire you to follow him through the world to spread the fires he lights with the torch in his mouth. And yet when you stop feeling and think, you must admit that this little fellow is a thoroughbred by all his points. It is just his face, or the cock of his head perhaps, that is against his being a type. The longer you look, however, and the more often you return to look again, the more adequately expressive this seemingly inadequate little dog becomes. After all, by what natural necessity must a good watchdog, or a good hunter, look serious, determined, ferocious? The longer you ponder that cocked head, that appealing expression, the more you appreciate how well *this* dog represents the man who dared scatter an infant Order to the corners of the world and yet begged, on his knees and in tears, a Henry of Navarre to go without scrip or purse or staff. God heaped upon the wise and understanding Dominic "a treasure of joy and gladness," of gentleness and charm.

St. Dominic was lonely as a boy, so his biographers tell us. But as a man he was gifted in the art of making friends and keeping them. He drew men, young men especially, to himself with ease. Joyous in fatigue, he sang his way about the world, making light of hard roads and hard beds. He could sleep, if his body demanded sleep, beneath a tree or in the pew of a country church or on the steps of an altar. Youth loves a man of such spirit. St. Dominic trusted youth, advanced youth to high places, his trust ennobling them and impelling them to deeds worthy of their new exalted positions. Yet he could be severe, with himself and with others. Austere, he was yet affectionate, easily moved to tears of sympathy. He was the man portrayed in the apocalyptic figure of the Preacher Dominic, clothed in flowing cloak and armed with the Epistles of St. Paul. He was also the man portrayed in the quiet, gentle contemplative searching the face of his crucified Master. He lived according to the maxim of Ecclesiastes: "All things have their season, and in their times all things pass under heaven. . . . A time to

weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather. A time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces."² Could youth help loving him? Grace molded a gifted nature; grace and nature wove the robe of glory, of wisdom and understanding, of joyousness and gladness, with which God clothed him in the end.

*The Epistle*³

The call to action came in a time such as the Apostle Paul foretold, when the people "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires they will heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." It is hard to believe that people could abide the contradictions and evil consequences of the Albigensian heresy. To condemn nature outright as evil, to accept a doctrine that leads logically to suicide, destruction of the family, infidelity in matrimony, fornication—the heresy was truly like a fable. "They will turn away their hearing from the truth, but will be turned to fables." It was an old fable, taking its origin from the Gnostic heresy, revived and given a new locale. But it was as dangerous as of old. "According to their own desires," did the people heap to themselves teachers. They had no ear for sound doctrine; sound doctrine was in too many instances not taught at all or taught to the accompaniment of sounding brass and tinkling cymbal. The Cathari at least appeared to be sincere. It was the wise and understanding Dominic who realized the difficulty and set out to preach the simple austerity of Christianity by being simple and austere. To one who knew the beauties of human nature at its best, to one who used every natural talent of his own to full advantage under the refining influence of grace, this heresy was abominable. St. Paul had exhorted: "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season: reprove, entreat, rebuke in all patience and doctrine." St. Dominic obeyed.

His doctrine was especially the Gospel according to St. Matthew, the document of the humanity of Christ, and the Epistles of St. Paul, the document of the life of the glorified Christ, solid, unyielding, uncompromising truth. All his life St. Dominic had been especially devoted to these two books of the Scriptures—providentially, for the humanity of Christ gave

² Eccl. III, 1, 4-5.

³ 2 Tim. IV, 1-8.

the lie to the so-called essential evil of man's nature, and the glory of Christ demonstrated conclusively to what heights this nature could and would be exalted. "In season, out of season," wet and cold, heat and dryness: it mattered not to this fire-brand of Languedoc; he, the Lordlike Dominic, preached the word.

"But be thou vigilant," said St. Paul, "labor in all things, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill thy ministry." St. Dominic's vigilance was sharp both in prayer and action. It was Dominic who saw the fields in Languedoc white for the harvest, he who labored, alone eventually when the good Bishop of Osma was called to other fields; he who did the work of an evangelist in the way the Evangelist did theirs, without purse or scrip or staff. It was Dominic who prayed all night and scourged his tired body that God might show mercy to His blinded people. At the end of his efforts in Languedoc, Dominic could say with St. Paul: "I have fought the good fight." But it was not yet time for him to say, "I have finished my course," however beautiful was the crown already laid up for him in heaven. For St. Dominic felt that somehow he had not "kept the faith." His labors had been almost fruitless. He sought out his spiritual Mother for comfort, help, and guidance. The Rosary came into being, and with it success. The Rosary was the people's way of "hearing sound doctrine." No longer did they turn away their ears from truth. They were won.

*The Responsory**

"The mouth of the just shall meditate wisdom: and his tongue shall speak judgment. The law of his God is in his heart, and his steps shall not be supplanted." Nine of the first converts, all women, took up the battle by way of prayer in the first convent of Dominican nuns at Prouille. They had come to St. Dominic, having been cast out by their own for embracing the truth. Who shall say that their praying was not in the spirit, if not the word, of that "wonderful hope" which Dominic gave to those who wept at his death? "O good Father Dominic, be mindful of thy works: and standing before the supreme Judge, plead for thy poor brethren."

The brethren began to gather around the Father. St. Dominic's preaching drew to him others of like aspiration. Mannes,

* Ps. xxxvi, 30-31.

his brother, also a priest, was among them. The missionaries were a success. The Bishop of Toulouse knew it, gave them the church of St. Romain for their monastery, the first Dominican Priory.

With a remarkable increase in the number of his followers, Dominic the vigilant conceived the idea of a world-wide missionary Order. St. Francis of Assisi at this time had a similar notion; neither seems to have gotten his from the other. Both of them must have brought their conception out from beneath the veil of Holy Writ, inspired so to conceive by no less a Person than the Holy Ghost. "Going therefore, teach ye all nations. . . ." They had authority enough for daring to think in terms of the globe, but none for acting. The Holy Father had to think twice before granting their unusual request, if for no other reason than that Rome had but lately forbidden the formation of new religious orders.

On the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady in Heaven, 1217, St. Dominic received the vows of his little band—and then scattered it throughout Europe! The trust he placed in his followers was equalled only by the trust he inspired in them.

The Gospel⁵

Precisely when St. Dominic told his brethren that they were "the salt of the earth" and "light of the world" we know not. But very soon there came into the focus of men's attention a new being, a type of missionary neither monk nor diocesan priest, called "Friar Preacher." A friar, according to St. Dominic's conception was not a monk, and yet again under another aspect, was very much a monk; not a monk because the world was his monastery, if there was need for the salvation of souls; yet a monk because bound by monastic discipline—choral recitation of the Divine Office, silence, study, mortification—when ever not actually engaged in saving souls. The balance is nice. A Friar Preacher spends his life maintaining it. To save souls monastic discipline and study were the preparation, and yet neither was to interfere with the saving of souls. The idea may be paradoxical. But the extraordinary balance of it takes one's breath away.

To make certain that his followers would remain the salt of the earth (for "if the salt lose its savor wherewith shall it be

⁵ Matt. v, 13-19.

salted?"), St. Dominic enjoined upon them the study of sound doctrine. Sound doctrine would be the seasoning of faith and the preservative of grace.

But the unbalanced intellectual, like the absent-minded professor, tends to create for himself a world of ideas far removed from the real world of joys and pains, failures and achievements, births and deaths. On the other hand, the preacher is always in danger that in preaching to others he himself may "become a castaway." Hence the necessity of monastic life, of prayer in common, discipline, silence,—of the crucible of divine love. Monastic discipline lifts the student out of himself, broadens his point of view, and gives him a good measure of zeal for the salvation of souls. As for the preacher, monastic life takes him out of the world of harsh realities, softens him where he has grown callous and unfeeling, gives him time to think thoroughly through the problems he has met, and by filling him with a conviction that in Christ he can do all things, overcomes that enervating feeling of his own utter inadequacy in the face of the mystery of sin. St. Dominic knew that monastic discipline is the anvil on which the blade is forged, sharpened, and re-sharpened time and again. St. Dominic, the Canon of Osma, had spent thirty years in the forging.

He was no timid general, however. "Ye are the light of the world. A city placed upon a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house." St. Dominic sent his first disciples into the cities to learn solid doctrine at the universities, and having learned it, to preach it forthwith. Like their father, the brethren became known for their prayerfulness as well as their learning. Thus did they justify his confidence in them. Men thought him mad to break up so small an Order so soon after its foundation. He was not mad but inspired, and dared because of his inspiration. His followers were lights; they must not be hid.

The whole purpose, of course, of letting their light shine before men was that men "might see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." Few saints have been so "demonstratively" holy as was St. Dominic, at least in the early days of his ministry in Languedoc—and for good reason. "Pride lieth in wait for good works to destroy them."⁶ St. Paul

⁶ *The Rule of St. Augustine.*

published his good works for a definite purpose; the continuance of his work demanded a recognition of his authority to teach. St. Dominic too did many things in what was called "his holy weakness," in order to wean the Cathari away from their veneration of the austerity of their leaders. On his deathbed also, so eager was he to impress upon his brethren the excellence of purity that he confessed to having retained his baptismal innocence. "Let your light shine before men" can be the prompting of pride. Yet it is also the counsel of the Son of God. At the one extreme stands the flippancy that casts aspersions upon motives, destroys the effect of good works, and leaves men shocked by facetiousness about holy things; at the other extreme is a singular sanctimoniousness that repels both the good and the bad. In between stands edification without ostentation. Pope St. Gregory enunciates the difficulty involved in trying to fulfill this duty to edify: "He who carries his treasure publicly on the road invites robbery (by human praise);" but adds by way of solution, "But this I say not that your neighbor should not see your good works: but that the work may be thus in public while the intention remains secret." *In medio stat virtus.* St. Thomas Aquinas includes in one of his prayers the petition for the ability to edify without ostentation. Thus does the son express the mind of the father. It is said that St. Dominic blushed in that hour of death when he realized he had mentioned something praiseworthy, and begged pardon of those who heard. Yet the truth remains that it was his publicizing of his own austerity that won for him, in great part, a hearing from the Albigensians.

Came the day of St. Dominic's death. Like a good father, he left a last will and testament. "He had not come to destroy, but to fulfill," to join the silent power of the contemplative with the active power of the ministry, to restore to the Church an apostolic band, to give his Mother sons like to her first.

Père Lagrange, in *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, declares that our Lord had no intention of saying that the law and the prophets would remain in their entirety until everything they contain had been accomplished. Commenting on the words of St. Matthew, "till heaven and earth pass, one jot, or one tittle shall not pass of the law, till all be fulfilled," Père Lagrange says: "We have to bear in mind that the law and the prophets are religious and moral truth. Now how is a *truth* fulfilled? Surely by the fact that, while remaining unchangeable in substance, it becomes

ever clearer to the minds of men, revealing more and more its content of ideas, manifesting an ever greater fruitfulness in its effects."⁷

If we take the sense of "destroy" and "fulfill" as Père LAGRANGE understands it, we are astonished at the similarity of St. Dominic's testament with that of Christ's—not by any means that both are on an equal plane, but rather that the intention behind each is so similar. For St. Dominic left a will that has remained unchangeable in substance but has become ever clearer to the minds of his followers. He helped form a Constitution, the content of which he dominated by force of personality alone, and included in it an element that would beget fruitfulness in its effects. In the first place, the testament was but an essential development of monasticism, of the rule of St. Augustine and the Constitution of the Father of Prémontré. And in the second place, the unchangeable substance of his testament he knew, and desired, to be destined to real progress in development. His revelation—again no equality of plane is intended—like Christ's, has suffered attacks from within and without, attacks which at times have brought his Order into disrepute because they were momentarily successful. Designedly St. Dominic left the Order's ideal, in its scope and government, in the hands of his spiritual progeny. True it is, as Fr. Bede JARRET wrote in his *Life of St. Dominic*, that "had (the Order) been more straitly organized in the hands of a single ruler . . . it cannot be doubted that sometimes a very serious decline in zeal or learning or observance might, not improbably, have been stayed, for freedom, like friendship and the sacraments and all things noble, can become a danger through its abuse, a danger more perilous and degrading because of the sacredness of that which is abused." But in Dominic's eyes the excellencies of democracy "would appear to outshine their shadows, for the defects are defects in external work, but the excellencies lie in the soul. Democracy may mar results, but it makes men."⁸

Although St. Dominic left a testament that oftentimes one might wish were more explicit, yet who shall say that the seven hundred-odd years of the Order's age are not the result of the trusting Father's care for each jot and tittle, each seed of truth that he sowed in that testament? "These are, my beloved ones,

⁷ *The Gospel of Jesus Christ*, (New York, 1938), I, 154.

⁸ *Life of St. Dominic*, (London, 1934), pp. 127-8.

the inheritance that I leave you as my sons: have charity among you; hold to humility; possess voluntary poverty." And when he spoke of poverty he pronounced a curse on all who should interfere either by gift or acceptance with the poverty he desired to be continued among the brethren.

*The Offertory*⁹

As we speak the words of the Offertory we might have a momentary misgiving. "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, O Lord, and hast not withholden from him the will of his lips." Surely the will of his lips was martyrdom; he spoke of his desire for it several times in life. But it was not given him. His wish to preach to the Cuman Tartars denied him, he took his desire among the Albigensians. Truth to tell, these worthies were more than willing on one occasion to give him his desire—until they discovered that his willingness thwarted their own. "What profit," said they, "to give him what he wants so much?" Are we to say then that God did not give him his heart's desire, or should we rather say that his desire was paramountly the fulfillment of God's will in his soul? God "set upon his head a crown of precious stones" instead, a holy death in the midst of his beloved brethren.

*The Communion*¹⁰

"A faithful and wise steward" was St. Dominic, and after his death, as in life, he continued to be the head of that portion of the Lord's family allotted to his stewardship. "Some there are who declare regretfully that the brethren no longer actually, if not intentionally, look upon their Father as the steward of the Order; that the firstborn son, St. Thomas of Aquin, has succeeded to the Father's place.

Whether or not the regretful declaration squares with the facts is a matter of opinion. But even if it does, St. Dominic would be the last to think it regrettable. As a matter of fact, St. Dominic is responsible for the admiration the brethren give so unstintingly to St. Thomas. For if the Father had not been so insistent upon the intellectual element in holiness of life and prayer and study and the ministry, St. Thomas would not have been St. Thomas, and the brethren would not consider him the

⁹ Ps. xx, 3-4.

¹⁰ Luke xii, 42.

epitome of their Father's ideal. It is not the first time, moreover, even in religious orders, that a son has eclipsed the father. And in the Order of Preachers there is a most natural reason for the eclipse, granted that by many it is so considered. For if the heart of a man follows his mind, and his love his knowledge, then the instinctive admiration of many for St. Thomas has a natural cause. For St. Dominic effaced himself in silence, while St. Thomas quite unconsciously wrote himself into the pages of myriad books. If the son has overshadowed the Father, to regret the circumstance is hardly after the mind of the Father, and it is absurd to say that the Father is not honored and does not rejoice in the honor paid to the image of himself. No one can take away from St. Dominic his God-given stewardship, and as through his prayers angels once brought food to the community, so has he ever merited "the measure of wheat in due season," now, in this season, the wheat that is the doctrine of the Angel of the Schools.

The Prayers

Through St. Dominic's intercession we ask God never to be wanting in spiritual and temporal helps, for he trusted so in spiritual things that he had neither habit nor bed of his own in which to die, and therefore is worthy of receiving all those things that shall be added unto him who seeks first the kingdom of God. Through St. Dominic's intercession we ask God to sanctify our gifts of bread and wine, of ourselves in union with Christ, of the gifts of others in this Holy Mass, for St. Dominic so realized the meaning of the Mass that he wept daily at the Consecration of his own offering of the Holy Sacrifice. He through whose intercession we ask God to relieve us of the burden of sin often wept and groaned before the altar for the sins of the world, scourged himself for so great an evil, and therefore is worthy to intercede for us in our distress.

The Sequence and the Preface

Moses taught, Elias preached, Samson sent fire among the enemies of God, and Gedeon was raised up to rout them. St. Dominic has been likened to all four. In his greatness sons and daughters have imitated him. He was called rather to enlighten the minds of men than to ease their heartaches and bodily pains, and yet he knew how to assuage a mother's sorrow and the

hunger of men. If his way to sanctity did not lead him directly into the byroads of the poor, neither did it keep him from bestowing his love and care upon the poor he met in his way. He was sent "for the honor and defense of the Church . . . to revive . . . the apostolic form of life . . . to overcome heresy by preaching, and to establish an order of champions of the faith for the salvation of nations," and because star differeth from star in glory by the design of God, both he and all his faithful ones hear the "nations speak of his wisdom, and the church declare his praise."