

DISCOURSE OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE MASTER GENERAL
AND THE CAPITULAR FATHERS, SEPTEMBER 15, 1946



IT IS fitting that we receive with a joyful and loving heart, you, my Dominican Brethren, who celebrate at Rome the General Chapter of your religious family. We have followed its progress and work attentively, and We do not doubt that it will bring forth good and desired accomplishments and events, so that your Order, with strengthened discipline and increased vigor, may contribute more and more to the salutary triumphs of the Gospel.

But to come to the point, the new Master General chosen by your votes excites hope in Us. We are pleased to welcome him now here present. We are pleased also to acknowledge publicly the copious merits which Our beloved son Martin Gillet gathered to himself during the long period he fulfilled the office of your supreme moderator.

While We were thinking and pondering a subject to which We could opportunely and usefully turn Our discourse, there came to Our notice some words in your Constitutions, which indeed seem to be worthy of meditation: "united in peace, assiduous in study, fervent in preaching" (n. 452). A brief expression, a profound thought; a small group of words, yet a heavy burden of precepts; for there shines forth the form of the outstanding virtues, which will be to the chosen and beloved offspring of St. Dominic an augur, a goal, a star, of a glorious journey.

"United in peace." We do not speak of peace under a counterfeit name, difficult to obtain, easy to lose, full of snares. We understand a true, solid, sincere peace, which is the daughter of charity and the parent of holy joy, according to the Divine Words: "Much peace have they that love Thy law" (Ps. 118, 165), and: "Joy followeth them that take counsels of peace" (Prov. 12, 20).

Peace of this kind is the most beautiful gift of Christ, which the world can neither give nor snatch from us, but can only vainly envy us. Indeed that peace is Christ: "For He is our peace" (Eph. 2, 14): Christ, namely, Who dwells in and animates our breasts, to Whom we belong if we live rightly. However, since peace is the harmony of painstaking virtues, always press on with greater alacrity, subjecting the body to the soul and the soul to God, flowering with evangelical grace, so that you may please the angels by your desire and thought, and men by your work. Let there be far from you anything to disturb the fraternal concord which especially becomes religious men, and

adorns them with the ornament of tranquil wisdom. Among you, let leadership be a faithful assistance; let submission be a continual holocaust; let your life shine before others as a living pattern and a brilliant example of Christian profession.

"Assiduous in study." Your peace is not a languid idleness; on the contrary, it has a task which equals any other in grandeur and excellence, for it is yours to grow strong by the study of doctrine, especially to grow rich daily by a more fruitful knowledge of divine things, to meditate upon, to illustrate, to defend the divinely given truths. Hence, let those opportune exhortations of St. Jerome stimulate each one of you always to seek a more copious knowledge, not separated from sanctity of life: "Never let a book depart from your hand and your eyes; learn the Psalter thoroughly; pray without ceasing, with watchful attention, not open to distractions. Let the body and soul tend together to the Lord" (St. Jerome, Ep. 125 ad Rusticum, n 11—Migne, PL, t. 22, col. 1078).

You who always have dedicated a high place to cultivating theology and philosophy, rightly and deservedly gain for yourselves extraordinary praise. You gave to the Church St. Thomas Aquinas, Common Doctor of these disciplines, whose authority, whether in teaching beginners or in leading further the investigators of hidden truths, is unparalleled, as is asserted in the very Codex of Canon Law in the form of a decree: "In the studies of rational philosophy and of theology and in the instruction in these disciplines, let the professors explain them entirely according to the mind, doctrine, and principles of the Angelic Doctor, and piously hold them" (can. 1366, 2).

But indeed, following the counsels and paths of Our Predecessors, we have noted elsewhere with what diligence that prescription must be carried out (cfr. Acta Ap. Sedis, 1939, p. 246-247). However, in this affair the questions now seem of small moment, howsoever great they are to be considered in philosophic and theological investigations and discussions, in which, under the patronage and authority of the Ecclesiastical Magisterium, there was always the free power of thinking and disputing. Therefore, Our speech now is less about those conjectures of doctrines pertaining to physics and to the nature of things, which were proper and peculiar in the past, or of their consequences, inasmuch as the discoveries and findings in our age have overthrown and surpassed those opinions: those findings and discoveries the Church favors and promotes, neither opposing nor fearing them.

Now in truth it is a question of the very foundations of the perennial philosophy and theology, which any system and discipline, if it is to be considered Catholic in reality and in name, knows and re-

spects; it is a question of science and of faith, of their nature and mutual relation; it is a question of the very basis of faith, which no judgment of criticism may weaken; it is a question of the truths made clear by God, whether, namely, the sharpness of the mind can penetrate these by certain notions and from them gather more ultimate ones. Briefly we say: In this matter the question is, whether that which St. Thomas Aquinas built—beyond and above any age in its uniquely composed and compact elements, which has drawn admirers of Christian wisdom of all times—whether it rests upon a solid rock, whether it may perpetually grow strong and prevail, and now safeguard the deposit of Catholic Faith by an efficacious defense, and provide a secure guidance of theology and philosophy in new advances.

Surely the Church asserts that, since It has persuaded Itself to proceed by this safe route for knowing and solidifying the truth. Hence in the Apostolic Constitution, *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, edited on May 24, 1931, it confirmed the above cited prescription of the Code of Canon Law. Philosophy must be so propounded—this is prescribed in the same place—“so that the hearers may be instructed in a full and coherent synthesis of doctrine according to the method and principles of St. Thomas Aquinas,” and in theology, “after the truths of faith have been exposed and demonstrated both from Sacred Scripture and from Tradition, let the nature and intimate reason of these truths be investigated and illustrated according to the principles and doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas” (art. 29).

But if it were necessary, it would not be difficult, as experience and practice show us, to put so-called technical formulas, which are usually obscure to the unskilled, into the clearness of everyday language, and to explain them to laymen in a more detailed manner.

Because these things have the weight of law which is binding on all Catholic schools of philosophy and theology, We expect that much more will be forthcoming from you, not only by an external example, but also by intimate judgment and study, that you may comply with these lofty norms pertaining to the universal Catholic doctrine, and also to those which touch the laws and social order.

Study diligently the books which contain the institution, laws, and history of religion; weigh thoroughly by wise investigation and turn to the use of sacred science whatever modern times provide. Let your peace, the friend and companion of a placid toil, shine with the reflexions of heavenly truth, just as a tranquil lake surrounded by fir trees reflects the image of the heavenly rainbow amid the forbidding mountains.

Nor do we wish to pass over in silence another item, which is very close to Our heart, namely, the Leonine Edition of the works of

St. Thomas Aquinas, which ought to be carried on by further study. For it is an undertaking which will be not only a glory to you but also an imperishable and precious benefit to philosophical and theological studies, in which the Angelic Doctor will always be the most skillful director and never-failing guide.

"Fervent in preaching." Dearly beloved, preaching is a great mystery to Us. For the salvation of humankind is faith; preaching, however, produces faith, as it is written: "Faith then depends on hearing" (Rom. 10, 17). Between the Incarnation of the Word of God and preaching there is a necessary connection, wonderful proximity and realization. The disciple of Christ, like the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, shows, brings, and gives Christ to men; he is a Christ-bearer. The Virgin Mother Mary clothed Christ with His human form. The preacher of the Gospel clothes Him in the form of words: both bring the Truth which enlightens and sustains men; the mode is different, the power is the same.

This maternal honor, glory, and dignity is yours as your name shows. Guard your name; guard your office; let no one withdraw from the office of preaching because of temerity or fear.

Indeed, it is your duty in this work to excel others. Let your words always be in keeping with your life: support what you say by your example. Although it is useful that human letters be learned and cultivated, lest the word of God be deprived of its proper honor, yet the strength of the word of God is the heavenly grace of the Holy Spirit, implored by prayers and pious works. "Thus a truly eloquent man acts, when he speaks both just and holy and good things, for he ought not to speak otherwise. Therefore, he does as much as he can, when he speaks these things so that he may be heard intelligently, willingly, obediently. And let him not doubt that he succeeds, if truly he did succeed, and to the extent of his success, more by the piety of his prayers than by the power of orators, so that by praying for himself, and for those whom he will address, he is a pray-er (orator) before being a speaker" (St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, c. 15, no. 32—Migne, PL, t. 34, col. 103).

Hence there are three things to which you must devote your careful thought and labor if you are to be worthy of the name and duty of Dominicans: peace, study of doctrine, preaching. They are not disjointed, but unified; they are not separate, but a loving union. With these safeguards honor your profession, hasten to Our ministry, succor the prostrate world. "Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God the Father and Christ Jesus, the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John, 3). Thus with these words spoken from Our heart, we lovingly impart to you the Apostolic Blessing.