

DEVOTION TO MARY AND HER SCAPULAR IN THE ORDER OF ST. DOMINIC

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PART I

MARY, INSPIRATION OF THE DOMINICAN APOSTOLATE



THE DEVOTION of St. Dominic to the Blessed Virgin is famous throughout Christendom. He had so imbued his first companions with this devotion that at times the people called them, not Friars Preachers, but Friars of Mary. What was the source of this extraordinary piety? Did he learn it from his holy mother, or did it spring from one of those supernatural instincts so varied in the hearts of saints? It was much more than this; it was a *grace of state*, a gift reserved by heaven for Dominic as founder of an Order that he might better accomplish his mission. Such is the subject that I have the honor to submit to this most noble audience, asking indulgence for the imperfection of my speech and the insufficiency of my thought.¹

The mission and passion of Dominic are revealed in the devise written upon his shield: *Veritas*. That is why the liturgy proclaims him "Doctor of Truth," "Doctor *Veritatis*."² And one of the exhortations often addressed by the Saint to his disciples was this: "Dear brothers, hold truth dear above all things." Great in mind, yet greater in heart, he understood that the first of charities is that of truth, and that the first of truths is that of the Word made flesh, the Redeemer, the Saviour. To proclaim this truth, to spread it throughout the world with the help of Mary, is a great mission and a sublime apostolate whose object, though one in itself, can be considered by us under a twofold aspect: the Truth of Faith or of Sacred Doctrine and the Truth of Christian Piety.

¹ This was an address delivered to the Marian Congress of Rome in December, 1904, by the Venerable Father Cormier, O.P., whose cause has been introduced lately at Rome. (*Ed.*)

² Office of St. Dominic, Magnificat antiphon for second vespers.

THE TRUTH OF FAITH OR OF SACRED DOCTRINE

There is nothing more appealing at first sight, but at the same time nothing more formidable, than this apostolate of Sacred Doctrine. The man chosen by God to exercise it meets as his adversary, escorted by his satellites, him who does not walk in truth. "He stood not in the truth because truth is not in him."³ To discover this adversary's astuteness and to confound him, a mere consciousness of duty is not sufficient; an exquisite mind is required, the mind of Christ. "But we have the mind of Christ."⁴ This marvellous mind gives a penetrating vision into, and a violent repulsion for, dogmatic error. Let us hear a great convert, Father Faber, on this subject: "In the eyes of the worldly this repulsion for heresy is exaggerated, bitter, and indiscreet. They call it bigoted, intolerant, irrational, and immoral. Their self-styled charity shows preference for those who are least for God, while they show themselves pitiless towards others. Nevertheless the integrity of the Faith is one of the interests dearest to Jesus. Also, a heart penetrated with a sincere charity suffers more than one can say when it hears false doctrines expressed. Every opinion which tends to make Our Lord forgotten, to depreciate His grace, to diminish esteem for His Sacraments, to obscure the honor of His Holy Mother, to restrict the prerogatives of His Vicar here below, wounds it so much that it feels sorrow, even physical pain."⁵

This instinct, this hatred of error, is possessed by Mary to a nearly divine degree. The Church does not exaggerate when She praises her thus: "Thou alone hast destroyed all heresies throughout the world."⁶ If we consider Mary more especially in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception, we see joined to the serenity of her brow and the smile on her lips the vigor with which she crushes the serpent under foot. And, note it well, it is not a question of two different phases in the life of a single person. At the same moment the same attitude shows us these two extremes: Mary crowned with stars, serene and smiling, and Mary who attacks and crushes. It is precisely because she crushes that she is serene and radiant, happy to have become our liberator by the triumph of truth. "The truth shall make you free."⁷

A similar zeal in banishing heresy was revealed in Dominic from

³ St. John, viii, 44.

⁴ I Cor. ii, 16.

⁵ *All for Jesus. At the Foot of the Cross.*

⁶ Office of the Most Holy Rosary. First Response of the second nocturn.

⁷ John, viii, 32.

the moment he came in contact with the monstrous errors of the Albigensians. At this spectacle, what horror, what tears, what sighs, what burning desires, what efforts to confound the impious dogmas and the abominable calumnies! Yet, besides these errors, the heretics by an infernal logic were fighting together with Jesus, the Redeemer, Mary, the Co-redemptrix.

We are assured that the book of his doctrine which he three times submitted to the test of fire in the presence of heretics, explicitly taught the immaculate purity of Mary. Three times did the flames cast the book back unharmed.⁸ This, then, explains how Blessed John of Vicenza, a very close disciple of St. Dominic, was represented in the ancient Gallery of the Convent of Friars Preachers in Treviso (1352), holding in his hand a parchment adorned with these words: "Holy Mary without stain."

However, to deliver the garden of the Church from the venomous serpent is but the negative part of the apostle's task. He must proceed from there to the positive, aggressive, creative side. "Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant."⁹ He has to make the truth luminous and persuasive to all, to the very adversaries themselves if they do not steel themselves to resist. And in this work, too, Dominic had for his helper the Virgin Mary. You hear him, after having vindicated her purity which is the glory of heaven, preaching to the Christian people her maternity which gives salvation to the world, since the mystery of the Redemption would not exist without it. This was a fundamental principle for Dominic. He was so deeply imbued with it that he never ceased to comment on the virtues, the prerogatives, and the examples of this Virgin Mother. It was a book which sufficed him for everything; on his lips there was nothing more efficacious to make true and holy all human life, however humble. The great Augustine, whose Rule he adopted as the framework for his Constitutions, had recommended this doctrine to him. He would retell it to the world under different forms of teaching, both through the oracles of his son, Thomas of Aquin, Patron of Catholic Schools, and by the paint brush of Angelico of Fiesole, who

⁸ "This book treated of the Humanity of Jesus Christ and included in chapter 17 the following words, taken from the Acts of St. Andrew: 'Just as the first Adam was formed from virgin earth which was free from every curse, so it was fitting that the second Adam be formed from a virgin earth free from all malediction.'" Alexandre S. Canole, S.J., in a book on the Immaculate published at Palermo about 1752.

⁹ Jeremias, i, 10.

was also a luminous, persuasive, and immortal Doctor.

With this end in mind Dominic introduced or propagated, it is recounted, the recitation of the Hail Mary at the beginning of sermons; and in the holy tribunal he gave most often to sinners as penance some practice in honor of Mary, in order the better to produce contrition in them and assure a firm purpose of amendment.

Everywhere, then, he was "a burning and a shining light,"¹⁰ given to the world by Mary in order to dissipate the thick darkness of error and sin.¹¹

These characteristics of Dominic's mission appear to us in a clear light at the Convent of Santa Sabina in Rome. The celebrated Master of Canon Law, Reginald of Orleans, was there preparing to enter the new Institute when a violent fever took hold of him and brought him to death's door. But, behold, the Queen of Heaven appeared and, approaching his bed, anointed his feet, saying: "May this anointing be to your feet a preparation for preaching the gospel of peace." Thereupon, she gave him in behalf of all the sons of Dominic a new manner of dress characterized by the white scapular, of which we shall speak more fully in part II.

We are not here concerned with the single person of Master Reginald, but rather with the Friar Preacher as such and with the distinctive marks of his vocation. The startling brightness of the scapular does not signify purity of life alone, but also the purity of doctrine which must shine in him most especially. And as it is not enough that the apostle be merely its jealous guardian, so Reginald, the champion of truth and precursor of a long line of Friars down through the ages, received through the anointing of his feet by the Holy Virgin incredible strength, readiness, and fearlessness to carry to the ends of the earth the precious and life-giving message of truth.

Another marvel of Santa Sabina confirms this teaching about Our Lady and the Order. St. Hyacinth of Odrowatz, clothed here with the white habit by the patriarch St. Dominic himself, stayed but a short time to taste the charms of the venerable cloister. With the reception of the habit he was initiated into the ways of the Order and,

¹⁰ John, v, 35.

¹¹ "For his more immediate and personal object Dominic took the light of science in order to extirpate the errors which had arisen in his time, thus taking on him the office of My Only-Begotten Son, the Word. . . . He was a light which I gave to the world by means of Mary, placed in the Mystical Body of the Holy Church as an extirpator of heresies."

(St. Catherine of Sienna. *The Dialogue*. Translated by Algar Thorold. p. 298. Newman Bookshop, 1944).

taking as a cloak the twofold spirit of his father, he departed, or rather he fled, to evangelize the vast regions of the North in the face of ice, immense floods, and Tartar hordes. So great was his constancy that if his journeys were joined together, they would equal, so they say, four times around the world. In particular, what a beautiful picture he must have made as, dryshod and with a light step, he crossed the Dnieper, carrying in his arms the Blessed Sacrament and a statue of Mary.¹² Behold the man, the apostle, the true and whole-hearted imitator of Dominic! Behold his faith and his love!

THE TRUTH OF PIETY

To praise Dominic as the apostle of that true piety which is lofty in its principles, simple in its development, practical and salutary in its results, Rome offers to our gaze another sanctuary, San Sisto on the Appian Way. This, in brief, is its story.

In Trastevere there were certain religious women, who had become lax, restless, impatient of their yoke, enemies of the cloister, and slaves to the affections of their families. To make them return to their vocation, the august authority of Pope Honorius III was not sufficient; the height of sanctity was needed. At the instigation of the Pontiff, Dominic undertook the task, and by the light of his discourses, by the influence of his goodness, and by the threat of divine judgments, he brought these foolish virgins to repentance. They consented to take his Rule and to be cloistered at San Sisto, thus becoming his adopted daughters.

Yet in their hearts there remained one regret; they would have to leave their beloved miraculous Virgin in the Church of Santa Maria in Trastevere.¹³ "Do not hold back because of this," St. Dominic said

¹² This statue portrays the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, since it shows Mary, Queen of the world, having beneath her feet the serpent that has been vanquished by the Cross. This agrees with what is said in the holy liturgy; "Who didst keep her from all stain by the foreseen death of the same Son." The statue is of alabaster and is preserved in the convent of the Friars Preachers in Leopol, Galicia, where it is greatly venerated. It stands nearly 20 inches high and weighs about 24 pounds, which explains why the great wonder worker, humanly speaking, could not carry it far in one arm while in the other he held the Holy Eucharist.

¹³ The Virgin of San Sisto is one of those called *Acheropita*, that is, not painted by human hands. Some chroniclers place it among those Virgins painted by St. Luke. Mabillon indicates seven of these venerated in Rome; a later writer enumerates twelve. These traditions are not always supported, it is true, by ancient and irrefragable documents; nevertheless, one cannot, as certain critics would have us do, place them in the category of those acts of regrettable credul-

to them. "We shall take it with us, and if, as we are assured has happened formerly, it returns of itself to its old place, you also will be free to return." Then the translation was made during the night for fear of a popular demonstration. Dominic, bearing the holy image upon his breast, led the way; at his side walked two Cardinals with their attendants, followed by the Religious in double file. All were barefoot. The picture, once put in place, did not move. The foundation was definitively accomplished.

But no, it was only a beginning! The spiritual work by which the Sister Preacher shares in and completes the apostolate of the Friar Preacher remained to be done. Mary once more had a powerful role, not as a picture fixed on a wall, but as a prototype traced upon the blank page of their hearts by the hand of Dominic. The same may be said of them as of every similar institution of religious men and women throughout the ages, even our own, provided that they are not led astray by certain misleading ideas and that they continue with their providential purpose in mind. Stopping by the sanctuary of these holy souls, the passer-by might perhaps say: "What are they doing there? Let them display their humanitarian works, or at least the new devotions conceived by their imagination." Without contradiction, they esteem every form of good work; yet in their humility and with gratitude, they cease not to cry out, "My lot is among the best."¹⁴ Their task is to raise up, to adorn, to fill with incense and with songs, sometimes joyous at other times plaintive, the temple of true piety, with Mary as the dominating picture, altar, victim, priest, doctor, and the daily object of praise. Thus can they say in all truth: "I live, now not I, but Mary lives in me."

Indeed, the Blessed Virgin lives in them in the diversity and unity of her mysteries. In them lives Mary the Immaculate by that love of virginity which, from their tenderest years, they have possessed, cultivated, fortified, and embellished. In them lives Mary of Nazareth by their diligent and joyous attention to their daily tasks. In them lives Mary, Seat of Wisdom, by their study of the great masters of asceticism and by their eagerness to hear the divine word, both from the lips of a preacher and from the whisperings of the Divine Preacher Whose very silence is a lesson. In them lives Mary of

ity which weaken the principles of faith and destroy true piety. On the contrary, such devotions manifest the true notion which the people had of the supernatural order . . . and the incomparable place of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Saviour, in it.

¹⁴ "The lines are fallen unto me in goodly places: for my inheritance is goodly to me." Psalm xv, 6.

Calvary when, sweet and innocent, they do endless penance for poor sinners and suffer indescribable anguish in their hearts as they identify themselves with our Holy Mother the Church and Her tribulations. In them lives Mary of the Cenacle by their meditation on the Gifts of the Holy Ghost, attracting them by the vehemence of their desires; establishing them in their hearts as an adornment and perfection; bringing them down to the practice of daily living, which can then attain the level of heroism; finally by their solicitude in extending throughout the world heavenly aromas and good works. In a word, they are everywhere a faithful mirror, a living continuation of Mary, of her truth, goodness, and beauty, ever ancient yet ever new.

Now, all you who pass by, simply curious, philosophers, economists, statisticians, and lawyers, who asked yourselves the reason for these holy sanctuaries, now you see the answer. Would that you could comprehend it. "And now, O ye kings, understand."¹⁵ Princes and powers of the world, give to those who live in these sanctuaries, if not temporal favors, at least peace. Those of you who are rich, give them the bread of earth. Priests, give them the heavenly and super-substantial bread of doctrine, bearing in mind that their "godliness is profitable to all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."¹⁶ Here on earth they are as lightning rods against the flashes of God's anger. And in heaven we shall perhaps see with great astonishment and no less joy that the 19th century, about which we have heard so much evil spoken, and the 20th, about which there is still more apprehension, are among the most glorious of the Church because of the silent reparations and the interior life of these predestined souls.

We could show how the Rosary in its turn offers to pious souls a pure and abundant source of genuine piety. It is not only a sword in the hands of its devotees to attack heresies and vice, but it is also a book that teaches the solid piety of Mary. Therein we contemplate in a beautiful sequence the principal and essential part that Mary has in the mysteries of the Incarnation of the Divine Word, the Redemption of men, and the glorification of the elect. There is nothing more enlightening to the mind, nothing more consoling to the heart, indeed nothing more efficacious in transforming lives and in working out the sanctification of men of good will. These benefits are so often explained that it is unnecessary to develop them further here.

All these helps, advantages, and attractions which make Christian

¹⁵ Psalm ii, 10.

¹⁶ 1 Timothy iv, 8.

piety flourish in the most arid lands, and even among the ruins made by revolutions, are your work, O Immaculate Virgin. In deigning to crown the virtues and good works of your children, you will have but crowned your own gifts.

(To be Continued.)