

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

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PART II

MARY, BESTOWER OF THE DOMINICAN HABIT



WHEN DOMINIC OF GUZMAN, canon of Osma, left his country in 1203, at the age of 33, and directed his steps towards France, it was only in deference to the wishes of Diego of Osma, his Bishop. Diego had accepted the mission of going to Dacia, a vast region in the north, and there to ask the hand of a royal princess in marriage for Ferdinand, son of Alphonse, King of Castile. He needed as a companion on this embassy someone whom he could trust. He had chosen Dominic, whose modesty, worth, graceful bearing, and wisdom he held in high esteem. God's thoughts, however, are not the thoughts of men, for in the course of the negotiations, the young princess died. Thus were the human plans destroyed; the divine plan was soon to become evident.

In descending the slopes of the Pyrenees on the side of Languedoc, Dominic discovered the whole country overrun by the Albigensian heresy. Everywhere there were horrible blasphemies against Jesus and Mary; sacrilegious ruins; snares laid for the children of the Church; the groanings of the just, cruelly oppressed for their attachment to the faith. What sorrow for the faithful servant of God! To pray and weep would have been too little; the flame of zeal grew in his heart, and burst forth, making him an apostle. He saw a select group of men gradually gather around him, eager to enjoy his intimacy, to share his labors, and to follow him in combat for God's cause.

What a beautiful sight to see this band of apostles advancing to the conquest of souls. They had no ostentatious cortege; on the contrary, their poverty forced them to beg their way. They often went barefoot and found joy in the humiliations and in the rough treatment they received. They were tireless in preaching the gospel everywhere, in churches, public squares, private homes. Shining as torches, coura-

geous as lions, meek as lambs, they knew how to confound by their sanctity, rather than by their words, the calumnies hurled against the Church of Christ. Would it happen that after a time these men would discontinue their voluntary association, as happened in the case of the noble Crusaders when they returned from the Holy Land? God did not so will it. The monster of error in different guise is a menace to truth in every age. Men of such remarkable virtue, who knew how to combat it with so effective a method, merited to increase in number and to take root in the soil of the church to the extent of founding a new institution: the Friars Preachers.

If this Order was novel in its end, in its name, in its spirit, and in its own type of monastic observance, it was fitting, remarked St. Vincent Ferrer, that it have a new habit.¹ Yet, the humble Dominic had not given it a thought; he continued to travel, hear confessions, and preach, in the habit of a canon regular. It was Mary who intervened to determine this desirable change, and thus give to Dominic's work a definite sign of her approval. None should be astonished at this, for "mothers love to make garments for their children," and they excel in giving these clothes a cut, a form, and a grace, which is pleasing to their maternal heart. Jacob, displaying a mother's love, made "a coat of divers colors" for Joseph, the cherished child of his old age.²

Was not the holy Founder the privileged child of Mary? Dare we maintain that the grandeur of heaven would render the attention to such details unworthy of the august Queen? It was Blessed Reginald who was singled out by Mary to transmit to the entire Order the new habit, the gift of her love.

Reginald of Orleans, celebrated professor of Canon Law at Paris, and afterwards dean of the Chapter of St. Aignan in Orleans, decided to pass through Rome on his way to visit the Holy Land. In Rome he met Dominic and became attached to him. The infant Order provided the answer to his aspirations for the perfect life. He resolved then and there to join the new Order and made profession into the hands of Dominic even before receiving the habit, as was sometimes done at that time.³

Not long afterwards, as has already been said, he was struck

¹ Sermon 1 on St. Dominic.

² Genesis xxxvii, 3.

³ "He promptly bound himself by vow to the profession of his Institute." *Office of Bl. Reginald*. Blessed Jordan of Saxony wrote that it was the same in his case.

down by a violent fever. It made such headway that there was no hope left for his life. Dominic grew sorrowful for this child of benediction, dying almost before he was born. But the Holy Virgin, coming down from heaven with St. Catherine and St. Cecilia, approached the dying friar and anointed his body, as she spoke some mysterious words. At that very moment Blessed Reginald was completely cured!

Is this all? Indeed no, for this was only the beginning. Mary presented to Reginald a whole religious habit, saying: "This is the habit of your Order." Dominic soon learned from Reginald of Mary's visit, and clothed himself with the new habit, such as had been shown to him. Little by little he imposed it on his sons everywhere. After the apparition Reginald became the object of admiration among the brethren and, after his death, was mourned by them as a model of virtue and a power in the apostolate. His memory will last forever in the Order because of the habit and his teachings.

Such is the story given to us, not by later chroniclers more or less suspect of leaning towards legends or of putting too much trust in secondary sources, but by the first historians of the Order. Some of these were the companions and trusted brothers of Dominic or of Reginald; while others were those appointed a few years afterwards to gather the traditions that were still living and certain. Jordan of Saxony, who was received into the Order by Reginald and who later became the immediate successor of Dominic as Master General, reported the story in this manner.⁴ So did Bartholomew of Trent and Bernard Guidonis. Stephen de Salagnac, whose manuscripts are perhaps the oldest, is the most explicit, since he dares give Mary the surname "joyful vestiarian of the Order."

Fra Angelico transmitted the common tradition by means of his brush. On the gradin of an altar at Cortona he represented Mary, clothed in azure and suspended in the air, as she offered to Reginald, piously kneeling, the white scapular joined to a black cappa, whose capuce is doubled with white. Behind Mary are two saints, who undoubtedly are St. Cecilia and St. Catherine, Mary's companions at the healing and anointing of Reginald.

Later St. Catherine of Siena in ecstasy heard the same thing in different words, when the Son of God told her: "Thy father Dominic was a light which I gave to the world by means of Mary, placed in the

⁴ Speaking of Mary's apparition to Reginald, as told by Dominic in chapter, Jordan adds: "I was present" (at the chapter). Mary, he said, gave to Reginald the complete habit, which indicates that Mary's gift was of the ensemble, and not just one part. (*Life of St. Dominic.*)

mystical body of the holy Church as an extirpator of heresies. Why do I say by means of Mary? Because Mary gave him his habit—this office was committed to her by My goodness.”⁵

Indeed, in the reception of this signal favor from the Blessed Virgin, Blessed Reginald was merely St. Dominic’s representative. So true is this, that St. Catherine of Siena, who loved dearly the habit of the Order as the gift of Mary, hardly knew Blessed Reginald. Bartholomew of Ravenna, a Carthusian, made the following deposition in the celebrated process of Venice which inquired into the virtues and sanctity of St. Catherine: “Catherine added that St. Dominic showed her a great multitude of Friars Preachers united with him in beatitude, making known to her their merits and their names. . . . Amongst them she saw one who shone with a special glory, and whom, she said, was called Bro. Reginald. She asked me when he had lived. At first the only one with that name who occurred to me was the companion and confessor of St. Thomas Aquinas.⁶ However, she did not agree that it was this one. Thinking it over later, I believed, and still do, that it was the Blessed Reginald whom St. Dominic received into the Order at Rome and about whom are related in the legend of St. Dominic many wonderful things.”

The mysterious symbolism and harmony seen in the ensemble of this habit received by Reginald make it worthy of the maternal love which designed and bestowed it. It is made of lamb’s wool, since Dominic, like Jesus his Master, has the meekness of a lamb, and he desires that his children be his faithful image. The outer part of the habit, the black cappa, symbolizes humility and the spirit of penance. These virtues were characteristic of the life of St. John the Baptist in the desert, who “was the voice of one crying in the desert: Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”⁷ Like the holy Precursor, the preacher too must prepare the way of the Lord, and these same virtues must shine forth in his life. Thus, he wears the black cappa. The cappa protects the whiteness of the tunic without concealing it entirely. In fact, its blackness sets off in bold relief the brilliant lustre of the tunic and scapular.

Why this whiteness of the tunic and scapular, if not to symbolize the purity which the Order is specially charged by the Immaculate Virgin to practice and preach to the world? Its practice is seen in the

⁵ *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*. Translated by Algar Thorold. Newman Book Shop, Westminster, Md. 1944. P. 298.

⁶ i.e. Brother Reginald, confidant of the Angelic Doctor, to whom St. Thomas dedicated his *Compendium Theologiae*, calling him in the dedication his very dear son.

⁷ Matthew iii, 3.

purity of heart and morals which competent historians tell us was found in the lives of the Saints, Martyrs, and incomparable Virgins of the Order. It is preached to the world in the purity of Sacred Doctrine which the Friar Preacher must defend everywhere without diminution or compromise, fearlessly and forcefully despite prevailing prejudices. If it is necessary to die for Catholic truth, he does not hesitate. The stain of blood is the only blemish allowed upon this immaculate garment. It is even an adornment. Catherine of Siena, who longed for this distinctive mark, called it in her gracious language "the vermilion rose,"⁸ the sign and privilege of the martyr.

When we have meditated upon these things, we are not surprised that the annalists cited above, and others after them, laid aside their pens and knelt down to sing the manifold bounties of Mary towards the Order of Friars Preachers, especially the gift of the habit. "Consider," says one of them, "that this Mother provides her children with a double garment of black and white (Cf. Proverbs xxxi, 21). O, Brother, who hast received the mantle of zeal from so illustrious a donor, reflect carefully, weigh diligently, and impress upon your memory, that even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed as you. Therefore, give praise to the Queen of Heaven whose insignia you wear. The Virgin has taken great care to make your habit, so to speak, with Gedeon's fleece; it is now up to you to decorate it with morals, conduct, and bearing worthy of it."⁹

Another has the following to say: "Truly happy and glorious is this Order of Friars Preachers, which resembles the angelic orders, since like the angels the friar is consecrated to praise, bless, and preach! Blessed is this Order, which the Virgin Mother obtained from her Son to labor for the salvation of the people in these latter days! Happy is this Order, which Mary has enriched with a precious habit as a sign of predilection! Therefore, beloved Brother, guard your royal and virginal habit, so that at all times there may reign in you chastity of the body; in your labors, the light of truth; and in your heart, a sincere purity."¹⁰

⁸ Letter CCCXXXI. T. 2. Tommaseo.

⁹ An anonymous author of the 13 century, (*Tractatus de approbatione O.P.*, vid. Echard, Ecript. ad Ann. MCCXVIII).

¹⁰ Thierry of Apoldia (*Bolland. Tom. 1. Aug.*)

(To be concluded.)