

O WONDERFUL HOPE!

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BOASTING about one's ancestry is never in good taste, particularly in these days when a man's greatness is not judged by his family tree. When the children of St. Dominic, however, contemplate the nobility of their father, they find it impossible to repress the sentiments of pride which fill their hearts. Lacking a witness, this pride in the glory of St. Dominic would be subject to the suspicion of family prejudice. A witness, however, is ready to testify.

The Church, Bride of Christ and Mother of the faithful, extols what St. Dominic's children most admire in their father, and this in a way which outstrips the enthusiasm of even his most devoted child. She does this in the liturgy of his feast, with judgments based not on human values, but divine. The Divine Office, the Church's prayer, contains some antiphons and responses for the Feast of St. Dominic which place in sharp relief the sublimity of this life of love, the infinite love of God for Dominic, and the love of Dominic for God. In so doing the Church really tells, or rather sings, her story of his saintly life.

DIVINE ELECTION

*Summoning the world to the nuptials of the Lamb
The Master sends forth His servant at the hour of the feast,
With promises of untold delights.
To this ineffable banquet He predestines Dominic,
His holy messenger.*

—First Response of Matins

The story of a saint begins not in time or place, but in eternity, in the mind and heart of God. "All things work unto good for those who, according to His purposes are saints through His call. For those whom He has foreknown He has also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:28). Sanctity, then, is nothing more than the fulfillment of the eternal designs of God in a soul, the effect of His inestimable love and predilection. Therefore, a soul's intimate conformity to the Incarnate Word and the faithful

accomplishment of an exalted supernatural mission are sure signs of a glorious and excellent election.

How exalted, then, was the divine election of St. Dominic, the Father of the Friars Preachers! His life was one of perfect conformity to the God-Man. "In his baptismal innocence, shining with the grace of the Holy Ghost, he devoted his soul to fervent love of the King of kings. In early youth he stood arrayed with the full armour of holy discipline. In the very morning of his life he disposed his heart to ascend by steps unto God; he 'went from strength to strength,' always advancing from good to better. He offered his body as a 'living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.' Taught by divine wisdom he consecrated himself entirely to Him. Having once started on the way to holiness he never looked back, but giving up all for Christ, Who for us was stripped of all, he followed Him faithfully, choosing to have his treasure in heaven, rather than on earth."¹

In a way equalled by few of God's saints he was called to share in the very office of the Word made Flesh. The Seraphic Virgin of Sienna writes in her Dialogues these words of the Eternal Father concerning the mission of St. Dominic. "For his immediate and personal object he took the light of science in order to destroy the errors which had arisen in his time, thus taking upon himself the office of My Only-Begotten Son, the Word. Truly he appeared as an apostle in the world, sowing the seed of my Word with truth and light, dissipating darkness and giving light." At first glance this statement seems to be the result of a daughter's exaggerated love for a saintly father, and had it not proceeded from the pen of a saint, it might easily be disregarded. The truth of St. Catherine's statement is clearly seen, however, through a comparison of the mission of Word made Flesh and the vocation of Dominic Guzman.

The Word, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, was sent into the world by the Eternal Father to reveal to men the depth of divine love, to invite men to the eternal nuptials, and to enlighten their minds with knowledge of the secrets of the Godhead. St. Dominic was chosen by the Eternal Father, says one biographer, "at the eleventh hour," to recall to men this same divine love, to proclaim once again the invitation to the eternal nuptials, and to dispel the ignorance which had obscured in men's minds the truths revealed by the Word. The works of Christ were so many lights illuminating the intellects of men with divine truth and warming their hearts with divine love. In an

¹ Prayer of Blessed Jordan in honor of St. Dominic, *Dominican Prayer Book*, Rome, 1934, p. 330.

analogous way the apostolic life of Dominic, rooted in divine science and founded on his intimate union with Christ, was as the sun's rays turning the darkness of heresy into light and re-encindling in hearts, grown cold by sin, an ardent charity. Dominic was the messenger, the champion of Truth; his vocation was to bear witness to the Truth. The words of Christ in the Praetorium of Pilate, "This is why I was born, and this is why I have come into the world, to give testimony to the truth" (John 18:37), accurately describe the mission of St. Dominic, follower of Christ and founder of the Friars Preachers.

*Given to the world for the glory of the world,
His coming was foretold by a wondrous grace of Christ.
Prophecies were the heralds of the rise of this child,
Whose glory no age would dim.*

—Second Response of Matins

The relationship of a mother to her child is one of tenderest intimacy and genuine joy. Yet there is perhaps no period in a mother's life in which this intimacy is more perfectly realized or this joy more intensely experienced than during that time in which she carries in her womb her unborn child. From the moment she feels within her the first stirrings of a new life, her days are ones of happiness and wonderment. Thoughts of this new life occupy her days and nights. What will this child be like? Will it be healthy and well-formed? Is it destined for greatness? What are God's plans for this newly infused soul? So run a mother's thoughts.

Assuredly the mother of St. Dominic filled her mind with similar thoughts of the child within her womb. But the joy which filled her heart, no matter how sublime, was something more than merely natural. Hers was an intensely supernatural joy. Her mind was filled to overflowing, not with vain conjectures about the future, but with a familiar pattern of prayers of thanksgiving. Blessed Jane of Aza *knew* the destiny of her child. She *knew* his mission was "To be a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and glory of his people" (Luke 2:32). God, moved as it were by divine enthusiasm, and unable to keep secret His designs concerning her child, made this chosen mother His confidant by revealing to her his future. Before she had conceived this child of divine election, Blessed Jane dreamed that she carried in her womb a dog which bore in its mouth a flaming torch, and going forth from her womb seemed to inflame the entire world. By this she was made to understand that the child to be born of her would be an eloquent and saintly preacher, who by his zeal for God's glory would set on fire the hearts of men with love for God. In him the Church would find a man

ever ready to defend the sheep of Christ from the attacks of voracious wolves bent on the destruction of souls.²

The sentiments of love and thanksgiving which prompted Mary to utter the sublime words of her Magnificat might well describe the thoughts of this happy mother. God had indeed bestowed upon her a singular grace. Throughout time and eternity "all generations shall call her blessed." Whatever is sung in praise of her son, either by the Church Militant or the choirs of the Church Triumphant, will redound to the glory of this mother and will be our eternal reminder of her pre-eminent virtue.

IN ANSWER TO LOVE'S CALL

The story of a saint is a love story, a divine romance. It tells of an exchange of hearts, a union of wills; it tells of God's love for His creature, and the creature's love for God. The Church, then, having told of the infinite love of God toward Dominic, now sings in her liturgy of Dominic's love for God.

*Skilled in the doctrines of secular learning
Dominic turned to the contemplation of Supreme Truth.*

—Third Antiphon of Matins

During his early boyhood St. Dominic received his education at the knee of his saintly mother, who formed in his soul a true love for God in preparation for his life's mission. At the age of seven he was sent to begin his formal studies of rhetoric and the classics under the direction of his maternal grand-uncle, the archpriest of Gumiel d'Isan. Having learned all that his uncle could teach him, Dominic then went to Palencia, where he entered upon the study of the liberal arts and theology.

Palencia, like many university towns of our own day, was a center of considerable vice and temptation. Dominic, however, already well advanced on the path of perfection, spurned these allurements and devoted himself diligently to prayer and study. With the successful completion of his course in the arts, the young student began the study of theology. Drinking deeply from the fount of Divine Wisdom, the more he learned of God, the more insatiable became his desire to be united to Him. To know and love Eternal Truth was his only ambition. So all consuming was his love for God, nurtured by the study of the Holy Scriptures, that for the love of Christ he even sold his pre-

² cf. *Legenda Petri Ferrandi, Monumenta Ordinis Praedicatorum, Historica*, Rome, 1935, t. XVI, p. 211.

cious books to relieve the poor, and offered himself as a slave to redeem Christian captives languishing in Moorish prisons. Dominic at Palencia, like his master at Nazareth, "advanced in wisdom and age and grace before God and man" (Luke 2:52).

*Through studious application to the Rule of St. Augustine,
He made progress in perfection;
Till at length the canon yields the apostle.*

—Fourth Antiphon of Matins

With such dispositions it is no wonder that Dominic, after receiving Holy Orders on the completion of his theological studies, immediately began a life of complete dedication to God. Longing for perfect union with his Beloved, he joined the Chapter of Canons Regular of Osma, where he lived with strictest fidelity the Rule of St. Augustine. As at Palencia, his learning and piety marked him as a model of virtue, and his brother canons, recognizing his holiness, elected him sub-prior of the community. Seldom leaving the monastery, he spent his days and nights in zealous fulfillment of his choral duties, constant communion with God, and fervent meditation and study of the Scriptures and the Fathers. These years spent in monastic solitude were the final preparations for his active apostolate.

*Doing battle for Christ's name,
With poverty his garment,
Dominic scatters abroad in the world divine seed.*

—Fifth Antiphon of Matins

St. Dominic's participation in a diplomatic mission to Denmark marked the inception of his apostolic labors. Diego, Bishop of Osma, had been entrusted by King Alphonse IX of Castile with the task of arranging a marriage between his son, Prince Ferdinand, and the daughter of Valdemar II. Diego, wishing to have in his company a man of holiness and learning, chose Dominic to accompany him.

The journey to Denmark led through Languedoc, a southern French province and the stronghold of the heretical Albigenses. There the royal envoys saw everywhere the terrible effects this insidious heresy had wrought on Christian faith and morals. Dominic's heart was filled with anguish at the sight of so many souls living in the bondage of sin and error. "From that time on," writes Bernard of Guidonis, "he contemplated the project of spending himself for the salvation of souls and of establishing for that end a preaching Order to be devoted to the christianization of the nations." But unable to free

themselves from the royal commission, Dominic and Diego could only spend a short time preaching to the heretics, and then were compelled to continue their journey.

With the mission accomplished they returned to Spain, only again to be given the royal command to return to Denmark and to escort the betrothed princess to Spain. When they arrived in Denmark, however, they learned that the princess had died. "O the depth of the riches and wisdom of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways" (Rom. 11 :33). A mission which was intended to bring about the earthly nuptials of two creatures, was the occasion for the divine and eternal nuptials of the Kings of kings and countless souls redeemed by His Precious Blood. Now freed from their royal service Dominic and Diego could carry out a long cherished dream.

SERVANT OF CHRIST'S VICAR

They headed for Rome and presented themselves to Pope Innocent III, begging him to grant them the permission to go as missionaries to the Cuman Tartars, a fierce barbaric tribe of the East. The pope was visibly impressed by their zeal. He explained to them, however, that there was a threat to Christendom even more dangerous than the war-like Cumans. The very life of the Church was being undermined from within by the heretics of Languedoc and its neighboring provinces. The services of Dominic and Diego would be much more beneficial to the Church in these regions than in the East. Moreover, if they were yearning for the crown of martyrdom, the opportunities were equally as numerous among the Albigenses as among the Cumans. These words of the pope were the expression of the will of God for Dominic and Diego. Missionaries they would be, not to the Cumans, but to the Albigenses. They were to join the Cistercians already laboring in Languedoc and bring this land back to the fold of Christ.

With joyful heart Dominic returned to Southern France. His keen mind enlightened by God immediately perceived the root causes for the success of this pernicious doctrine. The leaders, who called themselves "The Perfect," had gained a hold on the people by replacing true Christian asceticism with vengeful maceration of the body, which they taught was to be despised as intrinsically evil. Thus they presented a facile solution to the problem which has always confronted mankind: "Whence evil, and how deal with it?" The "perfect" might be sure of salvation through the severe renunciation of all sensible pleasures, and especially marriage, while the common folk could rest assured that, although living in the throes of the evil state they

believed marriage to be, they might nevertheless be forgiven all their transgressions through the deathbed rite of the sect, called the Consolamentum. If this province and, ultimately, all of Western Europe was to be saved for Christ, this perversion of the true order of things had to be righted.

Remembering the words of Christ, "The truth shall make you free," Dominic made his immediate object the refutation of those doctrines which had so long kept souls slaves of sin. His long years spent in intensive prayer and study at Palencia and Osma fitted him well for the task. He, therefore, accepted the challenge of public theological disputations with the heretics, too long victorious over the Catholic cause. The Faith found in Dominic an invincible champion. He triumphed again and again, destroying the sophistic arguments of the heretics with his profound and convincing theological reasoning. But an even more powerful argument was his own life of evangelical perfection. In imitation of the Apostles he preached everywhere the Word of God, taking with him "neither staff nor wallet, nor bread nor money" (Luke 9:4). Everything about him spoke of holiness. The heretics saw in his every word and deed the beauty and truth of Christ.

Nor were these labors sufficient to satisfy his longing for souls. He who spent his days in apostolic work, spent his nights in prayer and severe mortification of his own body. He offered himself as a victim to divine justice, taking upon himself the enormity of the heretic's sins. With tears and groans he begged God to touch the hearts of these unfortunate people with the light of His grace. The "Sitio" of the dying Christ urged him unremittingly to slake his Crucified Lord's thirst for man's love.

A man of such heroic sanctity could not help but attract to himself a band of noble souls ready to sacrifice all for the love of Christ. Dominic, who found himself alone in combatting the heretics at the death of Diego and the return of the Cistercians to their monasteries, soon found himself the leader of sixteen zealous men. He trained this first group for the apostolate with the greatest diligence. He gave them the means he found most successful in opposing heresy, the life of evangelical perfection, monastic observances and the "assiduous study of sacred truth."³ Souls long lost in the abyss of sin were led back by their preaching to the bosom of the Church. The land which once lay prostrate beneath the forces of error, was now becoming gradually a garden of Christian virtue.

The work of the Saint among the Albigenses had been noted with

³ *Constitutiones S.O.P.*, I, 1, n. 4

great enthusiasm by Innocent III and his successor Honorius III. In Dominic and his followers they saw the realization of the papacy's fondest hopes. Where all previous efforts had failed, Dominic succeeded; where the swords of the Crusaders against the Albigenses were powerless in overcoming the doctrinal obstinacy of the heretics, the spiritual swords of Dominic conquered. On December 22, 1216 Honorius solemnly confirmed the canonical approval given to Dominic and his first sons the previous year by Innocent. In the bull addressed to Dominic the pope wrote, "Considering that the brethren of your Order are to be champions of the faith and the true lights of the world, we confirm your Order and take it under our government."⁴ With this approval the Order of Preachers was born. The cherished dream of Dominic had been accomplished.

A man of less love might have gone no further. But for Dominic the land of Languedoc was too restricted a field for his zeal. God's love had to be preached wherever souls were perishing. Consequently, after much prayer he determined to disperse his sons over the face of Europe. "For he knew," writes Blessed Humbert, "that seed scattered becomes fruitful, that heaped together it corrupts." Dividing them into small groups he sent them to Paris and Spain, while he and a companion journeyed to the Eternal City, to establish there the seat of the Order's government. The prophetic vision seen many years before by Blessed Jane was being realized. The fire of Dominic's love for God was illumining the world.

*Fresh life to a child restored
Puts to flight a mother's grief.*

—Fifth Response of Matins

The measure of a man's love for God is his love for his neighbor. The sign of a man's sanctity is his genuine compassion at the sight of his neighbor's suffering. Who can call himself a follower of Christ who does not possess this attribute of Him Who is Divine Compassion?

That there existed in Dominic's heart a genuine compassion for souls laboring under the yoke of sin is evident. Yet his charity, primarily concerned with men's eternal salvation, also extended to their temporal welfare. Nor was this an inefficacious interest, a mere well-wishing. God confirmed before men the greatness of his servant by bestowing upon him the grace of miracles. Dominic was not only the physician of souls, but also of bodies.

⁴ cf. Mandonnet, O.P., *St. Dominic and His Work*, translated by Sr. Mary Benedicta Larkin, O.P., B. Herder Co., 1944, p. 39.

The Church sings of several miracles in the Office for his Feast. There is one, however, which seems to glorify Dominic in an especially striking manner, both because of its evident supernatural character, and because of its likeness to one of Christ's most marvelous works. The miracle happened in this way. Returning one day from preaching at the Church of San Marco, Dominic found waiting for him at his convent of San Sisto a woman carrying in her arms the body of her dead child. She had been present at Dominic's sermon, and when she returned to her home she found that death had snatched away her treasure. Inspired by God she had gathered in her arms the lifeless body and quickly made her way to the Friars' convent. There, upon meeting Dominic she threw herself at his feet, begging him to restore her child to life. The grief of this mother deeply moved him. Raising his eyes to heaven he prayed, and then making the sign of the cross over the infant he restored it safe and well to its mother. Her joy was immense and she ceased not in proclaiming Dominic's fame throughout the city. The cry heard once in the village of Naim was re-echoed in Rome's narrow streets, "God has visited His people" (Luke 7:16).

A FATHER'S PROMISE

Truly the children of St. Dominic have reason to be proud of their father. As Blessed Jordan wrote shortly after Dominic's death,

"Who could ever be equal to imitating this man's virtue? We can admire it, and also in light of his example appreciate the sluggishness of our time. To be able to do as he did, however, does not belong to human virtue. It is a singular grace, unless perhaps the merciful and good God should deign to choose another for such consummate sanctity. Yet who would be fit for this?"⁵

God has looked upon every member of the Dominican family with a love of predilection. He has given to each Dominican the same exalted mission He gave to their father. The children of St. Dominic have been called by God to defend truth, to spend themselves for souls and to follow their father's way to complete conformity to Christ. The Church which found Dominic its most effective weapon against the heresies of the thirteenth century now looks to his sons and daughters to overcome the heresies of the twentieth century. To be a true Dominican is to be another Dominic. But who can reach such heights of sanctity?

⁵ cf. *Libellus Jordani de Saxonia, Monumenta Ordinis Praedicatorum Historica, op. cit., p. 76.*

The Church in the Office of St. Dominic shows the way. She reminds the Dominican family of their father's promise to be more helpful to his children after death than he was in life. She places on their lips this prayer to her Spouse, begging Him to hear the father's prayers for his children.

*O good Jesus, by the intercession of Dominic
Deign to make us pleasing to Thee.
Through him Thou hast restored the dead to life;
Through him also deliver us from the punishments we deserve.*

—Eighth Response of Matins

She tells them their father will never cease his prayers for them, nor will his Lord fail to hear them. The love of a father is measured by his efforts in bringing the souls of his children to eternal glory. What father is more loving or more desirous of seeing his sons and daughters enter into the joys of heaven than the father of the Friars Preachers?

*O Wonderful Hope, which thou gavest to those
Who wept for thee at the hour of thy death,
Promising after thy departure to be helpful to thy brethren!
Fulfill, O father, what thou hast said,
And help us by thy prayers!
O thou who didst shine illustrious by so many miracles,
Wrought on the bodies of the sick,
Bring us the help of Christ to heal our sick souls.*

—Ninth Response of Matins

THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

. . . from the pen of St. Thomas . . .

"Since human reason cannot handle all the singular and contingent possibilities, it happens that 'thoughts of mortal man are fearful, and our counsels uncertain' (Wisd. 9:14). Therefore, man needs to be directed by God in the inquisition of counsel, for He comprehends everything. This is the work of the Gift of Counsel, through which a man is directed as if receiving counsel from God Himself."

ST. THOMAS, *Summa*, II IIae, 52, 1, ad 1.

. . . from the life of St. Dominic . . .

"He had a wonderful way of scattering the brethren here and there; and so confidently did he handle matters which, in human estimation, seemed doubtful, that it appeared that he knew the final outcome. That these things were done under the impetus of the Spirit of God was actually proved by what happened later."

LEGENDA PETRI FERRANDI on the life of St. Dominic