

THE HOLINESS OF ST. DOMINIC

Part Three

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IGNIFICANT and moving details of St. Dominic's life are recorded in the translations presented below, the third and last of a series appearing in *Dominicana*. The three last witnesses to appear before the Pope's commission at Bologna add appreciably to the evidence of Dominic's sanctity. Brother Stephen stresses the tremendous spiritual benefits which people received through the merits and intercession of Dominic. Brother Paul recounts a personal miracle worked through prayer to the holy founder. Brother Frugerius tells of Dominic's tenacity in clinging to the strictest practice of evangelical poverty. All three attest the Master's great devotion at Mass and his love for the liturgy.

The Testimony of Brother Stephen

Brother Stephen, although a Spaniard, probably saw Dominic for the first time during the summer of 1218 in Rome. In 1219 he met Dominic in Bologna and entered the Order in the unique manner described in his deposition. He succeeded Brother Bonaventure as provincial of the Lombardy province in 1224, and held this position until 1238. In that year the general chapter sent him and another delegate to Rome to persuade Raymond of Pennafort to accept the post of Master General of the Order. Stephen was later made Archbishop of Oristano in Sardinia.¹

On the thirteenth of August, Brother Stephen, Provincial Prior of the Order of Preachers in the Lombardy province, stated under oath that he had known Master Dominic, the initiator, founder and first Master of the Order of Friars Preachers, for more than fifteen years. But before he ever saw Dominic or knew him personally, he had heard many good things said of him by very important and trustworthy men. When Dominic was either Prior or Subprior of the church at Ozma (where he was a canon),

he was studying Sacred Scripture at Palencia. At that time a terrible famine began to waste the region so that many of the poor were dying of hunger. Brother Dominic, moved by compassion and mercy, sold his books (which he himself had annotated) and other possessions, gave the money to the poor and said, "I will not study on dead skins when men are dying of hunger."² Following his example, some very influential men acted similarly and then began to preach with him. The witness understood that shortly afterwards Brother Dominic accompanied the Bishop of Ozma to preach, especially against the heretics, throughout the countryside around Toulouse. It was there that he conceived and organized the Order of Friars Preachers.

The witness was studying at Bologna when Master Dominic arrived there and preached to the students and other sincere men. He confessed his sins to him and it seemed that Dominic really loved him. Then one night when the witness and his companions were about to eat supper at their lodgings, Dominic sent two of the brethren to him. "Brother Dominic says you must come to him immediately," they said. "After I have eaten, I shall go to him," the witness answered. But they said, "No, you must come right now." So he got up, left everything and went to him.

He found Dominic and many of the brethren at the church of St. Nicholas. Brother Dominic said to the brethren, "Show him how to make the *venia*."³ After making the *venia*, he placed himself in Dominic's hands. Before he left, Dominic clothed him in the habit of the Friars Preachers, saying to him, "I want to give you the armor you must use to fight the devil all your life." At the time and afterwards the witness greatly wondered concerning this intuition of Brother Dominic. He had called and clothed the witness with the habit of the Friars Preachers before the latter had ever said anything about entering the religious life. But he believed that Dominic must have acted from divine inspiration or revelation.

The witness stated that both the brethren and others found Brother Dominic to be the best possible comforter when they were troubled with temptations. He knew this fact, because when he first entered religion and was a novice, he had many different temptations. But he was completely put at ease by the preaching and counselling of Dominic. Many other novices told him that they had the same experience with Dominic.

After entering religion, the witness lived with Brother Dominic in the monastery of St. Nicholas for nearly a year, and was

very close to him. During the entire time that he lived with Dominic, the witness never heard an evil, malicious or idle word from his mouth. Dominic carefully prepared himself and was unremitting in his preaching; his words were so moving that most of the time he stirred himself and his hearers to tears. The witness never heard a man whose words so moved the brethren to compunction and tears. And it was his custom to speak always either of God or with God, whether he was in or outside the house, or on a journey. He strongly urged the brethren to act similarly and had the practice inserted in his Constitutions. The witness knew all this because he lived with him, was present, and so heard and saw it.

Dominic was more persevering and devout in his prayer than any man the witness has ever seen. He saw that after the brethren had finished Compline and their common prayers, Brother Dominic would then send them to the dormitory and usually remain himself in church to pray. During the night, his prayer affected him so strongly that he would burst into groans and cries. Brothers sleeping nearby were awakened and some were moved to tears. Most of the time he would stay up to pray until Matins. He nevertheless remained for the Office, and would walk around each side of the choir, exhorting and encouraging them to sing devoutly and on key. Thus he dedicated the night to prayer, so that the witness never remembers having seen him sleeping in a bed, although a regular place was prepared for him. There was simply a wooden frame covered with a blanket, but without any mattress or padding. Although he often searched carefully, the witness could never find him in bed during all the time he lived with him in that monastery.

The witness very frequently saw him celebrate Mass, and always noticed that his eyes and cheeks were wet with tears during the Canon. It was quite easy for those present to perceive his devotion from his great fervor during Mass and the way he said the *Pater Noster*. As stated above, the witness never remembers having seen him say Mass with dry eyes. He related all these facts, having seen and heard them.

The witness never saw any man who was so zealous to strengthen the Order, preserve the Rule and comfort the brethren. And he does not really think Dominic will ever have a comparable successor in these qualities. Brother Dominic also loved poverty. The witness very often heard him preach this virtue and exhort the brethren to practice it. When anyone offered property

to Dominic or the community, he would not accept it nor allow the brethren to do so. He also wanted them to have cheap and small houses. He himself had the most ragged habit and wore poor clothing. Asked how he knew this, the witness answered that he had quite often seen him wearing a short and extremely tattered scapular. And he did not try to hide it with his cloak, even when important people were around.

At St. Nicholas, the cells of the brethren were quite plain and small. Therefore, Brother Rudolph, the procurator, began to heighten some of them the length of an arm (Brother Dominic was away at the time). When Dominic returned and saw the higher cells, he began to weep; he rebuked Rudolph and the other brethren many times, saying to them: "So soon you want to abandon poverty and build great palaces!" Hence, he ordered them to stop the work; it remained unfinished while he lived. As he himself loved poverty, so he desired to see it loved by his brethren. Therefore, he commanded them to wear poor clothing and never carry money while traveling, but to live by begging all the time. He then had this written in his legislation.

The witness also stated that Dominic was sparing in food and drink. Asked how he knew this, he said that he often noticed Dominic in the refectory. When the brethren were given double portions or two courses, he was content with one. Because he was worn out from his excessive vigils, Dominic nearly always fell asleep at the table while the other brethren were eating. Since he ate and drank so little, he was practically forced to fall asleep at mealtime.

The witness firmly believed that Brother Dominic was a virgin in mind and body to the end of his life. Asked why he believed this, he replied that he used to hear Dominic's confession, and a mortal sin could never be found on his conscience. Dominic was also patient and joyful in trials. The witness knew this because he observed that in all the necessities, the needs for food and clothing which Brother Dominic and the brethren suffered at that time, Dominic was always joyful and happy.

The witness also was convinced that the graces given to the Friars Preachers in Lombardy and the other provinces have been received and increased through the prayers and merits of Brother Dominic. He believed this because from the time that Brother John of Vicenza began to preach the revelation he had divinely received concerning Brother Dominic, and make known to the people the public and private life—the sanctity—of Dominic, and

from the time that the witness himself, together with some of the brethren, began to undertake the translation of Dominic's body, greater graces were evident and were clearly being poured out, both on the brethren who were preaching his life and sanctity, and on the people who heard them. The evidence of these graces was to be seen in the effect in the cities of Lombardy, where a great number of heretics was burned. Also, more than a hundred thousand people, who did not know whether they should follow the Roman Church or the heretics, were really and sincerely converted to the Catholic Faith through the preaching of the Friars Preachers. The witness knew this to be true, because the converts now abhor and hunt out the heretics they formerly defended.

Also, nearly all the cities of Lombardy and the Marches have taken their affairs and laws that needed ordering and changing and handed them all over to the discretion of the brethren. They could add or subtract, change or delete, according to their judgment. They were also able to stop wars, make peace and settle disputes among the people; goods obtained through usury and fraud were returned, confessions were heard and many other benefits achieved, which it would take a long time to relate.

The witness stated that it was he who decided on the day and manner of removal of Master Dominic's body. He was also present at the translation itself, along with many of the brethren, the Podesta of Bologna, many important citizens of the city and many from other cities. In the presence of all these, the witness and the other brethren began to dig with iron stakes and pikes. They found the ground hard and the tomb sealed with a very strong and durable cement. Raising the stone which covered the top of the tomb, the brethren and all the bystanders inhaled a fragrant perfume. The witness asserted that he could not describe it, for it did not seem to have the smell of any earthly thing. Because of the fragrance, the brethren and all those standing there prostrated themselves on the floor in tears, praising and blessing the Lord for having shown so wonderfully that his saint should be glorified.

They then found the wooden casket which held Brother Dominic's body; it was strongly built and sealed with iron nails. They opened it also, and then a fragrance more powerful than the first one came out. The Master of the Order and many of the brethren, with reverence and devotion, took the bones from the old casket and put them in a new one. Then the witness, together

with Master Jordan and the other brethren, in the presence of the Lord Bishop of Ravenna, many other bishops and clerics, the Podesta and many other citizens of Bologna, took this new coffin and placed it in the marble tomb where it now lies. The witness also stated that for many days afterwards he could smell the vestiges of the first fragrance both on his own hands and on those of the others who had handled Brother Dominic's relics. He knew all these facts because he was there and witnessed them himself, touched these things with his own hands and many times afterwards clearly sensed the fragrance on his hands and those of the other brethren, who had touched and handled the relics.

The Testimony of Brother Paul of Venice

Brothers Paul and Frugerio (whose testimony follows Paul's) entered the Order at Bologna during Lent of 1219. The brethren were then living in a poor and small monastery at the church of St. Mary of Mascarella. Brother Reginald was the superior who received them there. Brother Paul's testimony adds nothing substantially new to what the previous witnesses have already stated, and Brother Frugerio's deposition is rather brief. Both men, however, include personal touches that heighten the interest of their accounts.⁴

On the sixteenth of August, Brother Paul of Venice, a priest of the Order of Preachers, stated under oath that he had entered the Order at Bologna more than fourteen years ago, making his profession in the hands of Master Reginald. He received the habit on the Sunday the Gospel of the marriage feast at Cana is sung. Master Dominic arrived in Bologna the following summer. From the very time of Dominic's arrival in the city the witness was very close to him. He lived with Dominic for a long time when the latter stayed at the monastery in Bologna. Then he traveled with Dominic for nearly two years throughout almost the whole of the march of Trivisano—eating, drinking, traveling and saying the Office with him, night and day.

The witness never remembers having heard Dominic speak any detraction or flattery, nor any idle or malicious word. On the contrary, when they were traveling, he noticed that Dominic either prayed or preached, or devoted himself to mental prayer and meditation on God. Asked how he knew this, he answered that Master Dominic used to say to the witness himself and to

the others who were with him, "Go on ahead and let us meditate on Our Savior." The witness then used to hear him groaning and sighing. Wherever the Master was, he always spoke either with God or of God, strongly urged his brethren to do this and had the practice written into the legislation of the Friars Preachers. Asked the source of this information, the witness replied that he had lived with Dominic for a long time and so saw and heard these things. He never saw Dominic angry, upset or troubled, even when tired out by traveling; Dominic never gave way to passion, but was always calm, joyful in tribulations and patient in adversities.

Dominic himself loved poverty, desired it for his Order and urged the brethren to practice it. When he was at Bologna, certain Bolognese wanted to give some property to the Order, but he would not accept it. He also forbade the brethren to receive it. Dominic even had the Constitutions prohibit the acceptance of property by the Order. The Master himself wore an extremely ragged habit, and when he got outside the villages and towns he used to take off his shoes and travel barefoot. The witness very often saw this when he traveled with him.

He sometimes saw the blessed Brother Dominic himself going from door to door, begging alms and receiving a piece of bread like any pauper. Once when Dominic was begging at Dugliolo, some man gave him a whole loaf of bread; Father Dominic received it on his knees, in great humility and devotion. The witness often heard Dominic express his desire to the brethren—that they live by begging.

When they traveled together, the witness never saw him sleep in a bed, although he sometimes slept on some straw. Once after a long journey the blessed Dominic, the witness and another companion stayed with the people of Porto Legnago. After Father Dominic had secured a place for his companions to sleep, he himself went to the church and spent the night in prayer. But he was nevertheless present with his companions and the clerics of the church for Matins. While journeying, the blessed Dominic himself fasted, but he used to make his traveling companions eat, because of the fatigue of the trip.

Although the witness lived with him at the church of St. Nicholas in Bologna, as he already stated, he never remembers having seen that Dominic had a regular place to sleep at night. Sometimes he slept on the floor, sometimes on a wooden bench or board, but most of the time he remained all night in the church

praying. And the witness knew that he wept much in his prayer, for he saw Dominic do this many times. Sometimes the witness had to call him from his prayer, and then he saw that Dominic's face was covered with tears. Even while traveling, he was devout and constant in his prayer. If he could find a suitable church, he wanted to celebrate a High Mass every day.

He greatly desired the salvation of all souls, both of the faithful and of infidels. Frequently he said to the witness: "After we have organized and provided for our Order, let us go to the Cumans, preach the faith of Christ to them and win them for the Lord."

He rigidly and perfectly observed the Rule himself, exhorted and commanded the brethren to do likewise and strictly punished offenders. Yet he reproved them with such patience and kindness that no one was ever upset or rebellious because of the correction.

He was present with the community for meals and the Office. And although he very often devoted the entire night to praying in church, he was always present with the brethren for Matins; he would then walk around on each side of the choir, exhorting the brethren by his words and example to sing well and attentively, and to recite the Psalms devoutly. He himself was so faithfully intent when he prayed, that he was never distracted by any tumult or noise.

He was the best possible comforter of the brethren and of anyone in trouble or temptation. The witness knew this both because he experienced it himself and also heard the same thing from others. Brother Dominic was patient and compassionate, sober, pious, humble, kind and chaste. The witness heard, and himself firmly believed, that Dominic was always a virgin. Dominic possessed these and other virtues to such a degree that the witness did not think any man of Dominic's time was better than he, nor has he ever met Dominic's equal. And whenever Dominic traveled, he always preached to those who joined his party, exhorting them to practice penance.

The witness was present when it was necessary to open the grave where Master Dominic's body was originally buried when he died, and to remove it to its present tomb. Many bishops and clerics, the Podesta and many important citizens of Bologna were also there. When they began to dig, they found the ground extremely hard, the sides of the tomb very strong and the cement quite tough and durable; they could just barely break it with mallets and iron stakes. Then they had a difficult job lifting the

stone which had been placed on top of the tomb. But when this stone was raised from the sides, thus opening the tomb, a powerful but sweet and delightful fragrance came out of the grave, so that it filled the entire church. When the witness and the bystanders sensed this, they prostrated themselves on the floor and wept, giving thanks to the Lord for the fragrance they smelled. The witness had never before experienced such an odor in any apothecary's shop, cluster of flowers, nor in any other place. Neither the witness nor the bystanders (as they admitted to him) could identify the fragrance; it did not seem like any earthly smell at all. The witness knew all this for he was present at the opening, saw these things and sensed the fragrance, as he has already stated.

He also said that he came from Venice to Bologna the previous Sunday to give his testimony. But on Sunday evening a terrible pain, which used to afflict him for many days, seized him in his back and kidneys. Since he was afraid he would be unable to present his testimony, he went to the tomb of the blessed Dominic and most ardently sought help and relief. He was completely cured almost immediately.

The Testimony of Brother Frugerio of Penne

On the fifteenth of August, Brother Frugerio of Penne, of the Order of Preachers, stated under oath that he had entered the Order fourteen years ago last Lent. He made his profession in the hands of Master Reginald, from whom he also received the habit. This occurred in the church of Mascarella, where the Order of Preachers was at first located in Bologna. During the summer of that year, when the Order was at St. Nicholas, Brother Dominic, the founder and first Master of the Order, arrived in Bologna.⁵ With Master Reginald's permission, the witness had gone to visit his family and only returned to Bologna on the first of September. There, at the church of St. Nicholas, he met Dominic, the Master of the Order of Preachers.

The witness then lived with him for more than four months in the monasteries at Bologna, Florence and Rome. He also traveled with Dominic to Rome and other cities; he said the Office with him and they ate and spoke together; he used to hear Dominic's confession; he prayed and talked with him of God, night and day. Dominic's devotion to prayer was so constant, both in

the monastery and while traveling, that the witness was never able to find him sleeping in a bed, neither in the house nor on the road, although sometimes one was prepared for him. Occasionally when he was worn out by his excessive vigils, he would sleep for a while, resting on his arms or lying on the floor or on some boards. Asked how he knew this, the witness answered that he saw it.

He saw Dominic say Mass many times, both in the monastery and on journeys, and there was not a single time when Dominic did not shed many tears. The witness knew all this because he saw it. And when Dominic spent the night in prayer, his petitions were accompanied with groans and tears. He also wept when he preached to the brethren. Oftentimes they would also be moved to tears from his example.

The witness never heard him speak an idle or malicious word, nor any flattery or detraction; rather, he always spoke of God. Whenever someone joined him on the road, Dominic would preach to him of God. He strongly encouraged the brethren to do this also, and had the practice inserted in the legislation of the Friars Preachers. He had a burning zeal for the salvation of souls, not only of Christians but also of Saracens and other infidels, and exhorted the brethren to be like-minded. This love for souls was so great that he planned to go to the pagans and, if necessary, die for the faith, once his brethren were established. Asked how he knew this, the witness answered that he heard Dominic speaking of it and making his plans.

He was so strict with himself that when he was traveling he would observe the fasts of the Order perfectly, eating nothing before the prescribed hour, but he would make his companions eat the ordinary two meals.

Dominic used to wear the same habit, summer and winter. He loved poverty and urged the brethren to practice it. Asked how he knew this, the witness replied that he used to see Dominic wearing a ragged habit. He also heard Dominic exhorting his brethren to embrace and love poverty. If he found any brother wearing unbecoming clothes (either because of their value or shape), he immediately corrected him and set him right. He loved poverty so much that he did not want the brethren to accept any property, but to live by begging. He then had this point written in the Order's legislation. He also wanted them to have poor houses and plain furniture for studying, for they should thus express their poverty in everything.

Brother Dominic strictly and perfectly observed the Rule himself and desired that it be kept by the brethren also. But when he sometimes found brothers violating the Rule, he would punish them with the greatest meekness, speaking kindly to them. And no one ever rebelled, although the penance would be most severe. Asked the source of his information, the witness replied that he had lived with Dominic for a long time and so saw and heard these things. He also heard Dominic's confession, and from this experience firmly believed that the latter had never committed any mortal sin. Dominic was humble and kind, patient in tribulations and joyful in adversities; he was pious and compassionate, a consoler of both the brethren and outsiders. Dominic was so resplendent with all the virtues, that from those things which the witness saw and recognized in him, he firmly believed that he had never seen or known anyone like him.

Aldrevando, the son of Theobaldo, a notary by the imperial authority, at the command of the lords Master Tancred, Archdeacon of Bologna, Thomas, Prior of Reno and Brother Palmerio of Campagnola, the delegated commissioners of the Lord Pope, has heard these witnesses, written down their testimony and drawn it up in the official form. Let us give thanks to God always.

Thus ends the testimony received concerning the public and private life, the death and miracles of our blessed father, Dominic.⁶

Footnotes

¹ Altaner, pp. 32-3; cf. also Taurisano, pp. 24-5 and Vicaire, p. 230.

² The play on words is derived from the fact that Dominic's books were written on parchment, which was made of animal skins.

³ A Dominican makes the *venia* (the word means "pardon") by prostrating himself on the floor. It is an act indicating interior contrition and expressing the desire for forgiveness.

⁴ Altaner, pp. 34-5; cf. also Taurisano, pp. 28ff. and Vicaire, pp. 236ff.

⁵ For the explanation of a slight textual difficulty, one may consult Altaner, p. 35.

⁶ This completes the testimony taken at Bologna. The hearing of witnesses continued at Toulouse, another center of Dominic's activity.

(Note: The reader is referred to the two previous issues of *Dominicana* for the complete bibliography.)