

## SAINT DOMINIC DESIROUS OF MARTYRDOM

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"Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for a friend." These are the words in which Christ formulated the supreme test of love. In view of this we cease to wonder that the Christ-like Dominic was ever eager thus to prove his loyal devotion. The occasion on which there was born in his heart this earnest longing was without doubt his journey through southern France, as companion to the Bishop of Osma. Heresy had once more broken out in the Church and threatened to undo in a lifetime the work of a thousand years. It seemed to Dominic that the wrath of God was being visited on his people. Then it was that he sought to appease the offended Deity by following the Master to Calvary.

Meanwhile, however, no time was to be lost. The idea which suggested itself to Dominic was indeed novel, and must have presented difficulties as obstinate as the evil it would uproot. But "diseases desperate grown, by desperate appliance are relieved." Events transpired rapidly in those pregnant times; and as day succeeded day the plan so hastily formed, seemed of itself to become better adapted to the pressing need of the Church. After all it was only a broader use of the means divinely instituted. "Go and teach," said Christ to the twelve awaiting their commission. Then if ever, the Church stood in need of apostles; men who knew not Jew or Gentile, but only the price paid for their souls. As the figure on the Cross would fain embrace mankind, so too did Dominic's heart go out at this time to the world, and especially to its little ones steeped in ignorance or sin.

The nature of the work he saw before him seemed twofold and contradictory. A sweet and encouraging, yet irresistible voice within, had bade him call together followers, infuse into them his own spirit of "all for souls," and then disperse them after the apostolic manner; on the other hand, the vision and hope of death at the hands and for the sake of the Cuman Tartars, was not to be thrust from his mind. Calmly and cheerfully however, did he set out on his mission. That memorable incident culled from his early experiences in which he hearkened not to the warnings of a snare set for him, reveals to us a truly simple and edifying faith and trust in God. Not rashly, yet without fear did he ever carry on his Father's business. Here, too,

we see how constant and persevering must have been that wish for martyrdom, and how mature deliberation had failed to shake his purpose. "What would you have done," asked his enemies, had you fallen into our hands?" "I would have prayed you," deliberately came the response, "not to take my life at a single blow, but little by little, cutting off each member of my body one by one; and when you had done that, you should have plucked out my eyes, and then have left me so to prolong my torments, and gain me a richer crown."

Dominic's one consuming desire was for souls. When opposition threatened to interfere with his design of establishing the Preaching Friars, the thought that his own life might yet aid in reconciling stricken humanity to God soothed and comforted his troubled soul. Nor did this source of consolation become arid with Dominic, set to guide the destinies of a youthful and struggling Order; his words and actions of later days bear the unmistakable mark of its influence. ". . . And it was agreed between us," writes William de Montferrat, one of the Saint's young disciples, "that after he (Dominic) had established the future discipline of his brethren, we should go together to convert, first the pagans of Persia or of Greece, and then those who live in the southern countries."

Ever true to his office of leader, Dominic asked nothing of others he himself would not do. Perhaps the first actual step in the direction of the infidel was made when, before dispersing his sixteen followers, Dominic called them together for the election of a successor to the master generalship, in case of his own death or removal. The sight of spiritually devastated France had left an indelible impression on his mind. Christian blood must fructify the seed about to be sown; and now at last, the martyr's crown sowed to lie within his own reach.

But Dominic was not called to martyrdom. A final attempt to rid himself of the reins of government, that he might be free for the work nearest his heart, was, like the others, doomed to failure; his resignation tendered at the first general chapter of the Order, was rejected without a dissenting voice. No, Divine Providence had decreed otherwise; God had raised him up not to be a martyr, but a father of martyrs. It was for the want of a Dominic to guide that men had been lost in the darkness of heresy. Now he must live and point the way for others to follow; he must live and beget spiritual children, and fashion their

hopes and desires after his own; then, with the parental smile of love on his face, he must stand aside and sacrifice in their favor his hope of martyrdom, the prayer of a lifetime.

But if St. Dominic was never to attain his desire in person, his sons lost no time in pursuing the ideal he had set before them. The address of a letter from Gregory IX, who ascended the chair of Saint Peter just six years after our holy Father's death, bears witness to this fact: "Gregory, bishop, servant of the servants of God. To our beloved sons, the Friars Preachers scattered among the Russians, Greeks, Persians, Tartars, Indians and Ethiopians." How those intrepid apostles must have swelled that white-robed martyr's chorus! In these first-fruits alone, Dominic's dream was more than realized. But the spirit he had breathed into them is the very life of the Order he has founded; for the Dominican is foremost an apostle, and he has ever been true to his calling. Indeed, Dominic's fondest expectations could not have been such as the world has since seen fulfilled.

China, which is today the object of such great missionary zeal, has long been the scene of Dominican activity. Before the dawn of the fourteenth century the white habit had reached its very borderland. But God had destined those of a later day to carry His tidings of joy to the Celestial Empire in a special manner. The pioneer of modern times was Father Gaspard of the Cross, O. P., who entered that country in 1555. Though his labors were of short duration his action was such as inspired emulation; and soon other apostles were at home amid the heathen. Here as elsewhere, persecution was the Church's lot; here, too, the blood of martyrs fructified the Gospel seed. This page from Dominican annals reads like an excerpt from Dominic's day; it breathes the same apostolic spirit, and realizes more fully, if possible, the life dream of that first Friar Preacher. Bl. Francis Capillas, the protomartyr of China, was taken from Dominican ranks; so, too, was Fr. Lopez, the first native priest and bishop. In these and many others of like caliber, the active life of the Order has been personified even to our own day. These are they who, with countless others of different garb, have labored and prayed and shed their blood that China might be converted to God. They heard and understood the message of Calvary: that Christ's merits are sufficient for all, but need to be applied. How well St. Dominic knew this when he scattered

his little community, as yet scarcely formed! "The seed will fructify if it is sown." Well must it have been scattered by these zealous laborers, for it now bears fruit a hundredfold!

History tells us the price of each new conquest among the heathen; the labor, privations and sufferings it entails; and not infrequently the sacrifice of life itself from an ungrateful people. But it is only thus that the world shall ever be brought to acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ. Eternal happiness for even one immortal soul cannot be too dearly purchased. It was this conviction that gave St. Dominic to the world. To enlighten those that sit in darkness was the inspiring motive of his life. It first led him to offer to God that noble and generous prayer for martyrdom which never left his heart, and later found expression in the Order of Friars Preachers. Dominic's apostolic zeal is the heritage of his children; and it has ever led them to the most neglected ones of Christ. That dream of seven hundred years ago has had far reaching effects. It was to diffuse the light of the Gospel among the heretics and pagans of his day that St. Dominic desired the palm of martyrdom. The same glorious work in behalf of the heathen awaits his American sons today. Shall the parental ideal be realized in one or more of their ranks? Then indeed would the Fountain-head of all blessings be opened for our Province at the very outset of its foreign missionary labors.

—Bro. Aquinas Gordon, O. P.