

THE NEW ROSARY INDULGENCE AND SAINT DOMINIC

BRO. NICHOLAS WALSH, O. P.



THE recent decree of our Holy Father, Pope Pius XI, granting a plenary indulgence to all the faithful for the recitation of a third part of the Holy Rosary before the Blessed Sacrament exposed or hidden in the tabernacle, should be a source of joy to the universal Church and in particular to Rosarians and the children of St. Dominic.

This precious indulgence, which the Holy Father so graciously granted, was given at the request of the Master General of the Dominican Order. It was promulgated on the occasion of the Italian national Eucharistic Congress held at the Basilica of St. Dominic in Bologna. How appropriate it was that this new indulgence or, if we may use the phrase, this Eucharistic-Rosary indulgence should be granted at Bologna, will be evident when we recall that in this venerable city lies the body of St. Dominic the Institutor of the Rosary, and that here also was born that little seraph of the Holy Eucharist, the patronness of first communicants, Blessed Imelda. Because of the importance of the decree to all Rosarians and admirers of St. Dominic we quote it in full:

APOSTOLIC BRIEF

Of Our Most Holy Lord Pius XI, by Divine Providence Pope, on the Plenary Indulgence to be Gained by All the Faithful as often as They Recite a Third Part of the Rosary in Presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Within a few days the most solemn celebration of a Eucharistic Congress will take place at St. Dominic's in the city of Bologna which, We are confident, will avail much in stimulating and maintaining the piety of the faithful toward the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Since the meetings of the Congress are to take place in the spacious Basilica of his Order, wherein the Body of the Founder is kept with such deep veneration, the Master General of the Order of Preachers humbly petitions us in view of this extraordinary and

auspicious occasion, to bestow a special indulgence from the treasury of the Church on all the faithful who, in presence of the August Sacrament in which Our Lord Jesus Christ lies hid beneath the Eucharistic veils, shall recite the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary instituted by the Patriarch Saint Dominic in honor of the Mother of God. Wherefore, knowing full well how fitting it would be to concede this indulgence, which, since it would owe its origin at once to Saint Dominic and to piety toward the Eucharist, would stand as a special token and a lasting memorial of the Eucharistic Congress of Bologna of which the Church of Saint Dominic will be in a particularly appropriate way the pivot, We have resolved to grant this petition and thus by this signal expression of Our will to increase the solemnity of the pious event. Having taken counsel, therefore, with Our Beloved Son, Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, the Major Penitentiary, and relying on the mercy of the Omnipotent God and the authority of His Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, We mercifully grant in the Lord in perpetuity to all the faithful who, having contritely confessed their sins and worthily received Holy Communion, a Plenary Indulgence and remission as often as they shall devoutly recite a third part of the Rosary in presence of the Sacrament of Christ's Most Sacred Body, whether exposed for the public veneration of the faithful or reserved in the tabernacle. All to the contrary notwithstanding, We decree that these presents are and shall always remain valid and efficacious; that they are to have and to receive their full and entire effects; that they are now and hereafter to be heartily fostered by those to whom it pertains or shall pertain; that whatever may happen to be attempted to the contrary, knowingly or unknowingly, by any person whatsoever, by whatsoever authority, is rightly to be judged and declared null and void.

Given at Rome, at St. Peter's, under the Fisherman's ring the 4th day of September, 1927, the sixth of Our Pontificate.

P. Card. Gasparri,
Secretary of State.

Note: By the will of the Sovereign Pontiff, the present Apostolic Brief was solemnly promulgated at the Eucharistic Congress held at Bologna, September 7-12, 1927. His Eminence the Cardinal Delegate Thomas Pius Boggiani, O. P., who received it from the hands of the Sovereign Pontiff, promulgated it by His commission, at the first solemn session of the Congress held in the Church of St. Dominic, while all gave thanks to the Sovereign Pontiff for the privilege of an indulgence so great and so kindly granted.

We may also note that to gain an indulgence such as this we must, of course, be free from mortal sin, and to gain it in its entirety we must be detached even from all affection for sin. The usual confession and communion for the gaining of a plenary indulgence are required. For those who go to Holy Communion once a week and to confession at least twice a month, or for those who in the right dispositions receive daily or at least five times a week, no special confession or communion is necessary to gain the indulgences during the week. (Can. 931). We may gain this plenary indulgence every time we say a third part (five decades) of the Rosary in presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, for the recitation of the entire Rosary, even at one time, we can gain three plenary indulgences. There are no special prayers required for the Pope's intention; and all the faithful, whether members of the Rosary Confraternity or not, may gain the indulgence. The Rosary may be said privately or in unison with others, and in any church or chapel where the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.

It is evident from the above quoted *Brief* that the underlying idea of the new indulgence is the uniting of the Rosary devotion to the Eucharistic devotion, or to put it in the terse phrase of Blessed DeMontfort—“*per Mariam ad Jesum*”—through Mary to Jesus.

That these two very Catholic devotions, that of the Most Blessed Sacrament and of the Holy Rosary, now so happily linked in the papal decree, were the cherished devotions of the Holy Patriarch St. Dominic is manifest from even a brief consideration of his life. Even in childhood he had been taught and trained by a pious mother in the knowledge and love of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. It was the custom of Blessed Jane to carry the child Dominic to daily Mass at which, it is said, “he assisted with precocious intelligence.” As a boy of seven he

was placed under the tutelage of his maternal uncle, the arch-priest of Gumiel d'Izan. Being a grave and serious boy, wise beyond his age, he was the constant and happy companion of his uncle. And from this uncle, a prudent and devoted priest, the young Dominic learned lessons, not only in Latin, but also in the reverent service of the altar. He delighted to be near Jesus in the Blessed Eucharist. We can visualize him at this time as the living representation of that picture which shows the child gently knocking at the tabernacle and whispering: "My Jesus are you there?"

For seven impressionable years Dominic stayed in this little retreat of Gumiel d'Izan, during which time the Holy Spirit was sweetly forming the strong character foundation of the future lover and "friend of Jesus." Having now fully decided on his vocation to the altar, the young student goes to Palencia for his higher studies, where he prepares himself for the reception of Holy Orders. And here again, from the very outset of his student career, Dominic stands apart from his fellow-students by the seriousness, austerity and purity of his life. As he draws nearer to the priesthood his love and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament increase. In the language of his biographer, "he preferred the bosom of his holy mother the Church, to the aimless and objectless life of the foolish world around him. The sacred repose of her tabernacles was his resting-place."

Almost immediately on completing his studies at Palencia he is called to receive the habit of the Canons Regular at Osma. The bishop, Don Diego de Azevedo, had already learned of the young cleric's learning and sanctity and desired to have him as a member of his cathedral chapter. That Dominic's reputed zeal and holiness proved to be equal to and even surpass the bishop's high expectation we may gather from the fact that in a very short time, although the youngest member of the chapter, he was elected subprior. At about this time too he was ordained priest. When we consider what as a boy and student his reverence and faithfulness were toward the altar, we can, at best, but faintly surmise the fulness of joy and love that was his when he ascended the steps to perform an Act not permitted to angels, to speak the Words of the Son of God, to consecrate bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ and to offer anew the Holy Sacrifice of Calvary. The words of Blessed Jordan give us a glimpse of the Saint's life at this

period: "Straightway he began to appear among his brother canons as a bright ray of sunshine, in humbleness of heart the least, in holiness the first . . . *day and night he frequented the church*, ceaselessly devoted to prayer, scarcely venturing beyond the cloister walls, the more to find leisure for his lone thoughts with God."¹

Through nine years in this cloistered solicitude Dominic's generous spirit grew and expanded under the benign rays of his Eucharistic Lord. Daily he learned to love and to lean upon Jesus more and more. His soul burned with an ardent charity. Yet his constant prayer was for a greater charity. Because of his intense love for the Redeemer his great heart yearned for the salvation of souls. Thus unconsciously he was preparing and being prepared for the high mission to which God had called him.

The habit which Dominic had formed as a student and still more as a canon, of spending long hours of familiar and loving intercourse with his God in the Eucharist, was a source of strength and consolation to him throughout his missionary and apostolic career. The field in which he labored was a difficult one. The poison of heresy had seeped into the souls of men. Those who called themselves Christians were enemies of Christ. They denied His sacraments and repudiated in particular the Blessed Eucharist and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. To counteract this poison, to destroy this heresy was a work which called for all the genius, prudence and zeal of the intrepid champion of truth. Dominic realized this. He needed wisdom and courage from on high and a large share in the infinite patience of Christ. Directly then to Jesus he went. Entire nights he would spend kneeling, adoring, prostrating himself before his Divine Master in the tabernacle. As Blessed Jordan remarks, "he gave the day to his neighbor and the night to God."² And yet all his fervent prayer and tireless preaching seemed to produce but little fruit in the souls of his obstinate hearers. God in His divine wisdom permits such trials to His faithful servants to purify their souls for new graces and gifts. In this darkness, almost discouragement, Dominic felt his utter weakness and helplessness. He threw himself at the feet of Mary, the "gracious Advocate" of men, and begged her to turn

¹ Bede Jarret, O. P., *The Life of St. Dominic* (New York, 1924), p. 14.

² Augusta Theodosia Drane, *The History of St. Dominic* (London, 1891), p. 265.

her sweet look of mercy and compassion upon him. His humble and confident prayer pierced the heavens. For behold, the Blessed Mother herself comes to the aid of her devoted servant; she gives him the Rosary and teaches him, as she alone could, a more excellent way of making known the mysteries of the life, sufferings and glory of her Divine Son.

Already Dominic had been well prepared to use effectively this new means of preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified. He had received from God a deep understanding of the passion and death of the Saviour. The crucifix was his constant and open study. From long and fervent contemplation before his Eucharistic Lord he had acquired such knowledge and love of Jesus that, like St. Paul, his beloved patron, he might well say that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers" could separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.³ With holy enthusiasm then and renewed vigor, Dominic preached the true Christian doctrine through the Rosary of Mary. The prayer of her who is called the "Destroyer of heresies" was with him, and with her prayer came success.

As to this venerable tradition, which attributes to St. Dominic the foundation or institution of the Rosary, we may note in passing, that it has among its most staunch defenders the vigilant guardians of Christian truth, the successors of St. Peter. Benedict XIV, whose genius and authority scholars have universally recognized, answers the doubting Bollandist thus: "You ask if St. Dominic was really the institutor of the Rosary, you declare yourselves perplexed and full of doubt upon the subject. But what account do you make of the decision of so many Sovereign Pontiffs—of Leo X, of Pius V, of Gregory XIII, of Sixtus V, of Clement VIII, of Alexander VII, of Innocent XI, of Clement XI, of Innocent XIII, of Benedict XIII, and of many others, who are all unanimous in declaring the Rosary to have been instituted by St. Dominic himself."⁴ "And who of Rosarians are not familiar with the enthusiastic sentiments and expressions of that modern luminary of the Apostolic See, Leo XIII, the "Pope of the Rosary?" In his first encyclical on the Rosary he has this to say of St. Dominic and its institution: "Great in the soundness of his doctrine, in the example of his virtue, and in his apostolic labors, he undauntedly pro-

³ Rom. VIII, 38-39.

⁴ Drane, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

ceeded to attack the enemies of the Catholic Church; not by force of arms, but by that devotion which he was the first to institute under the name of the Holy Rosary." And again, "Thanks to this new form of prayer—when adopted and carried out as instituted by the holy Father Dominic—piety, faith, and unity began to return."⁵ And now it has pleased our present Holy Father, Pius XI, to add his authoritative signature to those of his illustrious predecessors in substantiation of the traditional origin of the Rosary. In reply to the petition of the Master General of the Order of Preachers requesting a "special indulgence," on the occasion of the Eucharistic Congress at Bologna, for the devout recitation of a third part of the "Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary *instituted by the Patriarch Saint Dominic in honor of the Mother of God*," the Holy Father responds: "Knowing full well how fitting it would be to concede this indulgence, which, *since it would owe its origin at once to Saint Dominic and to piety toward the Eucharist*. . . . We have resolved to grant this petition . . ." It is noteworthy, then, that this new and rich Rosary indulgence has a particular connection with the name of Dominic, Founder of the Order of Preachers and Institutor of the Most Holy Rosary.

This generous decree of the Holy Father to all the faithful will stand indeed as a "perpetual memorial of the Eucharistic Congress of Bologna," but moreover, it will be a cherished reminder to Rosarians and the children of St. Dominic of the two outstanding devotions of that great lover and servant of Jesus and Mary; and finally, it will remain a new link by which the eminent name of Pius XI is added to the already glorious list of papal defenders of the traditional origin of the Rosary.

⁵ Encyclical Letter *Supremi Apostolatus*, September 1, 1883.

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