

THE LITURGY IN THE LIFE OF A FRIAR PREACHER

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VERY Religious Order has its own peculiar characteristics and distinctive spirit which differentiate it from all other Orders. To understand aright the spirit which animates any particular Order we must first of all trace that spirit back to its source and examine it in the founder of that Order. Likewise, to form a proper estimate of the extent to which the life of a Friar Preacher is colored and influenced by the liturgy we must go back to the founder of the Order of Friar Preachers and study in him that deep liturgical spirit which, as a noble heritage, he has bequeathed to his children. St. Dominic it was who determined by his own legislation that the basis of religious formation and conventual life in his Order should be liturgical prayer.

At the time of Dominic's birth Europe was biding fair to become the coveted possession of the pagan and barbarian. The corrupting influence of the Manichean heresy was again to be found withering branch after branch of the Catholic Church as it had done in the days of Augustine of Hippo. This time, however, greater disasters were befalling the Church of God, for the cunning of the Albigensian heresiarchs was winning over to the side of the heresy many among the hierarchy and clergy of the Church. In order to heal the bruised and torn frame of Christendom the Saint of "happy Calareuga" was inspired to found his preaching Order of Truth which would teach the true doctrine of Jesus Christ, the only Eternal and Unchangeable Truth. As the heaven-inspired Saint of Sienna writes of the Apostolic Dominic in her *Dialogue*, "He took on him the Office of the Word of God, the only begotten Son of God, and appeared in the world as an apostle scattering the darkness of error and giving light."¹

Dominic would restore all things in Christ and to this end he saw the need of gathering about him men who would, before all else, be clerics—other Christs. It was as a clerical Order that Pope Honorius III, on the 22nd day of December, 1216, approved Dominic's new

¹ Treatise on Obedience. Chapter 5.

Order of Preachers. In the very first chapter of the Order's Constitutions we read that the Order of Preachers is a clerical Order, especially instituted for preaching and the salvation of souls. Thus Dominic established that his followers should, like himself, be ordained for the ministry of the altar, for the dispensation of the sacraments and for the preaching of the word of God to the faithful of God. His next concern was selecting that mode of life which he would have his brethren live. Since they were to be clerics, Dominic did not select, as the basis of religious life in his new institute, a monastic rule wherein the priestly character was at best accidental. There was, however, another kind of religious observance, sanctioned by Holy Mother Church and fully developed in Dominic's day, and it was that of the canonical life upon which had been built the Orders of Canons such as, for example, the Canons of Premontre.

To this state Dominic looked as that best suited to the purpose he had in mind. In this form of life he saw whereon to raise his great apostolate of preaching and the work of saving souls. The life was not unfamiliar to him. The idea of such a vocation had captivated his heart and he had lived the first nine years of his priestly ministry in happy peacefulness and blessed solitude among the Canons Regular of the Cathedral of Osma, Spain. During these eventful years he had faithfully and zealously carried out the liturgical functions which, as a Canon, it was his bounden duty to perform daily in the Cathedral. He had even been chosen as the chief instrument by his Bishop to elevate this Chapter of Canons to that high degree of asceticism which was at once the glorious inspiration of his diocesan clergy and a source of great edification to the general body of the faithful. Indeed it was during these years of fervent ministry at the altar of God, in the Court-Room of the King, that gained for him those supernatural graces and favors which blessed the labors of after years in the apostolate among those lost in the erring paths of heresy and schism. From his days at Osma down until the day he put his hand to the founding of his preaching Order he never ceased to live the life of a Canon and to sign himself, Brother Dominic, Canon of Osma.

He had now planned to found an institute of clerics who would live a life similar to that of Canons Regular. Ever enthusiastically venturesome, he made still another bold departure from the established mode of procedure followed by previous founders of Religious Orders. He would give a newer interpretation to the canonical life than that recognized by other orders of Canons Regular. For them the main purpose of their life was the rendering to God, by means of the liturgy of the Church, that public worship which is due to the Lord

and Master of all creation, and this in the name of all created things. Theirs was then a liturgical apostolate. Dominic felt all this and it was just this element of their life that made the greatest impression on him. His own life at Osma, attached to the Cathedral Chapter there, was just such a life. Because the canonical life was so essentially liturgical Dominic, Canon of Osma, selected it as the basis of his Order. The liturgy was to him the touchstone which tested the value of the canonical life. He gave the liturgy, nevertheless, a place in Dominican spirituality different from that which it occupied with others. It was for them, as we have said, the end of their existence, but for Dominic it was to constitute, not the end, but a means, although an essential means, to the end which was preaching and the salvation of souls. Some fulfilled their calling with the completion of the daily cycle of the Divine Office. It was not so with the Dominican. His was to be a life which began in contemplation and ended in action. Contemplation had for its cornerstone the liturgy, and the liturgy served as the handmaid of the life of action.

Herein we have another and indeed the chief reason why the Apostle to the Albigensians laid so much stress on the proper and complete enactment of the Church's liturgy. While being primarily a preacher the Dominican had need of a supernatural driving force which would render his work worthy of producing fruit unto the sanctification of souls. It was vitally necessary, therefore, that he be, not only well versed in the Sacred Sciences, but that he be one in whom was developed to the fullest extent a real liturgical and spiritual sense. He had, therefore, to be both an apostle and a monk, preaching by day in the streets of city and town, returning by evening to the quiet of his cloistered convent, there actively to participate in the traditional ceremonies and monastic observances of his community. Unless he was thus strengthened by such participation in the liturgical offices of the Church, his preaching would indeed become an empty and fruitless endeavor. The liturgy, then, was to be his daily source of prayer. Conventual Mass, the solemn recitation of the Divine Office, as well as mental prayer and other community exercises, were duties binding on each and every member of the community and in every convent of the Order. Only through the constant and zealous discharge of these solemn, conventual obligations could the Friar Preacher hope to harvest that food of the soul which, by reason of his religious profession, he was bound to distribute to the Christian faithful for their spiritual sustenance.

At all times, however, this liturgical element of the Dominican life is to be an aid to the attaining of the Preacher's main goal in life—

preaching and the salvation of souls. Dominic himself determined this when he fixed the liturgy as the basis for Dominican spirituality, both factors to be the means of perfecting the Dominican's life of action in the apostolate of souls. The Constitutions of the Order very explicitly forbid any undue prolongation of the chant and urge that it be light and spirited yet rendered with that solemnity and reverence befitting the Majesty to Whom it is addressed. The time thus saved must be spent in study, an essential duty of the Friar Preacher. Yet study of itself cannot hope to unfathom all the "secrets of the King." In addition there must be noticeable always, by way of undercurrent, that other science—the science of the heart. What a glorious witness to this fact we have in the Angelical of Aquino who, as he himself has told us, gained more light at the foot of the Crucifix than he did from all of his well-pondered tomes. The same Holy Doctor has told us that here in this life it is more perfect to love God than to know Him, but in the next, where we contemplate Him face to face, knowledge, since it then knows no limits, will be superior to love.² To love Him, therefore, more fully in this life than He may be the more fully known in the next, the cultivation of a true liturgical spirit, since the liturgy is truly the science of the heart, is very essential.

Dominic himself was that man of God whom, to quote the great Dante, "Christ in His own garden chose to be His helpmate." He was not only a helpmate in that garden, but he was even one of its rarest flowers emitting the good odor of Christ and making the world fragrant all around him. He was truly imbued with a deep and sane liturgical sense. We are told that whenever possible he would sing the morning Mass. Daily on his journeyings from town to town he would sing spiritual songs, notably the *Ave Maris Stella* and the *Veni Creator*, and never cease speaking to God or of God. Was it any wonder, then, that he should have been so fired with a zeal for the proper performance of the liturgy in the convents of his Order? He was more than an "Athlete of Christ," more than a "Fearless Champion of the Faith," he was a loyal Captain in the King's army, who ceased not to attend court in the Throne Room of the Sanctuaried King of all society.

The Order of Preachers, like its founder, throbs with a lively liturgical spirit. It is essentially liturgical, since to remove the liturgy from it would surely mean the surrender of its spirit. This fact, we repeat, is due to the stamp which was placed upon it by the "good man

² *Summa Theologica* 1a q. 82 a. 3.

of Calareuga." It is an Order vowed to the cause of Truth, therefore, an Order of Science; but more than this, it is an Order established for the restoration of all things in Christ, and consequently an Order of Sanctity. Its members must be men of science and sanctity. Their teaching and preaching must be based upon sound theological doctrine, but that doctrine must be animated by the vivifying power of liturgical prayer. The liturgical prayer is not the end of a Dominican's life, but rather an essential means to that end. As Fr. Mortier, O. P., in his recent valuable work *La Liturgie Dominicaine* very clearly points out, "Like study, interior recollection, and the fruits of silence, the liturgy forms an integral part of the Dominican contemplative life. Study makes for knowledge of God through the spirit; the liturgy through the heart." Well understood and well carried out, it will be the animating source of that habitual elevation of the soul towards the invisible truths of God, which is essentially necessary for the attainment of that perfection through charity which is the end of all religious life.

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