

DOMINICAN PROCESSIONS

"I would be willing to lay down my life for a single one of the ceremonies of the Church."—Saint Teresa.

It is not our intention here to give an adequate description of every Dominican procession, but rather to portray briefly a few of the principal ones which have admirably characterized the Order of Saint Dominic for well-nigh seven hundred years. Religious Orders, like private individuals, have special devotions. The Order of Saint Francis can justly claim the distinguished honor of having preserved in unbroken tradition devotion to the "Five Wounds of Our Divine Lord." The Society of Jesus has ever striven earnestly to make the Sacred Heart of Jesus better known and loved; but it seems to have been the special mission of the Friars Preachers to enkindle in the hearts of men the fire of a fervent devotion to the Blessed Mother, and her Eucharistic Son. Processions have helped to foster this ardent devotion.

The processions which chiefly concern us here are, the *Salve*, the *Rosary*, the *Holy Name*, the *Blessed Sacrament*. and the *Libera*.

The "*Salve Regina*," or "*Hail Holy Queen*," is sung every day after *Compline*, the brethren going in procession from the choir to the church. This laudable custom of singing the "*Salve*" was first begun by Blessed Jordan of Saxony, the second saintly Master General of the Order. In 1223 a diabolical persecution was raging throughout Saxony. It was then that Blessed Jordan commanded that the "*Salve*," which had hitherto been only recited daily after *Compline*, should henceforth be sung processionally. The effect of this ordinance was the immediate disappearance of those diabolical spirits which had eaten their way into the very hearts of the people. "*This affliction*," says Blessed Jordan in his life of Blessed Dominic, "was the reason we established the custom of singing the anthem, '*Salve Regina*,' after *Compline*. We did this first at Bologna; then the pious and salutary custom spread over the whole province of Lombardy, and finally prevailed over our whole Order. How many tears of devotion has not this praise of the Mother of God called forth! How often has it touched the hearts of those singing and of those hearing it, softened and inspired them with fervent piety! Can we fail to believe that the Mother of Our Saviour is pleased and touched with the honor thus shown her? A most trustworthy

religious has assured me that he has often beheld in spirit, the Mother of God throwing herself at the feet of her Son, praying for the preservation of the whole Order, while the brethren were singing the words, 'Eja ergo advocata nostra,' that is, 'Turn, then, our advocate.'

Here the entire community kneel until the words "O clemens, O pia, O dulcis, Virgo Maria!" Then a short versicle is sung, with a response, invoking the intercession of the Heavenly Queen, after which the priest adds the following petition: "Concede nos famulos tuos"—"Grant, we beseech thee, O Lord God, that we thy servants may enjoy continual health of mind and body; and that through the glorious intercession of Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, we may be delivered from present sorrow and hereafter enjoy everlasting happiness." After the "Salve," the procession returns to the choir, the brethren singing in honor of Saint Dominic the following beautiful anthem, "O Lumen Ecclesiae":

"O Light of Holy Church,
Teacher of Truth divine;
Sweet Rose of patience,
Ivory white thy chastity doth shine.
Of Wisdom's living waters
All freely thou hast given;
Life thou our souls to Heaven."

An indulgence of 200 days was granted by Pope Paul V to all who assist devoutly at the "Salve" in a church of the Friars Preachers.

Besides this daily procession, which has been held for seven centuries in honor of the Blessed Virgin, we have also the Rosary procession on the first Sunday of the month—a procession which should be of special interest to the Christian world. On October 7, 1571, during the reign of the Dominican Pope Pius V, was won the crowning victory of Lepanto, "the most decisive battle of the world," gained by the direct help of Mary. And it was to commemorate this great event that Pope Clement VIII ordered that a procession to be made on the first Sunday of the month in honor of "Our Lady of Victory." An indulgence of seven years and two hundred and fifty days can be gained by merely being present at the Rosary procession and praying for the intention of the Pope.

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If devotion to Mary has linked the name of the Dominican Order with the ages of the past, in a far greater degree it can

be truly said that Dominic's children have been the ambassadors of Christ in proclaiming to the world the praises of the adorable Name of Jesus. Gregory X, at the Second Council of Lyons (September 20, 1274), seeing the universal irreverence and disrespect for the Name of Jesus caused by the Albigensian heresy, exhorted and enjoined upon our Order to preach to the people devotion to the Holy Name. Consequently, in obedience to that apostolic precept, the Dominicans have not only preached with untiring zeal love for that Name above all names, but they have also added a procession in its honor.

The second Sunday of the month is set aside in our churches for a procession in honor of the Holy Name. Among the hymns preferred to be sung is "Jesu nostra redemptio." This hymn is sung by some communities even when the procession is omitted. When the procession has passed through the cloister and returned to the choir, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament immediately follows, after which the brethren sing two stanzas of that sublime hymn:

"Holy God, we praise Thy Name;
Lord of all, we bow before Thee;
All on earth Thy sceptre claim,
Infinite Thy vast domain,
Everlasting is Thy Name."

A plenary indulgence may be gained for taking part in the procession in honor of the Holy Name.

But to laud the Name of Jesus is meaningless unless we glorify His Name and stand for all that it represents. Saint Paul tells us that the Gentiles were without excuse, "because when they knew God they did not glorify Him as God" (Rom. I, 21). Were any one to ask what is the essential characteristic of the Dominican Order, the true answer would be: Devotion to the Blessed Eucharist. The glorification of the "King of Kings" has ever been the aim of the Order. The Friars Preachers throughout the ages have stood as sentinels before the tabernacle. Saint Thomas of Aquin is universally hailed as the "Bard of the Blessed Sacrament," Saint John of Gorcum its martyr, and Saint Dominic its faithful adorer. It is only fitting and proper then that on the third Sunday of each month a solemn procession should be held in Dominican churches in honor of the Most Holy Sacrament, the brethren passing through the cloister, carrying lighted candles before the Sacramental Presence and singing that

celebrated anthem so beautifully and lovingly composed by Saint Thomas Aquinas—"Pange, lingua":

"Sing, my tongue, the Saviour's glory,
Of His flesh the mystery sing;
Of the blood, all price exceeding,
Shed by our immortal King,
Destined, for the world's redemption,
From a noble womb to spring.

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Of a pure and spotless Virgin
Born for us on earth below,
He, as Man with man conversing,
Stayed, the seeds of truth to sow;
Then He closed in solemn order
Wondrously His life of woe.*

An indulgence of seven years and two hundred and eighty days can be gained by attending the procession of the Most Holy Sacrament. This indulgence may be also gained by those unable to be present, by uniting in spirit with the same.

The last procession is one which should command out special attention—namely, the procession for the dead. The children of Saint Dominic have ever been mindful of the piercing cries of the faithful departed: "Have pity on me, have pity on me, at least you, my friends, for the hand of the Lord hath touched me!" In addition to the Office and Mass of the dead, which must be said once a week in every Dominican church throughout the entire world, the "Liberation" procession is held every week for the release of the suffering souls in purgatory. At the General Chapter of Salamanca, 1551, with the apostolic approbation of the Holy See, it was decided that the "Liberation" procession be made in our churches, and that if the procession could not be observed on account of the small number of brethren, the prayer, "Liberation me Domine," be recited with the Divine Office.

Besides the aforementioned processions—namely, the "Liberation," the "Salve," the Rosary, the Holy Name and the Most Holy Sacrament—there are many others observed throughout the year, viz., on the feast-days of the fourteen saints of the Order.

But perhaps a non-Catholic might be led to inquire into the meaning of those ecclesiastical ceremonies. "What," he may ask, "is the reason for so many magnificent processions, for so many gorgeous vestments, so many lighted candles, so many

* Dominican Mission Book, p. 332.

flowers, so many prostrations and genuflections, and why so many hymns of praise?" Why? Because it is only natural for man to give outward expression to his inward religious feelings. Do we not show publicly a spirit of loyalty and patriotism towards the President of our nation? Is not his inauguration conducted with pomp and magnificence? How much more magnificent should be the public honor shown to our Supreme Ruler, the eternal King, Jesus Christ! Moreover, this external manifestation of divine worship was religiously and publicly observed when Our Saviour "was seen upon earth and conversed with men" (Bar. III, 38). Did not a choir of angels sing over the cave at Bethlehem? Did not the shepherds come in procession to the crib? Did not the Wise Men bring to the Infant Saviour their offerings of gold, frankincense and myrrh? And in the very streets of Jerusalem a procession was formed of which Our Lord is the central figure. At His triumphal entry into that city, garments were strewn upon the way, palm branches were waved, and as the Saviour passed, men, women and children joyfully sang: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" Again, we see the last solemn procession slowly winding its way up the rugged hill of Calvary—and leading that procession is the Son of the Living God, "The King of ages, the invisible, the immortal, the only God, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever" (Tim. I, 17).

—Ceslaus McEniry, O. P.