

PREACHERS-GENERAL

URBAN FAY, O.P.



CONSIDER how excellent this office is, because it is apostolic; how useful, because it is directly ordained for the salvation of souls; how perilous, because few have in them, or perform, what is required by the office, because it is not without great danger." This is the high estimate of the preaching office set down by Humbert of Romans, the fifth Master General of the Dominican Order and one of the foremost preachers of this day. It is but a reflection of the enthusiasm enkindled in the early Dominicans for the great work for which they were formed. The pages of the history of the early days of the Dominican Order are filled with stories of remarkable zeal and eloquence in the pulpit. Even before the formative days of the Order were definitely closed, Humbert could say: "We teach the people, we teach the prelates, we teach the wise and the unwise, religious and seculars, clerics and laymen, nobles and peasants, lowly and great."

On January 11, at St. Pius' Church in Chicago, Dominican Fathers gathered to honor four missionary priests who have given further evidence that this apostolic zeal still flourishes. In the presence of the Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, the Most Reverend Bernard J. Shiel, D.D., several Monsignori, the assembled brethren and a host of the laity, the Very Reverend T. S. McDermott, O.P., S.T.Lr., Provincial of St. Joseph's Province, as delegate of the Master General, the Most Reverend Martin S. Gillet, O.P., S.T.M., conferred the degree of Preacher-General on the Very Reverend Robert L. Rumaggi, O.P.; the Very Reverend Joseph M. Eckert, O.P.; the Very Reverend Vincent R. Burnell, O.P.; and the Very Reverend John E. O'Hearn, O.P. This degree is conferred on preachers who have distinguished themselves by long and fruitful service in the preaching field.

The origin of the title, preacher-general, dates from the very earliest days of the Order. It appears three times in the *Constitutiones* of 1228, drawn up under the direction of Blessed

Jordan of Saxony, the immediate successor to St. Dominic as Master General of the Order. It appears again in the Chapter of Paris, 1234, in which it receives but passing mention, a fact indicating that it had already been well established. It seems not too great a presumption to credit its origin to St. Dominic himself; for, although the *Constitutiones* of 1228 were not under his personal direction, yet they may be said to have been drawn up under his inspiration.

The importance of preaching in the scheme of St. Dominic might very well have led him to conceive of various divisions in the preaching office. He realized that not everyone who sought admission to his band of friars would necessarily have all the qualifications he desired in those engaged in such vital work. From the beginning there were three divisions to the preaching office. First, there were those who were engaged solely in preaching to the brethren. The preaching activity of these friars was limited to the confines of the convent itself and at regular intervals they addressed the assembled brethren in the convent chapel or chapter room. Besides this class there were also those friars, appointed by the prior, who, with the approbation of the bishop, might preach to all the faithful within the limits or boundaries of the convent. This class was known as the preachers-in-ordinary (*praedicatores communes*), a name first mentioned by Humbert of Romans.

Among all these preachers there were some who had attained a high degree of eloquence, and in order that these potent forces for good might not be wasted within the narrow confines of convent boundaries, the Provincial and the definitors of the chapter might appoint these more eloquent and experienced preachers to the highest office with the title, preacher-general. To this office greater responsibilities and privileges were given. A preacher-general might travel throughout the whole province and preach to any and all the faithful within the vast limits of the province.

The care exercised in the choice of a preacher-general was of a necessity very great because of the nature of the work and the audience to whom the preacher must address his sermons. They were to be specialists in their field and not only masters of the pulpit technique but also models of religious observance. In order that they might the better exercise their high commission they were excused from the administration of temporal affairs and were admonished to study constantly. Stringent require-

ments were established for this appointment, and among the earliest specific requirements were three years of theological study and mature judgment in the affairs of the Order. These qualifications were constantly added to and the number of preachers-general was limited to one from every formal convent in the province. Besides the duties of the office, they were favored with many privileges, among them being the privilege of the seal, a privilege indicating their prestige in the Order. From the beginning they were numbered among the delegates to the provincial chapters.

The title, preacher-general, remains to this day a mark of special distinction. It is regarded as a testimony of excellence in a field that is the glory of the Dominican Order and coming, as we may reasonably suppose, from the mind of St. Dominic, it places the possessor in a most enviable position. The history of the degree in the province of St. Joseph is not without its special glory. In its comparatively short span of years the province has been blessed with a great number of gifted preachers. The number of preachers-general created by the Master Generals is in itself the finest testimony of the ability and zeal of the Dominican preachers of the province. Since 1881 there have been twenty-seven distinguished ministers of the Gospel upon whom this degree has been conferred. A list of these Fathers will speak for itself. In 1881 the degree was conferred on the Very Reverend Fathers J. V. Edelen*, J. P. Turner*, H. F. Lilly* and C. H. McKenna*; in 1893, on the Very Reverend Fathers J. A. Daly*, E. P. DeCantillon*, and C. A. Splinter*; in 1901, on the Very Reverend Father P. A. Dinahan*; in 1905, on the Very Reverend Fathers J. P. Moran*, J. A. Hinch, and R. P. Cahill*; in 1909 on the Very Reverend D. R. Towle*; in 1913 on the Very Reverend S. R. Brockbank*; in 1917 on the Very Reverend Fathers F. B. Logan*, J. B. O'Connor*, M. J. Foley, M. J. Ripple* and J. H. Healy; in 1926, on the Very Reverend Fathers F. L. Kelly*, C. M. Thuente, W. R. Lawler and J. A. Mackin*; in 1933, on the Very Reverend W. R. Burke. Finally, in 1938, the title was granted to the Very Reverend Fathers R. L. Rumaggi, J. M. Eckert, V. R. Burnell and J. E. O'Hearn. To these last four the ceremony of conferring the degree was held in January of this year.

The history of the preachers-general in the province of St.

* Deceased.

Joseph is but a continuation of the history of Dominican eloquence which has commanded the attention of the world for seven hundred years. They are the link which joins the modern era with the countless friars who set the world aglow by their preaching since St. Dominic first sent his small band to preach the word of God to all peoples. Their deeds give testimony that Truth will be defended no matter what the obstacle; that the Dominicans will remain faithful to their mission, expressed by Pope Honorius III in confirming the Order as "champions of the faith and the true lights of the world."