

DOMINICAN CONFRATERNITIES

One of the brightest pages of Dominican history is that which records the assignment of the first sixteen Friar Preachers by St. Dominic to different parts of the then civilized world. It is to that date that we can go back and find the beginning of many phases of present Dominican life. It is to that date that we may trace the beginning of activities among the faithful by Dominicans.

These sixteen Brothers went forth to preach; to teach the people the way to salvation. They told the faithful about Jesus; that He was the Treasure of the faithful, the Lord of all. They pointed out the value of His friendship; the best means of attaining it and keeping it. The means suggested by them are even today in use—devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and all honor to Mary Immaculate.

As years went by, the sons of Saint Dominic formed societies for the greater spread of devotion to Jesus and His Mother. The purpose of such societies was to unite those who, working together, could be of mutual aid in attaining eternal salvation. In all, the Dominicans have instituted and propagated five such confraternities: The Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and of the Holy Name; the Rosary Confraternity; the Confraternity of the Angelic Warfare and the Confraternity of First Communicants and Perseverance, or Blessed Imelda Confraternity. The aim of all is the same—the salvation of souls. The means used by each is different. Let the following explain the five Dominican Confraternities; their origin, propagation and fulfillment of their missions.

Blessed Sacrament Confraternity

Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has always been the base upon which the sanctity of the Dominican Order has rested. It was the first Dominican Cardinal, Hugh of St. Cher, who prevailed upon Pope Urban IV to institute, in 1264, the feast of Corpus Christi, the prayers for which were later written by St. Thomas Aquinas. Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was lukewarm when Father Stella, a Dominican at the Minerva, formed in 1539 a society in his parish to render proper respect and ven-

eration to the Holy Eucharist, especially to the Viaticum. When Pope Paul III heard of the society at the Dominican church in Rome, he immediately summoned Father Stella and requested a copy of the By-laws and Constitutions of this band, united to give due honor to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. So pleased was the Pontiff with the formation of the society that on November 30, 1539, he published a Bull, composed of Father Stella's words, which canonically established the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, the propagation of which was intrusted to the Dominican Fathers. Great is the wealth of indulgences with which succeeding Pontiffs have enriched the society.

Shortly after the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament for adoration was begun in the fourteenth century, a body of Dominican Sisters formed a Congregation for Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. This was at the Santa Maria at Vera. How long this body of saintly Sisters persevered in their holy purpose is not recorded. But we do know that in 1659 a Dominican priest, Father Anthony Le Quieu, opened a house in which devout women spent their lives, bound to perpetual adoration and inclosure by vows taken upon their entrance.

In order that the people of the world might partake of at least some of the graces received before the Blessed Sacrament the Forty Hours' Devotion was extended to the universal Church by a son of St. Dominic, Pope Saint Pius V. Another joy for the laity was the extension of the Holy Hour to nearly every diocese of the Church. This, because of its brevity and its practical application to the lives of Catholics, has become the popular devotion of the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament.

Confraternity of the Holy Name

In the thirteenth century people were inclined to treat the Name of Jesus with disrespect. Individual effort to do the Name honor was useless, so universal had become the abuse. All of the clergy were anxious to institute rigorous measures for its correction. In 1274, Pope Gregory X delegated the Dominicans, the most successful preachers of the day, to combat the vices of blasphemy, profanity and perjury.

By good advice, prayer and example the Friar Preachers were successful in their allotted mission. Not only did they show men the folly of improper speech, but they planted in their souls

a fervent resolution to honor the Holy Name of Jesus. To further promote this love of Jesus among the people, in 1432 the Dominican Bishop Diaz of Lisbon founded a society of the Holy Name. As time sped on and men gradually forgot that once an organization existed for the elimination of profane and blasphemous speech, a humble Dominican, Father Diego, in 1564 revived the Society and placed it on so solid a basis that never since has it ceased to be a force for good among men. The devotion was preached everywhere by the Dominicans. Never did the missionaries leave a town without establishing the Society.

But greater things were to be accomplished by the Confraternity. Father Alemany, the ninth Provincial of the Dominicans in the United States, was authorized by Rome, about the year 1850, to establish the Society throughout America. The ruling was obediently carried out; but under the handicap of the Clementine decree, which allowed the establishment of only one Society in a city, no matter how large that city might be. About 1870, Father McKenna, "The Apostle of the Holy Name," a true, unselfish Dominican, petitioned his superiors in Rome to obtain from Pope Leo XIII the extension of the privilege to every parish in the United States. With the granting of this favor the future of the Society was assured. During the years that have intervened, as the result of the united efforts of the clergy in the United States, a proud record has been achieved. Millions of men belong to the ranks, defend at all times the Holy Name and receive Jesus in Holy Communion every month.

Confraternity of the Holy Rosary

Though the first love of Saint Dominic's heart was given to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, before which he kept long watches night and day, no biographer of the Holy Founder of the Dominican Order fails to tell of His deep-rooted love for Mary. Next to Jesus, Mary was his dearest comfort. Mary it was whom he petitioned to care for his Order; to touch reprobate hearts; to give perseverance to saintly souls on earth. Mary, it was who refreshed his weary, fatigued body by a pleasant smile; by a reassurance of the favor in which Jesus held the Order of Preachers. Mary, Immaculate Mother, gave to Dominic the weapon to combat heresy and doctrinal errors; she gave him that chain which drags sinners from mire to the glory of

sanctity; which elevates saints from the world to a union with Jesus—Mary gave Dominic that precious gift, the Rosary.

How the Dominican Friars have spread this devotion of Mary, volumes alone can relate. Where a Dominican goes, there shall rise the Paters, Aves and Glorias as petitioned on Mary's beads. Children lisp it; youth speaks it; old age meditates upon its mysteries.

But, again, unity was the giver of strength. So in 1265 Pope Urban IV granted many indulgences to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary instituted by Saint Dominic and fostered by his sons. Successive Popes have lavished upon Rosarians indulgences which have placed in heaven saints the number of which only Judgment Day will reveal.

The young ladies' sodality found in many of our Dominican churches should be affiliated with the Rosary Confraternity. All women, young and elderly, should become Rosarians. But what of the men? Too many believe the Rosary Confraternity for the ladies alone. No man can take to himself a purer, better more faithful or loving spouse than Mary. She will storm heaven for graces for those who show their love for her by the recitation of the Rosary. She will guide them to Jesus if only they will tell how much they love her by saying their beads and meditating on the mysteries contained in them. Both men and women should join the Rosary Confraternity as revealed to Dominic by Mary, our Mother.

Confraternity of the Angelic Warfare

When, in the early part of the seventeenth century, clergy and laity were seeking a patron whom they could imitate in the virtue of holy purity, and whose intercession in heaven they would seek, it was inspiration which brought to their minds the Angelic Doctor, Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican.

In 1640 a Dominican priest, Father Deurwerders, realizing the dangers to which the youth of his day were exposed, in order to safeguard their most precious treasure, purity, instituted at Louvain the Angelic Militia. Within twenty years the society spread to Italy and was to be found in every district. Soon many Provincials of the Dominican Order petitioned the Master General to have the Pontiff, Innocent XI, extend the Confraternity to their provinces. After due consideration the Holy See granted

the request on May 26, 1727. In his Bull of this date Pope Benedict XIII bestowed many indulgences upon the new confraternity.

With Saint Thomas as their patron and pattern, youth is indeed fortunate. It has in him not only a saint but also a Doctor of the Church and the patron of Catholic educational institutions. In order to keep the members of the Confraternity of Angelic Warfare ever mindful of their patron, a cord similar to the one with which the angels girded Saint Thomas must be worn by them day and night. They should also recite daily fifteen Hail Marys in honor of Saint Thomas and the Rosary of Mary. There was a campaign started in 1907 by Father McKenna, O. P., to encourage all clergy and those preparing for Holy Orders to join the Confraternity, not only that they might obtain through Saint Thomas' intercession perseverance in holy purity, but that they might influence others to take the cord and place themselves under the protection of the Angelic Dominican.

Confraternity of Blessed Imelda

Since purity of heart and deep-rooted devotion to the Blessed Sacrament are the ideal aims of a Dominican, then, truly, we have a Dominican exemplary and perfect in the youngest beatified virgin of the Church—Blessed Imelda Lambertini, a Tertiary. Though she has been beatified as a virgin, not a martyr, there are many who consider her among the martyred—martyred by the incomparable pulsations of her childish heart. When she received her first Holy Communion her heart broke from joy, and as she swallowed for the first time the Body and Blood of Jesus, she departed from this world to be the spouse of Our Lord forever in the next. It was Ascension Day, May 12, 1333, and when Jesus ascended into heaven with little Imelda people immediately began to call her the Patroness of First Communicants.

Years later Père Rousset, at Prouille, started a confraternity dedicated to Blessed Imelda. Children who had begun preparation for Holy Communion and those who had received the precious Body and Blood were allowed to join its ranks. Adults who promised to provide clothing to the poorer children, instructed them in the rudiments of Faith or in other ways aided in preparing them to approach worthily their first Holy Communion, joined the Confraternity. When Pius X issued his Bull on fre-

quent Communion, he appointed as patroness Blessed Imelda—she whose heart broke from so great a love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Though the Third Order is more than a confraternity, its work in our parishes can be carried on as that of a society. The Third Order is a part of the grand old Dominican Order. It was founded by Saint Dominic himself for the salvation of souls. Its field of labor is vast. Its watchword should be action. The good it is possible for it to do among the poor, among sinners and the reprobate is almost boundless.

Any one who belongs to a Dominican Confraternity, if faithful to its rules, is paving an easy road to salvation. Life's years are naturally filled with sorrows. But how much lighter are these burdens when we place them before Jesus, by a moment of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament; or when we speak a word in defense of His Holy Name. How much lighter do they become when we are rapt in meditation on one of the mysteries of Mary's Rosary. Burdens of any kind are forgotten while we offer a prayer to the Angelic Thomas for purity; or send to heaven aspirations to be given to Jesus by Blessed Imelda, the Dominican Tertiary, who is with her Master in the heavenly court thanking Him for that precious Gift—her only Holy Communion.

—Bro. Ambrose Smith, O. P.