

FRIAR-PRIEST

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"Go thou and preach, for unto this art thou called."



WHEN St. Dominic commissioned his sons to go into the world to preach the gospel and to invite mankind to share in the fruits of the redemption, he inaugurated a work destined for all time to challenge every Friar's supreme attention.

The great deeds wrought by St. Dominic and his little band in the beginning of the Order, so out of proportion to the natural causes, is worthy of the highest admiration. It is a testimony to the fact that the Order was built not by man alone but by the power of God. Men of genius and learning came into the Order, and used their rich endowments for it, but they were not an essential factor in its founding or conservation. Great things have been wrought by men only insofar as they worked in the power of Jesus Christ. And it is through His power that the Order has unfailing life and energy of growth. In the affairs of men's souls nothing can be wrought by a mere human agent; he can serve only as an instrument to bring the power of God to act upon a subject. This thought, impressed on the minds of the first Friar-priests by St. Dominic, was carried with them through life. It guided their labors and their hopes. They ascribed the rich results that followed to that divine power which elevated their human words and works to the plane of divine agencies. Cheered and strengthened by it, they feared nothing; they stopped at no obstacle. It gave them an absolute assurance that they could not fail. They did not fail. They have done their work, and are gathered to eternal life. Today, their work is carried on by others. The arm of God is not shortened, and He desires the salvation of men as much today as in the days of St. Dominic. But new fashions of thought have invaded the minds of, and have weakened the human agents. The Gospel has grown old. Yet, the eternal truth remains. If we would achieve the results which the early Friars accomplished, we must make use of the same means.

CHARACTER OF THE TIMES

If there was ever a time in the history of the world when truth had need of a champion, it is today. Truth is held in contempt and

is outraged in many ways. In the pages of numberless books and on the lips of the sensualist, the philosopher, and the historian, are repeated the challenging words of Pilate: "What is truth?"

If the world is dying of starvation from want of truth, it is dying no less from excess of pleasure and indulgence. If in every age the preacher of the Gospel must react against sensual softness by upholding the ideal of austerity, and against an immoderate desire for wealth by the ideal of voluntary poverty, surely such doctrine was never more needed than it is today. If in every age an apostle can be a true apostle only on the condition of uniting to the blood of Jesus Christ shed for men's souls his own unwearied labors, his austerities, penances, and self-sacrifice, surely a modern apostle can be no exception to such a rule. If in every age prayer, and above all, public prayer, has been the gentle, kindly dew that gives life and increase to the studies and sermons of the preacher, can we today presume to abandon it?

We are the latest comers in a long line of Friar-priests that stretches back to St. Dominic. Our history is the history of the world since first we were sent out into it, agents and vicars of Jesus Christ. And when all is told, we may be proud of those who went before us. They sustained well the shock of conflict; they stood brave and united about the standard of Christ; they delivered to us unimpaired the lessons of His life and His teaching. Like the torch-bearers in the games of Greece, they have handed down, one to another, through seven centuries, the living flame of truth. We may well turn to the annals of the past for comfort and direction. We shall not be deceived. We may neither add to its constituent parts nor take from them; indeed, it is our boast and our pledge that we do not. But we may add to the zeal and the industry, the insight and the ingenuity of the past. It is possible to advance from height to height, to expand as a body from one sphere of good labors to another, and to add forever fresh pages of conquest to the annals of the Order. Not only is it possible; it is a law. *Estote Perfecti* includes not only the perfection of the individual soul, but when applied to the Friar-priest, it includes the perfection which is the steady progress of ministration to the needs of society. The real greatness and worth of the present age lie in its intellectual activity rather than in its material progress. There is in it a mental stimulus as strong as that which impelled the Friars Preachers of the time of St. Dominic to produce, in every sphere of thought and action, the works that still remain as an exhaustless source of inspiration.

WE BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

When St. Dominic laid the foundations of the Order, he peered deep into the future. He did not build for any particular time. He, therefore, set a purpose to be achieved far beyond us of today. We can only begin. We must live and think and act under the consciousness that we build for the future. We must forget everything except that the Order belongs to the future and that we are parts of the Order. Otherwise, we do not belong here at all. We came prompted to mighty efforts, pure life, and ceaseless attachment to the Order. The true Friar-priest seeks not to exalt himself, but he seeks to do the will of God. He rejoices not when he himself is held in esteem, or when his personal advantage is obtained, but when God's work is done. For him, self is only an instrument to accomplish the work of God. If that work demands the sacrifice of his life, his life is offered. His words are always true. He speaks not to please men but to please God. God is always pleased with the truth.

There are young and old, superiors and inferiors, experienced and inexperienced; there are those who are about to be clothed with their spiritual arms, and those from whose honorable hands these weapons are falling. But all belong to a common nobility. A common aristocracy of sentiment, temper, and duty is peculiar to all. May we so administer this high and holy charge of the priesthood that when we must step out of our place and yield them to others—while we go before the Great Captain of our earthly warfare—we may hear from Him that desirable sentence of approval: "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (Mt., XXV, 23).

The dearest thing that God has in all this world is the soul of every man. To possess these perfectly He paid the price of the blood of His Son; and He has decreed to entrust this possession to men to guard it and bring it to Him. All is great about it. The trust is great, the responsibility is great, the labor is great, the reward or punishment is great. If we wish to know how terrible is the punishment of the faithless priest, let us give ear to the Prophet Ezechiel: "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman over the house of Israel: and thou shalt hear the word out of my mouth, and thou shalt tell it to them from me. If when I say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die, thou declare it not to him, nor speak to him that he might be converted from his wicked way and live; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but I will require his blood at thy hand" (Ezechiel 3). What a terrible thing to be charged by the angry Judge for the blood of those for whom He died?

A TRUE SERVANT OF CHRIST

St. Dominic was the true servant of Christ. He is the model Friar-priest. He has given in his life a grand and perfect example of what a Friar-priest should be. First, his life was ever active; his thought and his powers of body were put into the great business of building up the kingdom of God. His method was perfect. He did not wait for people to come to him seeking salvation; he went in search of them; not alone in the cities, but out in the small villages, out into the fields, and wherever man is found. He was merciful and kind to all. He had compassion on every ill; his work added force to his words. The mercy shown to the body was but a means of reaching the soul. A man will open up his soul to one who convinces him that he is willing and able to help him. As we recall these facts in the life of St. Dominic, we may hear his voice coming to us: "Go and do likewise." If the life of the present day Friar-priest ever becomes so busy or so noise-filled that he can not hear that voice, his estate is wretched indeed. We shall never become useful ministers of the Gospel by multiplying our surface efforts, or by accumulating good works. This can only be done through the mighty power of a humble heart which leans on God, by a thoughtful soul which drinks deep of Him.

"Open the eyes of the intellect," said our Lord to St. Catherine of Siena in one of her revelations, "and gaze at the Sun of Justice, and thou wilt see those glorious ministers, who through ministering the Sun, have become like to It, as I told you of Peter, who received the keys of the kingdom of Heaven. I say the same of these others who have administered in the garden of the holy Church the Light, that is to say, the Body and Blood of My only-begotten Son, who is Himself the undivided Sun, and all the Sacraments of the Holy Church which all give life in virtue of the Blood. . . . See then that these have taken on the condition of the Sun, for, having clothed themselves and filled the power of their souls with Me, the true Sun, they become like to me. The Sun illuminates them and causes the earth of their souls to germinate with its heat. Thus act My own ministers elected and anointed and placed in the mystical body of the Holy Church in order to administer the Sun, that is to say the Body and Blood of My only-begotten Son, together with the other Sacraments, which draw life from this Blood; this they do in two ways—actually, in administering the Sacraments, and spiritually by shedding forth in the

mystical body of the Holy Church the light of supernatural science, together with the color of an honorable and holy life, following the doctrine of My Truth. . . . So thou seest that they are the Sun, because they have taken the condition of the Sun from Me, the true Sun, because through the affection of love they are one thing with Me, and I with them, and each has given light in the Holy Church according to the position to which I have elected him.”¹

In these words the great Dominican mystic, with the insight which characterizes such saints, declares the central idea of the priesthood. Its dignity surpasses all the grandeur of earth; it is, indeed, above that of Angels, both on account of the power of consecrating the Body of our Lord, and that of remitting sins . . . privileges so sublime, that if the Mother of God were here on earth, she could not exercise them. He is tongue and hand of Christ, who uses these instruments to work the wonders of His grace in the souls of the faithful. Thus he is made one with the source of all power in the spiritual order, with the Author of that life which has its center in the Sacred Heart, and thence flows and pulsates through all the members of the mystical body. Thus the priest's aim becomes identical with the aim of our Lord, his motive is the same, his work is the work of Him who prayed for priests, saying: “Sanctify them in truth. Thy word is truth. As Thou has sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world, and for them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. . . . And the glory which Thou hast given me, I also give to them” (John XVII, 17). A Friar-priest's life must therefore correspond to his dignity; his heart must be entirely united to God, his exterior entirely different from that of other people, giving a just idea of his holiness. How pure must those lips be, which receive the Son of God! How clean those hands, chosen to loose souls from the bonds of sin! How chaste the heart, watered with the blood of the Word made flesh! As the sun's rays fall in the mire and among poisonous herbs, without being soiled by the one or poisoned by the other, so should the Friar-priest walk amid the innumerable vices that deluge the world, and not be tainted. His mind should be as incorruptible as the bodies of the three youths in the Babylonian furnace. As they stood untouched amid flames, so should the Friar-priest preserve every virtue amid the flames of worldly vices, ambition, and interest. It is hard, very hard, to live

¹ *Dialogue of St. Catherine*. .p. 241.

in the midst of risks of every kind, the attacks of so many enemies, snares multiplied, without losing that integrity of conscience to which he is obliged who consecrates and administers the sacraments. Hear St. Chrysostom: "I do not speak lightly," says he, "but as I think; I really believe there are many in the Priesthood who save their souls, but many who are lost; and their damnation is so much the more certain, as they have committed greater faults by abusing invaluable blessings."² It is a burden to be dreaded even by angels. Saints Gregory, Ambrose, and Chrysostom understood this so well they fled when the Church wished to impose upon them the care of souls.

With a humble heart let the Friar-priest to-be say with St. Alphonsus:

O my Lord Jesus Christ, how can I thank Thee enough for having called me to the same work that Thou didst Thyself on earth, that is, the labor for the salvation of souls? How have I deserved this honor, this reward after having so grievously offended Thee, and caused others also to do so? Thou dost, indeed, O my Lord, call me to help Thee in this great undertaking. I will serve Thee with all my strength. Behold I offer Thee all my labor, and even my blood, in order to obey Thee. Nor do I by this aspire to gratify my own inclination, or to gain applause or esteem; I desire nothing else than to see Thee known and loved by all men as Thou deservest. I prize my happy lot, and consider myself fortunate, in having been chosen for this great work, in which I protest that I will renounce all the praises of men and all self-satisfaction, and will seek only Thy glory. To Thee be all the honor and satisfaction, and to me only the hardships, the blame and the reproaches. Accept O Lord, this offering which I, a miserable sinner, who wish to love Thee and to see Thee loved by others, make of myself to Thee, and give me strength to execute it. Most holy Mary, my advocate, who so greatly loves souls, help me.³

² *The Priesthood.* p. 89.

³ St. Alphonsus' *Prayer For Zeal.*