

THE HOLINESS OF ST. DOMINIC

Part Two ¹



ANY IMPORTANT and significant facts of Dominic's life are contained in the following desposition of the official process of his canonization. We see the tremendous opposition he faced in scattering his small group of followers throughout Europe. Characteristic aspects of his prayer and life of penance are recorded by these two witnesses. Brother Rudolph recounts the inspired words of hope which the holy father left his children when he died.

The Testimony of Brother John of Spain

Also called John of Navarre, he entered the Order on August 28, 1215. He was one of the early brethren who helped St. Dominic choose the Rule of St. Augustine in 1216. He is the only one of the nine Bolognese witnesses who tells nothing of the translation of St. Dominic's body in May, 1233. Therefore, he must have arrived in Bologna only a short time before the witnesses were heard by the papal board of Commissioners in August. He was probably an inquisitor in Southern France around 1236.²

On the tenth of August, Brother John of Spain, a priest of the Order of Preachers, stated under oath that he had entered the Order of Friar Preachers in the year of its approval in a consistory of the Lord Pope, Innocent III.⁴ The witness is quite certain that the next feast of St. Augustine will make the eighteenth anniversary of his reception of the habit from Brother Dominic's hands. And it was on that very day that he made his profession in the hands of the founder and first Master of the Order, in the church of St. Romanus at Toulouse. From that time he lived with Brother Dominic day and night; in various places and through different countries he traveled and rested with him.

Both night and day, Brother Dominic was constant in his prayer. He prayed more than the other brothers who lived with him, kept longer vigils; he used the discipline on his body with greater severity and frequency than the others. The witness knows these facts for he

very often saw Dominic acting thus. Some of the brethren also told him that Master Dominic used the discipline on himself and had others administer it; it was made of an iron chain with three branches. All this was common knowledge among the brethren, but the witness heard it from the brothers who had actually used this discipline on Brother Dominic.

When the brethren were guilty of violations, he punished them according to the Rule. Yet he suffered deeply with the offenders, and was extremely sorrowful whenever he had to penance anyone for his transgression.

Filled with compassion, he most ardently desired his neighbor's salvation. Hence, he himself preached frequently, and by every means possible he exhorted the brethren to act similarly. Sending them out to preach, he directed and counselled them to be wholly motivated by the salvation of souls. Since he placed great confidence in God, he also sent out the less talented brothers to preach, telling them: "Go securely, for the Lord will be with you and give you the words to speak; nothing will be lacking to you." They went, and everything happened just as he had said.

When the witness was at the monastery of the church of St. Romanus in Toulouse, Brother Dominic, acting against the will of the Court of Montfort, the Archbishop of Narbonne, the Bishop of Toulouse and certain other prelates, sent the reluctant witness to Paris with five clerical brethren and one laybrother.⁶ They were to study, preach and found a monastery there. They should not fear, for everything would prosper for them. To the prelates, the Court and the brethren, he said: "Do not oppose me, for I know very well what I am doing." Then he sent others to Spain, giving them a similar reply and instructions.

While the witness and his companions were studying at Paris, Master John (a deacon at St. Quentin and Regent of Theology at the University) and the College of Masters and Parisian Students gave him and the brethren the church of St. James. This church was located at the Orleans gate. They established themselves there, built a monastery and accepted many good clerics who entered the Order of Friars Preachers. Many gifts and revenues were given them, so they flourished, just as Brother Dominic had predicted.

During this same period, many buildings and much property were given to the Order in the country around Toulouse and Albi. Since the Order of Preachers had all this property and wealth in that area, the brethren used to carry money on their journeys, go by horse and wear surplices. Therefore, Brother Dominic worked hard

to convince them of the necessity of relinquishing and contemning all temporal goods—they should embrace poverty, live on alms, not carry money with them, nor ride horses. Thus the property in France was given to the Cistercian nuns, and in other countries to nuns there.

In order that the brethren might be more completely intent upon study and preaching, Dominic wanted the unlettered laybrothers of his Order to be over the learned brethren in the administration and care of temporal affairs. But the clerical brethren did not want the laybrothers over them, lest the same situation result as happened in the Order of Grandmont.⁷ Asked how he knew all this, the witness answered that he lived with Brother Dominic for a long time. He had seen everything related, except for the discipline made from an iron chain. But he knows the other facts because he was there and experienced these things with his companions.

Brother Dominic was friendly to all, rich and poor, Jews and pagans (who were very numerous in Spain). As the witness saw, he was also loved by all men, with the exception of heretics and enemies of the Church. He used to pursue these and refute them in debates and sermons. However, when he argued with them, he lovingly exhorted them to repent and return to the faith—as the witness saw and heard.

He often noticed that Dominic slept at night as he was dressed during the day, except that he took off his shoes. When he traveled from one place to another, he also took off his shoes and walked barefoot until he reached his destination. Whenever he got out into the country, he again took off his shoes and threw them over his shoulder—he would not let anyone else carry them for him. Asked how he knew, the witness replied that he heard it from the brethren and had often seen it himself. If he stumbled on a rock, Dominic bore it cheerfully. As a man who always rejoiced in his troubles, he was not disturbed, but used to say: "This is penance."

He was greatly in love with poverty, and zealously incited the brethren to have a similar love. The witness noticed this, for he saw Brother Dominic happy in the poorest clothing. Giving away all his temporal goods, he often exhorted the brethren to love poverty. He was also frugal in eating and drinking, but particularly as regards any special dish. He readily dispensed others, but never himself; rather, he strictly observed the entire Rule. The witness stated that he saw this himself.

When they walked through cities and villages together, the witness noticed that Dominic hardly raised his eyes from the ground.

He did not have a bed of his own, like the other brethren. If

Dominic had possessed his own bed, the witness certainly would have known of its existence, for he had gone to great trouble searching for it.

Two or three times he was elected to the episcopacy, but he always refused—he preferred living with his brethren in poverty to being a bishop. As to the source of his information, the witness replied that this was common knowledge at that time, not only among the brethren, but also among others, both clerics and laymen. The bishoprics were those of Béziers and Comminges. The witness added that this had happened before he had entered the Order.

Dominic rarely spoke, except with God, that is, in prayer, or of God; further, he urged the brethren to act similarly. The witness noted that he was always joyful with others, but he frequently wept while praying—for he saw and heard him. During and after Brother Dominic's lifetime, the witness heard that he persevered in virginity till his death—a fact well-known among the brethren. He once heard Dominic say that he desired to be tortured, cut to pieces and die for the faith of Christ.

Both by word and letter, he often instructed and urged the brethren of the Order to always study the Old and New Testament. The witness heard him say this and saw the letters. He always carried Matthew's Gospel and Paul's Epistles with him. From studying them so much, he almost knew them from memory.

The canons of Brother Dominic and many other trustworthy men told the witness the following incident.⁸ When Dominic was in the world studying at Palencia, a famine harassed that region; the poor were badly plagued and many died. Moved by compassion and love, Dominic sold his books and all his possessions to buy food for the poor. At his example, many others contributed much to relieve the distress.

The Testimony of Brother Rudolph

Under the magnetic influence of Blessed Reginald, Rudolph (also called Raoul) entered the Order in the spring of 1219. In choosing the poverty of the Dominicans, he resigned his benefice as a parish priest. A doctor of canon law, he was originally from Faenza. He died in 1259.⁹

On the eleventh of August, Brother Rudolph of Faenza, a priest of the Order of Preachers, stated under oath that he was the rector and chaplain of the church of St. Nicholas in Bologna, when that

church was given to the Friars Preachers. It was given by the Lord Bishop of Bologna at the request of the venerable father, the Lord Bishop Ugolino of Ostia, the Apostolic Legate, who is now the Supreme Pontiff. This was over fourteen years ago. During the same year, Brother Dominic, the founder and first Master of the Order of Preachers, came to Bologna. From the time he arrived until his death, he generally lived in that city—except when he visited the Roman Curia, certain regions of Lombardy and the city of Venice.

In all the time Dominic was in the city, the witness lived near him, for he was a member of the Order, having made his profession before Dominic arrived in Bologna. Since he was procurator for the house and the brethren, the witness was able to observe Brother Dominic in church, at the Divine Office, in the dormitory and refectory, night and day. Therefore, he was very well acquainted with the person and life of Dominic.

He often used to spend the entire night in church—he prayed much, and in his prayer wept and groaned often. The witness knows this for he frequently followed him to church and saw him. He used to stay there with him at night, and thus saw and heard him praying and weeping. Frequently in his prayer, Dominic would stand on tip-toe, raising his hands—as one would in prayer. Asked how he saw all this at night, the witness answered that a light was always kept burning in the church. Since the witness was his close friend, he used to stand near Brother Dominic to pray. He is most certain that Dominic was much more devout and constant in prayer than any man he had ever seen.

He always wore an iron chain next to his body, wrapped around his waist—and he kept it there till his death. The witness knows this, for when Dominic died, he found the chain wrapped around him. He took it and kept it, but afterwards gave it to the Master of the Order, Jordan.¹⁰

Dominic always slept at night dressed just as he was during the day, except that he took off his shoes. Sometimes he slept on the floor, sometimes on a board (which the witness himself would first cover with some cloth), but very often he slept sitting. Because of his many vigils and nights spent in prayer, he oftentimes fell asleep at the table.

Devoted to the Divine Office, he always attended choir with the community. He also ate at the common table, taking the same food as the brethren. The witness, who was the procurator, once put out a special dish for the brethren. Brother Dominic called him over, and, observing the silence, whispered to him: "You are destroying

the brethren, giving them these delicacies."

Whenever the house ran short of bread, wine or any item of food, the witness used to go to Dominic and say: "We have no bread—or wine." He would answer: "Go and pray, for the Lord will provide." So the witness would go to the church to pray, often followed by Brother Dominic. God heard them, for they always had enough to eat. Sometimes, at Dominic's command, the witness took the little bit of bread they still had and put it on the tables—and the Lord supplied the lack.

He observed the Rule and the customs of the Friars Preachers with perfect exactitude, as to himself and for others, in their clothing, food and drink, the fasts and in everything else. Since the witness lived with him, he often had occasion to notice these things.

The witness stated emphatically that he had never seen anyone so happy in his faith and devotion as Dominic. He wanted to save all men, Christians and Saracens, but especially the Cumans and other pagans. He had more zeal for souls than any man the witness had known—often he expressed his desire to go to the Cumans and other infidels.

But he was always cheerful and pleasant; a comforter of the brethren, he was patient, merciful and kind. If he saw a brother breaking any rule, he would pass by as if he had not seen it. But afterwards, with a mild expression and kind words, he would say: "Brother, you must confess your fault." With his gentle words, he induced all to confess and repent. He rigorously punished transgressions, but the offenders went away consoled because of his humble attitude.

He was a great lover of poverty and exhorted the brethren to practice this virtue. The witness experienced this, for when Brother Dominic arrived at Bologna, Lord Odoric Galiciani wanted to give the brethren some property worth more than 500 Bolognese pounds. The deed had already been drawn up in the presence of the Lord Bishop of Bologna, but Dominic tore up the contract. He did not want them to have that property or any other wealth, but to live poorly, wholly dependent on alms. If they had enough in the house to support them for the day, they were not to accept anything else on that day, or send anyone out for alms. He wished them to have modest houses and poor clothing. Even the vestments in church were not to be made of silk; his desire was that they be of buckram or some other cheap cloth.

The brethren were not to involve themselves in temporal affairs, nor interfere in the management and care of the house—ex-

cept those who had charge of this. His desire was that all the rest be constantly intent on study, prayer or preaching. When he found a brother who could preach well, he did not want any other assignment given him. Whether the brethren were out on their journeys or in the house, he wanted them to speak only of God or the salvation of souls. The witness never heard Dominic himself speak an idle or harmful word of detraction. He noted all these things, for he lived with Brother Dominic day and night—thus he saw him speaking and acting. He was much occupied in his devotion and faithfulness to preaching and the hearing of confessions. When he preached, he often wept, moving his hearers to tears also.

At the time of the first chapter of the Friars Preachers in Bologna, Brother Dominic said to the brethren: "I am only worthy to be deposed, for I am useless and remiss." He humbled himself greatly in all things. Although the brethren would not remove him, they satisfied him by selecting certain deputies.¹¹ While the chapter met, these would have power over him and the entire chapter to institute, define and impose legislation.

When he was sick with the illness which caused his death, the brethren were standing around him weeping. The witness supported his head with a towel and wiped the sweat from his face. Dominic said, "Do not cry, for I shall be more useful to you where I am going than I could ever be here." Asked about those present, the witness replied that many of the brethren were there, but he could not remember their names.

Then one of the brethren had asked Dominic, "Father, where do you want your body buried?" He answered, "Under the feet of the brethren." The witness feels certain that Brother Dominic died when the brothers, who were reciting the prayers for the commendation of his soul, were saying the words: "Oh saints of God, come to help him, oh angels of the Lord, come to meet him; take his soul and offer it in the sight of the Most High." All of this happened in one of the cells at St. Nicholas.

The witness never saw him sleep on a featherbed or any kind of mattress, except when he died—he was lying on a mattress. When Brother Dominic was at the point of death, he said to the brethren: "Prepare yourselves." They went and made ready. Then, while they were saying the prayers for a departing soul, he raised his hands toward heaven and died.

The witness himself dug the grave, procured the stone slab which was placed over the tomb, and made the wooden casket for the body. He himself put the body in the casket, fastened the top with

iron nails, and diligently guarded it until it was buried.¹² No kind of drug or aromatic substance was placed in the coffin or the grave. This could not have been done without the witness seeing it, for he was the procurator of the house and everything was carried out according to his orders.

He was among those who opened the first grave of Brother Dominic, when the body was transferred to where it now lies. Using an iron sledge, he loosened the wall of the tomb, which was very strong and constructed with firm and durable cement. He then had to use an iron bar to raise the top stone, for the tomb was enclosed with very large stones sealed together with cement. (He himself had deliberately built it this way in the first place, so that no one could steal the body.) When he raised the stone top with the iron bar, thus opening the tomb, a sweet, delightful and strong, or rather, very powerful aroma, although unidentifiable to him, rose from the grave. The witness does not think it was similar to the smell of any aromatic spices. The odor was so powerful that in no drug shop or any place had he ever experienced anything like the strength and quality of this aroma. The same fact was acknowledged by all those present—the bishops and clerics, the Podesta of Bologna and many distinguished townsmen, who had been guarding the grave.

For many days afterwards, the fragrance lingered in the first grave, on things placed in it, and adhered to the clothing and hands of those who touched it. To this very day, the bones of Brother Dominic retain the aroma. The witness bases his testimony on what he saw and touched with his own hands, for he was there.

(To be continued)

Footnotes

¹ The reader is referred to Part I in the March issue of *Dominicana* for details regarding the institution and development of the process of canonization in the thirteenth century.

² Altaner, p. 28; Vicaire, p. 221.

³ At Bologna, Italy, in 1233; cf. *Dominicana*, March, 1957, pp. 28ff.

⁴ Cf. Altaner, pp. 28-9, for the slight discrepancy in the chronology.

⁵ When a novice makes his profession, he holds the book of the Constitutions of the Order. The receiving prelate then clasps the hand of the novice. The latter pronounces his vows of religion, taken according to the legislation contained in the Constitutions.

⁶ Brother John asked Master Dominic for traveling expenses. Dominic refused, telling him they should go as the disciples of Christ—not carrying any money, for nothing would ever be wanting to those who fear God. Lacking Dominic's pure faith, Brother John would not obey. In his great kindness, Dom-

inic gave him the money, but he wept in doing so. Cf. *MOPH*, XXII, p. 155.

⁷ The troubles of this Order necessitated numerous interventions of the Holy See and the action of ten popes. The disputes were characterized by actions such as occurred in one monastery: The laybrothers imprisoned the prior and elected one of themselves as superior. The difficulties were well-known throughout Europe and were popularized in song and legend. Cf. Mulhern, pp. 25ff.

⁸ St. Dominic was a canon of the cathedral chapter in Osma, Spain before founding his own Order. The canons mentioned here were probably the companions of Dominic at that early stage of his life in Spain.

⁹ Altaner, pp. 30ff; Balme, vol. II, pp. 263ff; Vicaire, p. 225. Cf. Gerard de Frachet, pp. 9ff., for certain prophecies and miracles related by Rudolph.

¹⁰ Blessed Jordan of Saxony was elected to succeed St. Dominic when the latter died.

¹¹ They are officially entitled *diffinitores*.

¹² A description of the first tomb by a modern scholar can be found in the article, "Le sepulture e le varie translazioni del corpo di S. Domenico," by Father A. D'Amato, in the work, *Le reliquie di San Domenico*, Bologna, 1946, p. 5.

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THE APOSTLE OF CHRIST

... those who are to be the ministers and apostles of Christ should be solidly and perfectly trained and exercised in the spirit and apostolic virtues of their model, Christ Himself. They should have an ardent and absolutely pure zeal for promoting the glory of God, an actual and burning charity for the Church—for protecting her rights, for safeguarding and spreading her doctrine; a consuming zeal for seeking the salvation of souls, a supernatural prudence in speaking and acting, joined to an evangelical simplicity; a humble denial of self and a most reverent subjection to one's teachers, an invincible trust in God and an acute consciousness of one's duty; a firm skill in beginning works and constancy in finishing them, a careful fidelity in carrying out one's duties, and a magnanimous spirit in acting and in suffering; finally a Christian graciousness and humanity which attracts all.

POPE PIUS XII

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