

THE MARKS OF THE CHURCH IN THE ORDER OF PREACHERS

The Catholic Church, the true and only spouse of Christ, has ever exercised a potent and lasting influence for good upon the destinies of countries, communities and individuals. Every century has produced its saints, its martyrs and its scholars, who, enchanted by the beauty of her doctrines, and the charity of her purpose, have astounded the world by the exuberance of that zeal which she is known to engender. Among the countless numbers of this happy category, not the least conspicuous is our beloved Saint Dominic.

From his earliest youth Dominic nurtured a peculiar love for this "unspotted spouse," which increased with time. Thus in those early years of his life, whether we regard him as a talented student, or a zealous canon, there is discernible that unmistakable love of her precepts, and that untiring study of her beauties that signalized his earthly career, and nominated him in death as "lumen ecclesiae," a light of the Church.

The Church is one. That marvelous fact which is a living miracle of her divine sanction, wherein her members of diverse countries, languages, and ideals, are exercised in the profession of the one true faith, participating of the selfsame sacraments, and conscientiously submitting in matters of faith and morals to their one, visible, head on earth, the Pope. I pray that they may be one as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee; that they also may be one in us (John 17, 20, 21).

The Church is holy. Founded primarily and essentially by the God of holiness, whose seven holy sacraments and pure doctrines are universal channels opened to all peoples and inviting them without distinction to participate, that they may live and die like so many millions of her children, in holiness. "Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev. 19, 2).

The Church is catholic or universal. The Church of Christ knows no selfish restriction. She was and is intended for all nations, for all times. She inhabits highways and byways of all civilized nations and is ever penetrating with faith and virtue the snows, or the heats, or the forests of remote lands in search of the wanderers, until she shelters all sheep as Christ foretold in the one true fold." "From the rising of the sun to the going



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down thereof My name is great among the Gentiles and in EVERY place there is a sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation" (Mal. 1, 11).

The Church is Apostolic. Foremost in the maintaining of faith and order within the pale, is the Primacy. St. Peter was the first recipient of its power. "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed in heaven." Following St. Peter as authoritative representatives of Christ and in unbroken procession through internal and external trials, two hundred and sixty Popes have come down the ages, built as colossal stones around the first rock, Peter. Oppositions, heresies, persecutions, were, are, and shall be but confirmations of Christ's dictum, "and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Thus in the promised perpetuity of the Papacy, Christendom shall ever possess a paramount figure to exhort, enlighten and guide its morality, and the consummation of the world alone shall be the veritable sign of its cessation here upon earth, but of its eternal continuance "where trials shall be no more."

This, then, is the fundament of the Church's dignity and the scope of her mission, to gather to the Father all exiled children wandering in this "vale of tears," and to prepare them by her counsels for an everlasting beatitude, when death, the loving beckon of that Father, summons.

At the time of St. Dominic—the thirteenth century—the Church suffered no little anxiety from the state of corruption existing in France and Italy. The Albigensian heresy with its opprobrious cult, the indifferent state of the clergy, the general falling away from Christian ideals, and the susceptibility of the ignorant minds of many of the faithful to the false and pernicious doctrines then so rampant, pleaded vividly for reformation. These dangers appealed to our Saint with all the reality of their awfulness. Now, indeed, was the opportune moment, and now did he draw from the "spouse of Christ" his inspiration that would counteract those present interruptions of her progress. He would found an Order bearing like herself its four distinctive marks, distinguish it by a complex life of Cloister and University, and train its members to champion fearlessly the cause of Christendom against the intruding opponents of all times.

His first step, therefore, centered itself towards the attainment of unity. This he sought in government. The characteristic form of religious discipline of those days and in fact of anterior times, was to be found in the monarchical type of the abbey. Each monastery or abbey was distinct and independent from all others, even of the same Order, and its sole superior was the abbot, who had the episcopal power of ordaining, and who ruled the community until death. Dominic's aims superseded this restrictive affiliation into a more broad and democratic range, and in the main sought a universal unity. His representative working unit would be the priory, and its superior—the Prior—would be invested with a triennial jurisdiction. He would collocate these priories into provinces, supervised by another superior—the Provincial—whose authority would embrace a period of four years. At the head of all, would be the Master-General, governing the entire Order for a period of twelve years.

St. Dominic realized full well that the maintenance of unity consisted essentially in a love of God cojoined with a sincere fraternal love, and that this charity must be sustained by holiness. Consequently he would found his monastic life upon the rule of St. Augustine; embrace the three evangelical counsels; enjoin an exactitude in penitential discipline; further praise to God through the chanting of the Divine Office; **nurture a love** for silence; and draw up his rule of which future generations could write: "Its adaptability to the work of saving souls, its democratic suppleness and sensible spirituality has ever been the admiration of all legislators, even of such men as Machiavelli and Cavour, who had little love for anything Catholic. It has made every Dominican convent a free city of the soul for those who voluntarily chain themselves to Christ."

The insistent remedies of the present did not wholly influence Dominic to establish an Order that would merely harmonize with the Middle Ages. His foresightedness embraced its adaptability to every nation and of all times. Hence he would mould his members into a religious body adept in a superior philosophy and a superb theology. He would not, moreover, standardize a mode of life, which his members must monotonously live, rather he would allow them the natural bent of their minds and the means to perfect their inclinations by sanctifying their talents. Furthermore the field of labor would be immense. They were not to remain in the vicinity of their foundation, but must

journey to foreign countries, to all lands, and seek in the pulpit, in the university and in the arts the accomplishment of his ecclesiastical ideal, the "Salvation of Souls."

Dominic's pattern now stood in a certain degree analogous to its divine and superior exemplar, the Church, though it was still wanting in one particular, Apostolicity. Yet if on one hand it could not claim this divine right, it was not on the other to be deprived of Apostolic recognition. For we read that while our holy founder was in Rome, Sts. Peter and Paul appeared to him there, presenting him with a staff and book of Gospels and bidding him and his followers to preach. This fact and the subsequent sanction of Honorius III, constituted the approbation of his Order to the Apostolate. From henceforth they were to enjoy the distinction of universal preachers, to declaim in the name of the Church against vice, and exhort in her name all sinners to penance and charity. Previously Bishops alone maintained the office of preaching; now this new "Order of Preachers" would be the first of its kind to labor with them in the apostolate.

Thus his masterpiece was formed. Religious critics were taken aback at its daring boldness, many indeed prophesied for it a short life, while the Pope himself refused, until a heavenly vision urged him, to approve of its mission. But in the heart of Dominic not a single doubt of its genuineness was latent. Man might scoff, God's designs were indestructible.

No encomium is needed to inform us of the success of St. Dominic's ideals; time is its vivid clarion. The Church, the state, morality, have each in their turn felt the helping hand of Dominic's Order through the ages. And why? Because it has lived in the marks of the Church the purpose of its founder.

Few, if any, religious societies can boast of a seven centenary unity, devoid of all schisms or petty divisions. This is one of the glories of the Friars Preachers. For seven hundred years they have been united with a "unity of will in discipline and obedience and a unity of intelligence in doctrine and truth"; supporting zealously each forthcoming General's aims to glorify God; preserving the constitutions, which have come down unchanged in their pristine purity of St. Dominic to our own day; delving into and defending from every contaminating source of error, the incomparable works of their greatest son, St. Thomas Aquinas. But if the brotherly union is so distinctly manifest, much more

so is the unifying link which binds the Order to Mother Church. "In the arduous post of Papal Theologian or Master of the Sacred Palace—an office created for St. Dominic by Honorius III and still in the keeping of the Order—the best theological minds have exercised a hidden but potent influence on the Church." The Order has furnished the Church with four Popes, ninety Cardinals, more than five hundred Archbishops, and over three thousand Bishops. A still further concrete example of its loyalty to the Holy See is given us in the untiring efforts of St. Raymond of Pennafort, St. Vincent Ferrer, Blessed John Dominic and St. Catherine of Sienna; or again in the Friars' inflexible stand for the Popes during the Great Schism of the West. Ever has the Order of Preachers been "careful to keep the unity of the spirit and bond of peace."

The Dominican life, as has already been mentioned, embraces the twofold character of monasticism and of the apostolate. "*Contemplata aliis tradere*," to give to others the fruits of meditation is its constitutional bedrock. Thus in the acquisition of holiness; the set periods of meditation; the choral obligation of chanting the Divine Office, the highest and noblest form of praise that can be rendered to God by mere man; the indispensable rule of temporary silence; the sanctification of the studies; the glowing manifestations of Eucharistic reverence; the protective knight-hoods of the Blessed Sacrament, Holy Name, and Rosary; the tangible and constantly assured protection of the Immaculate Mother of God, are some of the perennial sources of merit and encouragement which are ever accessible to all, and the acceptance of which depends upon the free will and sincerity of the individual. It is precisely these spiritual aids that have modelled in the spirit of our Holy Father his thirteen children, honored by the Church as saints; nearly three hundred blessed; one hundred and thirty-five stigmatized members, of whom one is living today, as well as the host of mystics led on by Blessed Henry Suso, Ekart, Tauler and Venerable Louis of Granada. It is the effect of a perfect compliance with the rule, that has sent thousands of brethren to the various foreign mission fields; that has given no less than thirty thousand members the palm of martyrdom; that has for seven hundred years animated thousands with a love of Christ, who if they did not actually reach the degree of sanctity requisite for canonization, have at least surmounted the difficult barricades

to holiness, and have left by their singular piety, a jealous heritage to the younger generation of Dominicans.

In the Bull of Confirmation issued by Honorius III, the prophetic phrase referring to the brethren as "athletes of faith and true lights of the world," contains the duplex universality of the Order; that of its inner life; and that of its progress. So numerous are the means of saving souls and so faithfully does the Order comply with its demands through the cultivation of individualism, that it has ever maintained a most prominent place in preaching, teaching, sacred and profane sciences, literature, painting, architecture, music and other arts. Thus during the course of seven ages it has been the function of the Friars Preachers as "the light of the world," to have illuminated the darkened pathways and to have penetrated every region of civilized territory, and to have divulged many secrets of God's mercy to man. Only eight years after the death of St. Dominic, the Order could claim 21 Provinces, and 562 Convents situated in Europe and extending as far as Greece and the Holy Land. Today there are 54 Provinces spread throughout every known part of the world.

The Apostolate and its means of saving souls is multifarious. We shall here but consider its vital ingredient, Preaching. In the first place it must be noticed that Christ's mandate, "Go and preach," was not directed to or intended for His seventy-two disciples, but ONLY to the twelve Apostles. As Bishops are the legitimate successors of the Apostles, this sacred office was in turn transmitted to them. Preaching was and is a revered office. "It is not reason that we should leave the Word of God." "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the MINISTRY OF THE WORD" (Acts of the Apostles, 6, 2-4). Again it is worthy of notice that the words of Christ's commission to His Apostles, "Go and preach," were the selfsame words repeated by Sts. Peter and Paul to Dominic, "Go and preach." Hence it was an especial distinction bestowed upon his Order, and his Order has indeed proven its capabilities to so sacred a trust. To cite but a few instances. Who of men have equalled the medieval zeal and eloquence of a Vincent Ferrer, a Louis Bertrand or of still more modern times, of a Lacordaire, a Monsabre, a Didon, a Lombrado, or yet of our own times, of a Burke, or of a McKenna?

What a mission, then, is the Dominican's! That black and white uniformed Legion of Preachers; their only weapons the Cross and Chain of Roses, whose truths coming from the heart of Mary, filling the sin-stained soul with grief; joining heaven to earth for the repentant—as they come down the ages realizing the ideal of their founder, fulfilling the words of the Saviour, "Preach the Gospel to every creature."

—Bro. Dominic Morris, O. P.

A MORNING IDYL

Dawn like a rose has come,
And softly one by one,
The petals pink unfold,
Revealing purest gold,
The saffron sun.

Flown is the sable night
And dainty blossoms bright
The meadows trip along;
O hark, the birds in song
Upwing their flight!

Arise then, let us go
Where woodland breezes blow,
And bless each joyous thing,
And lift our hearts to Him,
Who made it so!

—Bro. Gregory Herold, O. P.