

THE MIRACLES OF SAINT DOMINIC

When a legate is sent by his sovereign to a foreign court, he is provided with certain credentials intended to substantiate the authority which he has received. Should he lack these, his power would not be recognized and his mission would be fruitless. This is a universal law which men have enacted to govern their dealings with other men, and holds good not only in governmental proceedings, but in all intercourse of man with his fellows. Now the all wise God, when communicating with his creatures, adapts Himself, as is befitting, to their requirements. Consequently, when He desires to manifest His Divine Will to men, He often selects from their number some one who will act as His delegate in the matter. These delegates of God we have named saints. In order that we may recognize the authority of the saints, God has given them certain credentials which prove, beyond all fear of doubt, that their mission is approved by Him. Now in just what do these testimonials consist? They are the miracles, those sensible effects produced by God outside of the order of all created nature, which being above the power of all creatures, have to be admitted as coming directly from the Creator.

Saint Dominic, as we know, was a man called by God to carry out a special work ordained by Providence. But he was not sent empty handed into the world lacking the signs of divine approval, for in that case few would have heeded him and his message, and we of today should never have heard of our Saint. But God affixed His seal to the works of Dominic in such a way that no sane and right minded man could doubt their authenticity, with the result that his deeds have remained, and his mission has been handed down to his children. What were these miracles of Dominic that so moved the world? Time and time again they have been recorded, but we can never tire of hearing of such things, and so the purpose of this article is but to recall them to our memory.

In the order of nature, the advent of a great storm may be known by the unusual signs which precede it; its duration is attended by awesome happenings and after its passage the heavens are adorned in majestic splendor, as if to remind us of the glory of Him whom the storms obey. So too, it seems, was the life of St. Dominic. Before his birth his future greatness

was made known to his parents in a miraculous manner; his life was replete with marvelous events, and after his death his place of rest was rendered glorious by innumerable favors from on high. We dare not attempt to transcribe in detail all the many miracles wrought to attest the sanctity of our Holy Father, for such a treatment would require many volumes. Rather shall we select a few from each of the periods mentioned above, in an attempt to show that St. Dominic was in the fullest sense of the word, an accredited ambassador of God.

The prodigies which occurred before the birth of our Saint, though not to be attributed immediately to him, nevertheless are deserving of a place in this treatise, as being antecedent signs of his subsequent greatness. His mother, Blessed Jané of Aza, was favored with a mysterious vision of a dog bearing in his mouth a burning torch which set the world on fire, as if to indicate the power which her offspring would possess over the hearts of men. His god-mother, as she held the child at the baptismal font, perceived a brilliant star gleaming on his forehead fortelling anew, that the infant was to be employed by the Master in an especial manner. Nor did these prophetic events lack fulfillment, as a further study of Dominic's career will reveal.

Languedoc, the opening scene in the ministry of our Saint, was privileged to behold some of the first confirmations of his divine mission. Dominic's labors were rapidly progressing and the time was ripe for the appearance of some unmistakeable sign of heavenly approbation. The people of this region had long since ceased to respect the commandments of God and His Church, and had become especially lax in the matter of Sunday observance. On the twenty-fourth of June in the year 1206, Dominic was wending his way towards Montreal when he chanced to perceive a group of peasants busy gathering in their harvest. He stopped and sternly rebuked them for working on a day of rest, but in a defiant and threatening manner, he was told that the harvest must be reaped, and that it should be done without the interference of any priest. They continued their work stopping to glance ever and anon, in a hostile manner, at the silent man of God. Suddenly they noticed that the sheaves were all stained with blood. Terror seized them, and realizing their sin, they fled in dismay. Thus was the divine will manifested from the very beginning of Dominic's apostolate among the Albigenses. Here too, on another occasion, was wrought

the miracle still spoken of as the "miracle of the storm," by which the saint, through prayer, averted a disastrous storm which had threatened the crops of some pious farmers.

Perhaps the most famous of all the miracles of this period, is that of the ordeal by fire, which took place at Fanjeaux. It was a part of St. Dominic's plan to enter into public disputations with the heretics that he might in this way reach a greater number of people. At Fanjeaux the arbitrators could not agree, and to settle the affair, it was decided that the books of the contending parties should be cast into the flames so that God, by His intervention, might declare which cause He favored. "Accordingly," the chronicler tells us, "a great fire was ignited and the two volumes were cast therein; that of the heretics was immediately consumed to ashes; the other, which had been written by the blessed man of God, Dominic, not only remained unhurt, but was borne far away by the flames in the presence of the whole assembly. Again, a second and a third time they threw it into the fire, and each time the same result clearly manifested which was the true faith, and the holiness of him who had written the book."

All of these miracles are abundantly vouched for by writers of that time, and yet it seems that the hearts of the heretics had been so hardened that these evident signs from heaven produced but little effect. They would not believe, and as in the case of Christ Himself, such signs and miracles were but thrown away.

In the pages which narrate the life of our Saint after his departure from Languedoc, miracles follow in rapid succession. Previous to his coming to Rome, Dominic had played but a minor role, and the world at large, had caught only a few hasty and imperfect glimpses of his labor. Now, however, events unrolled apace until at length there stood revealed, those details which made clear to mankind the supernatural character of his mission. Now, if ever, was it imperative that God should interfere in the proceedings and confirm the teachings and the authority of His Saint by extraordinary occurrences. Many refused to give credence to all that he taught; some even went so far as to style him a fanatic, so that for a time the success of his work hung in the balance. But God did not fail His servant. He was pleased with Dominic's labors and displayed His pleasure on many occasions by prodigies of a most remarkable kind.

One of the most hallowed spots in all Dominican tradition is the ancient convent of San Sisto, the first foundation of the Order in the Eternal City, and the scene of several of our father's most wonderful miracles. We shall mention but a handful of these which stand out as the greatest among the great. While the new convent was being remodeled to accommodate the needs of the youthful community, it chanced that one of the masons at work in the crypt, was killed by an enormous mass of earth and stone which fell upon him. The horrified friars, upon hearing the sad news hastened to the spot and after extricating the mangled body, summoned St. Dominic. The holy man hurried to the scene of the accident; knelt by the side of the unfortunate workman, and earnestly prayed that God would give back to him the life which had been so suddenly snatched away. His prayer was immediately answered, and the man who had been dead, arose to his feet and resumed his labors as if nothing had happened. This news inflamed the interest of all Rome and won for San Sisto many friends and supporters.

During the work of construction, the Saint did not cease to carry on his task of preaching in the many churches of the city. One day as he was returning from San Marco, he was met at the door of the chapter room by a lady bearing in her arms a dead infant. This lady had been present at the sermon in San Marco and upon reaching her home had found that her child had died during her absence. She did not give way to vain grief, but taking the baby in her arms carried him to the convent of the Friars. Laying the infant at the feet of St. Dominic, she threw herself on the ground and tearfully besought him to restore life to the little body. Dominic, deeply touched, turned away for a moment in silent prayer. Then he made the sign of the cross over the babe, grasped its tiny hand and restored it safe and sound to its overjoyed mother.

Not long after this event, the procurator, one of the most necessary men of the community, upon whom the others relied for their sustenance, was seized with a deadly illness and lay dying after receiving the last sacraments. But "Father Dominic, the ever-pitiful, deeply moved by the affliction of his children," dismissed the brethren who were praying at the sick man's bed side, and in the words of the old historian, "by fervent prayer, stayed with power the departing soul." Great was the rejoicing of the friars, and indeed, the rejoicing of the whole city,

at this miracle, and as a result, many were induced to listen to the preaching of the humble missionaries.

These three miracles, together with that of the restoration to life of the young Napoleon, which occurred not long afterwards, are generally reckoned as among the greatest of the wonders worked by our Saint, but there are countless others, many of which have never been set down in the annals of the Order. Undoubtedly, the most beautiful of all the manifestations of the divine protection and favor which ever attended the labors of Dominic, was the multiplication of the loaves which took place in the Convent of San Sisto. Poverty was the general rule with the friars and it often happened that they were forced to do without their meals for days at a time. It was a custom each morning to send some of the brethren out into the city in quest of alms, for the community had no regular revenues and lived from day to day on what they could beg in the streets. One day, the brothers who had been sent on this errand, were returning without alms of any sort, when they encountered a good woman who gave them a loaf of bread, saying she could not bear to see them go home empty-handed. Shortly afterwards they met a youth "of gracious and beautiful countenance," who asked them for charity; and the friars, though it meant that they would again have to forego their meal, gave him the loaf of bread and continued their journey home. When dinner time came, the Holy Father bade their brethren to assemble in the refectory in the usual manner. They obeyed, and seating themselves at the table bowed their heads in prayer. Suddenly there appeared two youths of most marvellous beauty, laden with loaves of bread which they placed before the astonished religious, starting with the youngest. Then St. Dominic dispatched one of the brothers to the wine cask, which, though previously empty, was now found to be filled with a wine of celestial flavor. For three days they lived on this heaven-sent food, and on the fourth day gave what was left to the poor. This same miracle is recorded to have taken place twice at Rome and twice at Bologna, and at Bologna they received figs in addition to the loaves. The friar who made oath concerning this to Pope Gregory IX, added that "they had never tasted better figs." Thus, then, at this critical moment in the history of the Order, did the Lord "multiply the marvels of His omnipotence and goodness" as if to "fully accredit in the eyes of all, the mission of His faithful and fearless servant."

As in the case of every other true saint of God, the solicitude of Dominic for his fellow mortals, did not cease with his death. Throngs of the faithful flocked to his humble resting-place and numerous were the divine favors and prodigies which were showered upon the patrons of the lowly friar preacher. His brethren were strengthened by the intercession of their Father and many were the graces poured out upon his clients. But so great was the simplicity and modesty of his children that many of his most wondrous works have never been committed to writing, and so we of the ages following St. Dominic, have been deprived of the pleasure of hearing the true extent of his power.

This brief and incomplete account of the works of the holy founder of our Order, does not pretend to be an exhaustive treatment of all the miracles which are attributed to him. On the contrary, some of his most widely celebrated prodigies have been purposely omitted as being unnecessary to establish the thesis which we set out to prove. We wished to show beyond all question of doubt that Dominic was an accredited ambassador from God. To do this, the relation of one well authenticated miracle would have sufficed; for every such event, since it surpasses the power of all created nature, manifests the direct intervention of the Lord of Creation, and is, as it were, His Divine seal which He affixes to the teaching of His saints. St. Dominic truly possessed this seal of the Almighty, as we have abundantly shown, and so he has justly merited to be received and recognized in the lowly courts of mortal men, as a grace-bearing legate from the throne of the Sovereign of all.

Authorities—"Life of St. Dominic," Mother Drane; "In St. Dominic's Country," C. M. Antony; "Dominican Year Book for 1913—San Sisto Vecchio," by C. M. Antony.

—Bro. Paul Doane, O. P.