

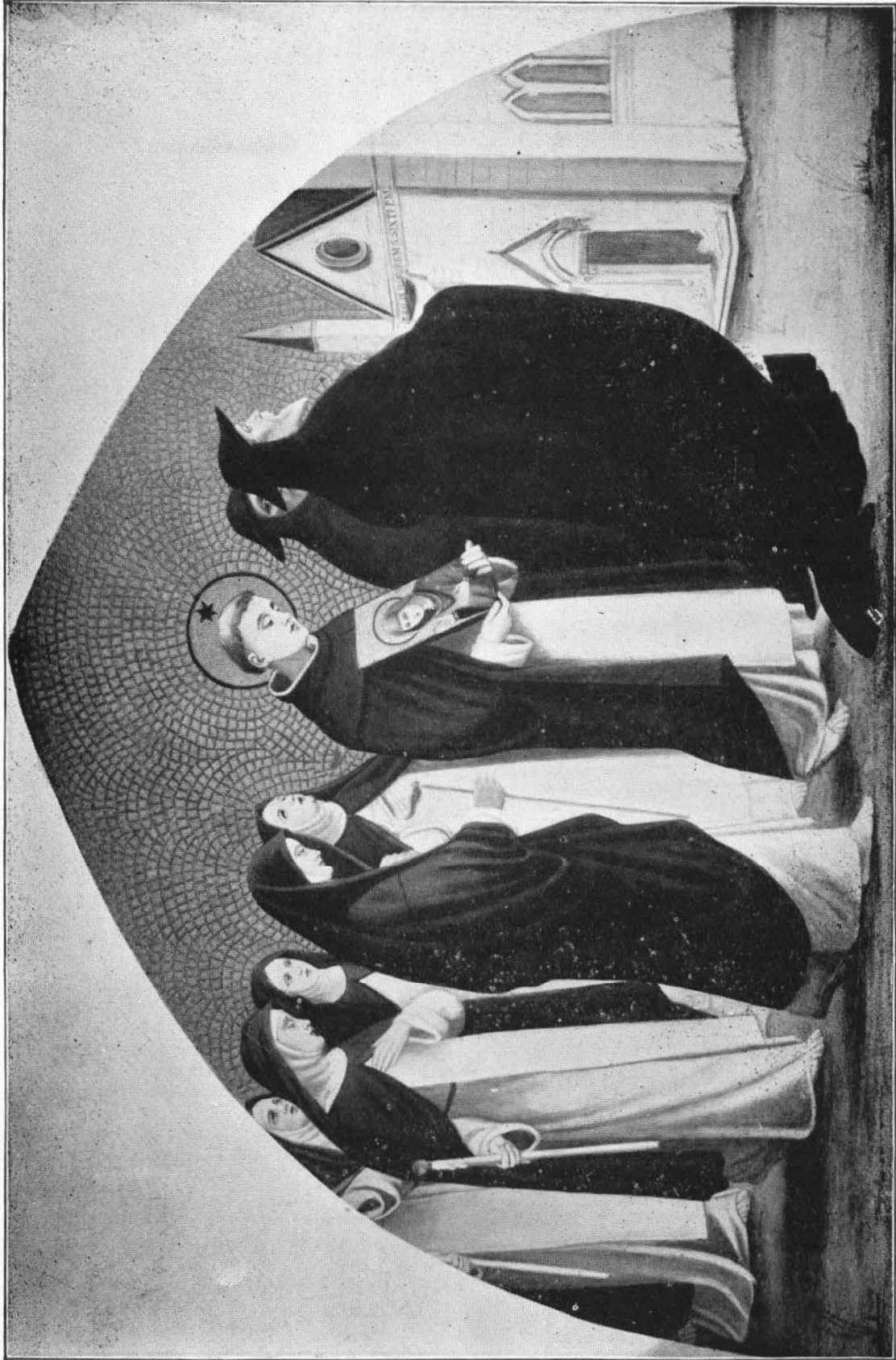
NEW LIGHTS ON THE ROSARY

In a series of articles which appeared recently in "La Ciencia Tomista" and "El Santisimo Rosario," the author, the Very Reverend Louis A. Getino, O. P., S. T. M., says that he believes he has found unmistakable references to the Rosary in early writings, particularly in an old thirteenth century work entitled the "Nine Modes of Prayer of St. Dominic," written by the German Dominican Gerard in cooperation with his confrere, Theodor of Apoldia.

Just as the rose does not spring full blown on the bush but passes through gradual shadings of growth and development, so too in Mary's garden of prayer we must expect a certain evolution in the Rosary. Father Getino recognizes this and tells us that if we seek in the documents of the thirteenth century for a devotion precisely as we have it today; that is, for the determined number of Our Fathers and Hail Marys, the fixed mysteries to be meditated upon, and the material counter or beads, we might as well search "a mediaeval museum for a gun or motor such as we are familiar with in our day." Even the name "Rosary" was not officially approved until the year 1476.

Our endeavor will be to indicate how the Hail Mary, so little used before the time of St. Dominic, was practised and inculcated by him; to point out that the early Dominicans knew and recited it; that a preference for fifty and its multiples is found in the first state of this devotion, and that meditation accompanied the multiple recital of Mary's prayer. Toward this end we will utilize neither the authority of the Sovereign Pontiffs, who continually affirm St. Dominic's authorship of Mary's beads, nor the constant tradition handed down from century to century, but rather the documents of that particular age.

The essential elements of the Rosary are the prayers, the Our Father and Hail Mary, their multiple recitation on a basis of fifty, and the accompanying meditations. The Our Father offers no difficulty, for it is well established that it was used prior to the time of the Founder of the Dominican Order (1170-1221). Its use was popular, for in the twelfth century we find cords with knots or other devices to number the recitation of this prayer taught by Christ. With the Hail Mary the case is quite different. Previous to the thirteenth century the Hail



First Rosary Procession

Mary was little practised, although examples of its recitation are not wanting. Even when this invocation became widespread, the custom of adding the "Holy Mary, Mother of God," etc., was not made general until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, before this time the Pontiffs had several times attributed the Rosary to St. Dominic and granted to it indulgences which might be obtained without that which now goes to make up its last part. The Holy Name, Jesus, seems to have been added in the middle of the thirteenth century. The interspersions of "Glory be to the Father," etc., varied in the primitive times of the Rosary.

The able Spanish Father gives a list of those pious persons who are known to have used the Angelic Salutation in the twelfth century, the century immediately preceding that in which St. Dominic lived. In our limited space we can give but two. St. Peter Damian named a religious who offered this prayer daily. Reynald of Clairvaux found comfort in repeating it during his life. However, his research has made evident that the recitation of Mary's prayer did not enjoy that diffused popularity which we find in the next century. It was not used at the beginning of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin (as was done soon afterwards by the Dominicans); the learning of it was not ordered in the synodal statutes; devotion to it was not mentioned in the lives of St. Norbert, St. Anselm, St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Hildegard or St. Bernard, in spite of their great veneration for the Mother of God; it does not appear to have been imposed upon religious, secular priests or the laymen who did not recite the Divine Office, as Mabillon indicates. The homilies of the Fathers and the canons of the Councils very frequently advised the recital of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed, but the Hail Mary does not seem to be recommended until the end of the twelfth century—and then only once. This single recommendation of general character relative to the learning of the Hail Mary is contained in a letter of the Bishop of Paris to his priests dated 1198. Half a century later this injunction was widely extended and copied literally in other dioceses of France, Spain, Belgium and England. But this half century coincides with the public life of St. Dominic and his first disciples and with his endeavor to implant the multiple recitation of the Hail Mary in a simple form, a form which the authority of the

Church finally crystallized into that preferred by her and which was called Garland, Crown, Psalter of Mary, Pater Noster of the Virgin, Rosary. This last mentioned title was the most fortunate of all.

If, then, the recitation of the Hail Mary was not used to any great extent in the twelfth century; if St. Dominic practised it and ordered it in his legislation; if his first children practised it far more than the rest of the people and even far more than the other religious families, it is to this source we must look for the center of a devotion which might have many different forms until the Church chose the most preferable, and which has its essence in the systematic repetition of the Our Father and Hail Mary combined with meditations.

From the writings of the Dominican Friar Bonvis, from those of a Balvacensian author, and from the "Nine Modes of Prayer of St. Dominic," all documents of the thirteenth century, we can learn the manner of praying to our Lady used by the Holy Founder and his first children.

The Dominican Friar and Belvacensian writer mentioned above tell us of the Holy Patriarch's love for the Mother of God as expressed in his "singing of the Ave Maris Stella" and his "imploping the condescension of the Divine Mercy and that of the Queen of Mercy, Mary most holy, to whom he had entrusted the care of his Order." The Dominican author of the "Nine Modes of Prayer" (who conversed with the first disciples of the Saint, especially Blessed Cecilia, whom St. Dominic had received into the Order) makes known the fact that St. Dominic "meditated, finding comfort in a kneeling posture." Again, "he began to rise and genuflect." These significant words conclude the quotation from the "Modes of Prayer": "this manner of praying he taught his disciples by example rather than by words."

The religious so instructed reveal what the nature of those prayers were in the words of Galvanus de la Flamma: "Having recited the above-mentioned devotions to the Blessed Virgin, some genuflected a hundred, others two hundred times during the day and recited the same number of Hail Marys." Gerard de Frachet in his "Vitae Fratrum," compiled about the middle of the thirteenth century, relates that "after Matins and Compline they (the friars) went to the altar of the Virgin and there, with

a remarkable devotion, commended themselves and their Order to our Lady, whilst they sometimes encircled her altar in three groups."

Father Getino cites further examples of this manner and form of prayer among members of the three branches of the Dominican family. He relates that in the earliest extant treatise on prayer for the use of the Dominican Novices we find the Hail Mary added to other prayers and terminating psalms and versicles. The General Chapter of the Order held in 1266, admonished the Lay Brothers "always to add the Hail Mary to the Our Father of their Office"; the Provincial Chapter of Burdeos in the year 1257, decreed that "the Hail Mary should be said separately and in one tone." For the Nuns of the Order, as is learned from an ancient document in the Convent of St. Dominic the Royal at Madrid (founded by Dominic himself), we find a multiple recitation of Our Fathers and Hail Marys prescribed. The Dominican Sister, Stephana Ferrete, offered 150 every day, accompanying her prayers with genuflections or the *venia*; that is, the prostration made in a spirit of humility.

Bl. Raymond of Capua narrates that the "Holy Founder imposed on the members of the Militia of Jesus Christ (as the Dominican Third Order was first known), a certain number of Our Fathers and Hail Marys to be said in place of the Canonical Hours whenever they assisted at the Divine Office." From a bull of Pope Gregory, dated May 24, 1235, (just fourteen years after the death of St. Dominic) we learn that these were "seven Our Fathers for each hour of the Divine Office, and seven Hail Marys for each hour of the Office of our Lady." This is the first ecclesiastical regulation to be found wherein the recitation of the Hail Mary is prescribed; it is the first garland, the first official Rosary which the Church commands to be offered to Mary. Also the rule of the Beguines, dated 1234, a year previous to the bull of Gregory IX, relates that each Beguine "ought to recite each day three garlands which are called the Psalter of the Blessed Virgin." This rule is more significant when we consider that the Beguines of Ghent were under the direction of the Dominicans from their foundation.

That attachment to the Hail Mary was not confined to the members of the Order and those intimately associated with it, but gradually had been popularized by some force or organiza-

tion is learned from the songs of the thirteenth century and the old popular romances. Valeri Serra in his recent work entitled "Folklore of the Rosary" begins with the famous "Joys of the Rosary" (which he attributes to Boniface Ferrer, 1355-1417), a brother of the Dominican, St. Vincent Ferrer). Herein, after extolling the joyful mysteries, we read this noteworthy phrase: "You have ordered the Friar Preachers to be the fortunate founders of your Sacred Confraternity." And again, this humble supplication: "Save, O Virgin Mary, the Confreres of the Rosary." A few stanzas from a song of the thirteenth century relate how a cavalier "had solemnly promised to offer a garland to the Virgin every day."

Having seen that the early Dominicans had a special devotion to the Hail Mary and were in a manner its patrons, we naturally want to know whether in this Dominican crusade the number fifty and its multiples was the object of a distinct preference so that the multiple Hail Mary devotion may be regarded as the first epoch of the present Rosary, or did there exist merely an arbitrary combination of Hail Marys; an indefinite series of salutations to the Blessed Mother.

The genuflections which we noticed accompanied the Hail Mary recitation aid us in this matter. Since the "Modes of Prayer" make known that the Saintly Founder "as if absorbed in his peculiar office and singular ministry, resumed his genuflections, and this practise he taught his brethren by example rather than by words," that mode of prayer in use among the Dominicans of the first era may be regarded as a valid argument of the manner in which Dominic practised and taught it "by example rather than by words." When we read in *La Flamma* that some of the first Dominicans genuflected a hundred and others two hundred times, reciting a like number of Hail Marys, we realize how on all sides had been initiated the practice of our Saint, of whom the text states that "he moved in a composed manner but with great agility, again and again rising and genuflecting." It is interesting to note all the other examples cited by the Spanish Provincial to demonstrate the preference for fifty Hail Marys and multiples of fifty. Space permits us to give but a few. A German Dominican Nun, Christina Ebner, as well as Sister Perret of Ruan, daily saluted the Virgin with a hundred Hail Marys; St. Louis, King of France, who was so

devoted to the Order of St. Dominic, prayed fifty Angelic Salutations. Thomas of Cantimpre, a Dominican writer of the thirteenth century, relates a striking story of a worldly young man whose uncle recommended that he salute the Mother of God fifty times each day, and who later admonished his nephew "to honor thy Heavenly Helper continually and sedulously by the thrice fifty Hail Marys." Further on the same author, under the heading "concerning a young man who daily recited the three parts of the Rosary," refers to another youth whom he knew who, in 1251, "daily recited the thrice fifty Hail Marys."

It is evident from these and other examples of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century that a preference was given to fifty and its multiples in the recital of Mary's prayer, although now and then the number does not seem to be strictly determined, as is evident from one case mentioned by Getino. Both facts serve but to confirm a gradual evolution in this period of the popular acclimation of the Hail Mary before the Church put her final seal of approval upon this excellent devotion and determined its set formula.

The far-reaching repetition of these prayers in honor of Mary Immaculate leads us to search for rosary beads. The Spanish Dominican thinks that the first material counters for the Hail Mary were the fingers of the hand and the older Pater Noster strings. Though it is difficult to determine whether the Our Father beads served primarily for praying the Hail Mary, nevertheless Father Getino thinks in many instances it can be discovered. Bernard Guidon testifies that the Dominican friar, Romeo de Llivia (who founded the Convent of Lyons in 1213), "died holding in his hand a cord with knots that served him as a means of counting the thousand Hail Marys he recited daily." We are told that this early Friar Preacher "had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin, whose salutation he never tired of using, bearing in his heart and uttering with his lips the mystery of the Incarnation." This incident is noteworthy for in it we find all the essentials of the present Rosary: we have the Hail Mary said on a multiple of fifty; we have the religious "bearing in his heart the mystery of the Incarnation," which is nothing other than meditation, and finally we have "the cord with knots that served him as a means of counting the thousand Hail Marys he recited daily." It is the first counter exclusively for the Angelic Salutation which history records.

But one is thus led to suppose that similar counters were used by the Dominican Lay Brothers of the thirteenth century (as may be seen in the Acts of the Provincial Chapter of Orvieto held in 1261); by St. Agnes of Multepulciano († 1317), and by other Dominican Nuns of the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries of whom Father Mezard, O. P., speaks in his "Origin of the Rosary." The Spanish author has a list of other persons whom he believes made use of rosary beads. We will mention but two instances. The sepulchre, dating from 1307, of Lady Teresa Gil, a patroness of the Dominican Sisters of Toro, shows her statue and figures of other personages with rosaries suspended from the neck. The statues on the tomb of the Dolphin Humbert, who is known to have purchased precious rosary or counter beads in Rome in 1333, prior to entering the Order of Preachers, are adorned with rosaries having the decades separated by large beads.

As the Rosary is not only a vocal but a mental prayer, we next turn to the meditations which rightly play such a large part in this devotion to Mary as we know it today. Going back seven long centuries we search existing documents for light on this important element of Our Lady's beads. Our reward is encouraging. When St. Dominic commanded that "all the friars should have in their cells an image of the Crucified Saviour and another of the Blessed Virgin"; when he "inclining towards the crucifix, gazed at it with great devotion, kneeling a number of times—even a hundred times, his countenance appearing as though his heart had pierced the heavens," as we read in the "Modes of Prayer"; when "he taught this manner of praying by example rather than by words to his brethren" (who, as we saw in La Flamma's writings, recited the Hail Mary at each genuflection); when the first friars, arranged in three groups around the altar of the Virgin, directed to her a hundred and two hundred Angelic Salutations "with admirable fervor and sighs," as Frachet puts it; when Friar Romea de Llivia, who took delight in its recitation, at the hour of death "bore in his heart the mystery of the Incarnation while he fondly meditated on the Child Jesus and His Mother, Mary"; when St. Elizabeth of Hungary recited the Hail Mary a thousand times in honor of the New Born Babe; when we consider all these facts we can be sure that meditation followed the recitation of Mary's prayer almost "as the shadow after the body."

Moreover, the rule of the Beguines, dated 1234, specifies that "each Beguine should meditate upon some mystery in the life of Christ and His Blessed Mother while reciting the Our Father and the Hail Mary." Father Getino believes that this important and striking injunction was not added at a later date to the rule of the Beguines inasmuch as John Sersanders, in a document dated 1227, bestowing property on a house of the Beguines, requested each member "to recite a Psalter of the Blessed Virgin," which was one of the first names of the Rosary. The practice of the Dominican, Romeo de Llivia, and the admonition contained in the rule of the Beguines are worthy of serious consideration. We could not reasonably expect to find anything more explicit regarding the meditations on the mysteries at a time when the first fruits of the planting of the multiple Hail Mary devotion were only beginning to appear.

The pictures of Fra Angelico and other Dominican artists likewise throw light upon this phase of the Rosary. In the picture by Angelico found in the Louvre we see St. Dominic wrapt in contemplation before the Blessed Virgin, while from his belt there hangs a cord with knots that immediately suggests to us the idea of the Rosary. This cord is found in another picture of the celebrated Dominican painter. Angelico and his brother, Fra Benedetto, delight in picturing St. Dominic in scenes of the life of Jesus and especially those of the Passion. On one occasion they go so far as to present us a vision, as it were, wherein the Saint is seen in meditation before the Blessed Virgin reviewing the painful progress of the Passion under various aspects; namely, the denial of St. Peter, the bargaining and kiss of Judas, the affronts during the crowning with thorns, the nailing to the Cross and the piercing of the side of Jesus. These Dominican artists apparently wish to give us the various details of the Rosary: the glorious Virgin to whom St. Dominic seems to be addressing the Hail Mary; the mysteries of Christ's passion that he seems to join with her in contemplating, and finally the knotted cord for numbering the verbal prayers.

The pictures of Fra Angelico which relate to the meditations on the mysteries of the Rosary preferred by St. Dominic form a veritable history, not only because the painter was inspired by St. Antoninus (who refers to the "Modes of Prayer" in his writings), but also inasmuch as Angelico himself refers to the same

work in some of the inscriptions on his paintings. The idea which the Angelic artist's representations, that are based on the text of the "Nine Modes of Prayer," most frequently suggest is this: that the meditations of the Patriarch were centered on the life of Jesus and above all on His Passion.

During this period of the implanting and popular acclamation of the Hail Mary devotion, that is from the days of St. Dominic to the first part of the fifteenth century, the Church had not, as yet, officially intervened. The intervention of the Church was caused by the change of activity which the Hail Mary devotion brought about in Christian life in the middle of the fifteenth century as a result of intense propaganda. Foremost among the propagators of the "Psalter of Mary," as he was pleased to call it, was Bl. Alan, a Breton Dominican, who some have said was the first to attribute the Rosary to St. Dominic. Not only is this not true, writes Father Getino, but Alan traces the origin of the Rosary to St. Bartholomew and tells us that St. Benedict, St. Bede and St. Bernard used it. However, after reading the note taken from chapter VIII of Alan's book on the Psalter (the authenticity of which is doubted), the interpretation of Mezard seems the most likely. Alan speaks of two psalters, the Psalter of Christ and the Psalter of Mary. The first, made up of 150 Our Fathers, he traces to St. Bartholomew, the Apostle; the second, i. e., the Psalter of Mary, Mezard thinks he attributed to St. Dominic. As is often the case in old manuscripts, the precise meaning is difficult to ascertain, but Father Mezard seems to us the more logical inasmuch as the Hail Mary was not in general use before the time of the Saint of Languedoc, nor do we find any mention of devotion to our Lady's prayer in the lives of St. Benedict and St. Bede (as Mabillon points out) or St. Bernard.

Of this much we are certain, that Alan and his confreres preached the Psalter of Mary; that they reestablished the confraternities; that they reawakened the fervor of the people for this salutary form of devotion after the passing of the Black Plague. Some estimate of the results attained may be had from the approximate number, 50,000, in Brittany alone, who practised this invocation to Mary.

Then the Church, which for many years had studiously observed the beautiful and varied devotion finally spoke in favor of the three groups of five decades and the simple five decades

of the Rosary and adopted it in the form which seemed most in harmony with tradition and the benefit of the faithful; then it was that she determined the precise mysteries to be commemorated in each group and gave to this great devotion, which she attributed to St. Dominic, its name—Rosary.

To sum up briefly, we have seen that the Hail Mary, so little practised before the days of St. Dominic, was frequently used by the Holy Founder and his first children; that he introduced its recitation into the Little Office of our Lady and prescribed it for the members of the Militia or first Third Order, the lay brothers in the thirteenth century being admonished to add it to the Our Father. We noticed the Holy Patriarch and his disciples preferring fifty and its multiples in offering this great devotional prayer, while the number of Our Fathers varied. Our attention was called to the probable use of Our Father beads as a material counter for this new devotion, counters of some sort having been used by the early Friars, especially Romeo de Llivia, and those devoted to the Order, and having been portrayed by Dominican artists in early pictures of the Saint. We have read that meditation was combined with these vocal prayers, particular reference having been made to the case of Friar Romeo, the early rule of the Beguines and the significant pictures of Fra Angelico. Finally, we have been called upon to witness the official intervention of the Church in order to fix the definite number of prayers and precise meditations to be commemorated, and to bestow the lasting name **Rosary** (a name mentioned in the thirteenth century by the Dominican, Thomas of Cantimpre) upon the beautiful devotion which she attributed to St. Dominic.

—Bro. Richard King, O. P.

