



## **Dominic: Preaching, a way of being a friend of men and women**

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Sr. Rosario and the commission for the Means of Communication have asked me to initiate these three conferences on the occasion of the death anniversary of St. Dominic. It is a great honor for me and I thank them. It is a good idea to "study in depth and understand better the life, inspiration and zeal that motivated Saint Dominic to respond with creativity to the needs of the Church of his time, and which, Marie Poussepin was able to embrace and integrate into the community that she founded." I will be referring very specially to *Libellus* of Jordan of Saxony, available in all the languages and I invite you to reread it on this occasion.

### **Introduction**

Dominic is first of all a man of friendship. He loves the world; he loves the people; he loves his sisters and brothers. "Because he loved everyone, everyone loved him" (Jordan). He is not a great charismatic figure, but a humble and persevering man. He is not a very brilliant man, but a man of wisdom and insight. I am not at all a historian and I will look at his life through this prism of friendship.

It is his love (for the people) that pushes Dominic to sell his Bible; it is his love for the heretics that pushes him to discuss endlessly and convince them with his gentleness. It was this love that urged him to pray at night for men and women and for the world. It was friendship that led him to put into practice the intuition of Diego of Osma: to preach by word and example without the pomp of a bishop and to be flexible and free to announce the good news of the Gospel. To do this, he founded an order, with sisters, brothers and lay people who were dedicated to preaching.

The essence of what I want to say is the following: there is no "Dominican spirituality" as such, nor is there a search for evangelical perfection "for oneself": it exists only "for the other", so that the Gospel may be proclaimed.

## 1. The initial gesture: a heart of flesh attentive to the surroundings.

### a. *Love for the Word of God*

When he was 14 years old, Dominic was sent to Palencia (which later became the first university in Spain); at the time of Dominic, there was already a seven year's "free science" course. Jordan reports that Dominic, impatient to begin the study of theology, put an end to this first stage of study after 5 or 6 years, considering that he had learned enough. (*Libellus of Jordan* § 6)

Then, he began to study theology at the age of 19-20. In those years, study of Theology meant study of the Holy Scriptures. Dominic loved the Scriptures and it is said that he always carried with him the Gospel of Matthew, the epistles of Paul, and (probably excerpts from) the lectures of Cassian. He is devoted to the Word.

*7. So he spent four years for these sacred studies. It showed his perseverance and his desire to draw untiringly from the waters of the Holy Scriptures. When it was a question of study, he spent nights almost without sleep and in the depths of his spirit, his steadfast memory retained in its bosom the truth which the ear received. And thanks to his gifts, he watered what he learned easily, with his sentiments of piety and he made his works of salvation germinate from it. In this way he could talk about the beatitudes, the judgment of the Truth as proclaimed in the Gospel: "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." There are two ways of keeping the divine Word: in one way, we retain in our memory what we receive through the ear; in the other way, we sanctify the deeds and manifest by action what we have heard. No one disagrees that this second way of keeping the Word is more praiseworthy out of the two: thus, the grain of wheat is better preserved when it is placed on the earth than if it is kept in a container. This happy servant of God neglected neither one of these methods. His memory, like God's granary was always quick to provide one thing after another, while his actions and works manifested outwardly in the most striking way what was hidden in the sanctuary of his heart. (*Libellus of Jordan*)*

One method must not remain without the other: we must both, read the Scriptures and especially listen to the questions that the Bible asks us and then, put these questions into practice in our lives. A French author I love, Jacques Ellul, likes to say that Bible is not a book of answers, but a book of questions. Dominic understands this.

### b. *The conversion at Palencia: the word of God exists only for those who are alive.*

We should be well aware of the era in which Dominic lived; it was before the invention of printing; so, all the books were the work of copyists (copying by hand). Then, comes an episode that undoubtedly marks Dominic's conversion: he sells his books and gives to the poor the money received. This gesture is contagious. "By this example of generosity, he moved the hearts of other theologians and teachers so much that they, on discovering their greed due to cowardice, as they witnessed the generosity of this young man, began from then onwards, to

offer big amounts of money on alms giving". (*Libellus* 10). Brother Stephen, who gave witness at the canonization process, adds that Dominic had said: "I do not want to study on dead skins while men are dying of hunger. "Jean-René Bouchet comments.

*Dominic is at Palencia. He is studying the Bible with passion. A famine ravages the country and Dominic is not rich. If he wants to help the starving, he has no choice but to sell his Bible, which is his working tool. (...) Dominic knows, as he had read it well, for example in Augustine, that, when it is not integrated and practiced, the Gospel becomes a message that kills, a dead skin, a book.*<sup>1</sup>

In the so-called "conversion at Palencia", there are three points that will mark Dominic's journey:

- While most of his predecessors will sell their Bible in a personal and internal process of integration of its message, here we see that it is the circumstances that compel Dominic to take this step.
- On the other hand, for some of the first friars who witnessed at the beatification process, this gesture was contagious. For Stephen of Lombardy, for example, there is a natural link between Dominic's gesture as a student and the foundation of the Order: "Several influential notables followed his example and from that moment on, they began to preach with him".
- Finally, there is a footnote on the vocabulary. Jordan describes Dominic as being "moved by the distress of the poor and burning with compassion within himself ", Stephen says, "moved by compassion and mercy" and John of Spain uses the expression, "moved by pity and driven by charity" (pp. 15-16). Dominic is moved to tears by the material or spiritual sufferings and this will never let him be at rest.

What is unique to Dominic's approach is that it is not motivated by the Word of God alone. It is the circumstances that led him to decide. This is a trait that will be seen often: Dominic obeys the circumstances and this blending of compassion or mercy and the 'sequela Christi' will characterize Dominic's way of doing things.

Marie Poussepin in her turn obeyed the circumstances: we must not forget that she chose to orient her preaching, through charity towards the poor and sick at home, and towards the young girls who had no education, because no one took care of them. The orientations of the Congregation (education and health care) are choices of circumstances. The question for us today is: where are the places and the people who have no one to take care of them? It is undoubtedly, there that we must preach by our word and deed.

### *c. Attachment to the Word and attachment to the poorest: a unique friendship*

This attachment to the Word will motivate Dominic, once his order is founded, to send the brothers to study. It means to love the world in order to have the desire to understand it better and listen to it and thus to be able to offer it the good news of the Gospel. But for that, we must

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-René Bouchet, *Saint Dominique*, Cerf, 1988.

understand the world in which we are, listen to the people and share their life, bread, joys and sorrows. It is only then that we will have some chance of finding the right words to announce Jesus Christ.

Father Congar (the great Dominican theologian of Second Vatican Council) used to say that a brother (and therefore a sister) must study four hours a day, and that this is his contemplation. To study is not necessarily to do high-level intellectual work: but to read the Bible and the newspaper, to form oneself and to cultivate oneself throughout one's life in order to hear the noise of the world, and in particular what Bruno Cadoré calls the other side of the world, to hear what is happening in the areas that interest no one. This cannot be found out on the internet or social networks. It can be found out from people with flesh and blood, whom we come in contact with. Are we friends with the people we meet? Study, thus understood is a work of friendship and contemplation. This is what Marie Poussepin proposed by inviting to her convent those who wanted to come on Sunday afternoons and listen to the spiritual conferences given by the sisters and thus to strengthen and deepen the faith of those who were more advanced in age.

## 2. [Dominic's prayer](#)

After selling his belongings, Dominic enters the chapter of the Canons of Osma. The bishop who received Dominic was Martin de Bazan and the prior of the community was Diego d' Acevedo (commonly known as Diego d'Osma) who was an open and esteemed man, anxious to make the Gospel alive among his Canons. At that time, the Canons lived a form of monastic life in the city, with a strict community life and the liturgy of the hours. They were often under the rule of St. Augustine and sometimes could run a small school of theology. Diego wanted to reform the chapter (because some of them had a personal lifestyle and considered the inheritance received from their families as private property). He valued Dominic and quickly made him his sub-prior.

In his complete biography of St. Dominic, Father M. H. Vicaire O.P. has clearly shown that the Canons at that time, were called to a life of prayer, often more contemplative than that of the monks who in their abbeys, in addition to their multiple tasks (work in the fields, schools), also carried out pastoral duties. The daily singing of the office, the celebration of the liturgy of the hours in common, meditation and spiritual reading in the cell provided the Canons Regulars with a framework in which contemplation could nourish. The young Dominic was impregnated with it and preserved its spirit until his death and, when he founded the Order of Preachers, he made it the basis for religious life.

He might be twenty-three or twenty-four years old when he received the white robe and black mantle of the Canons Regulars of St. Augustine: this dress, somewhat simplified, would later become the dress of the Dominicans. After a year of probation, he made profession in the chapter of the Canons, and soon afterwards was ordained a priest. We know that Dominic read with great interest the *Conferences of the Desert Fathers* by the Italian monk John Cassian: this book dedicated to the African anchorites helped to nourish the spiritual life of the religious in

the Middle Ages. Jordan recounts about Dominic's prayer (in which he had not participated, since he met Dominic much later).

*12. God had given him a special grace to pray for the sinners, the poor and the afflicted: he bore their misfortunes in the intimate sanctuary of his compassion and the tears that bubbled up from his eyes manifested the fervor of the feelings that burned within him.*

*13. It was a very common practice for him to spend the nights in prayer. With the door closed, he would pray to his Father. During and at the end of his prayers, he was accustomed to utter cries and words which came out of the groanings of his heart; he could not contain himself and these cries coming out spontaneously, were clearly heard from above. One of his frequent and unique requests to God was that He might grant him a true and effective charity to nurture and obtain the salvation of men (and women): for he thought that he would not be a true member of Christ until the day when he could give himself up totally with all his strength to win souls, just as Lord Jesus, the Savior of all men (and women), offered himself up totally to obtain our salvation.*

How can Jordan, who did not know Dominic in Osma, write these things, unless he observed them later in Santa Sabina in Rome? Jean-René Bouchet comments:

From this, we can presume that Dominic is recognized as the founder and preacher through this form of prayer; it is his charism and it is at the roots of the Order; there was only one step possible and I believe that Jordan took it here. In other words, the conversion at Palencia blossomed in Osma into a form of prayer that Dominic would preserve till the end.<sup>2</sup>

If Jean-René Bouchet is right, which I believe he is, the question of universal salvation is at the heart of Dominic's supplication and consequently, at the heart of our supplication also. He does not pray to obtain some grace for himself. He prays for others, for this world so that all may be saved, because there is no salvation unless all are saved. Perhaps, for Dominic, his sisters and brothers, the highest degree of prayer is not contemplation (like climbing the holy ladders of the medieval monks), but supplication for the salvation of men (and women). And this supplication has a specific significance in Dominic's way of doing things: together with Diego, he will preach this salvation.

### 3. [The dawn of preaching](#)

#### *a. The encounter with the heretics: friendship at the origin of the conversion of the Cathars*

In 1201, Diego was appointed bishop of Osma. He and Dominic were very close. In May 1203, the king of Castile, Alfonso VIII, asked Diego to lead an official delegation to the king of Denmark so that the latter would agree to let his daughter marry his son, Prince Ferdinand, the

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-René Bouchet, *Saint Dominique*, p. 19.

Crown. Diego asked Dominic to accompany him. During this trip (between October 14, 1203 and February 26, 1204) they both discovered pockets of religious discord in the Albigensian region. The Cathars (etymologically the "pure") liked to present themselves as the church of love (amor) against the church of Rome (roma, anagram of amor 'love'), which they considered to be the church of the devil.

They are Gnostics, with a double logic that opposes the Good and the Evil, the God of the New Testament (good) and the God of the Old Testament (evil). The flesh, world and time are bad; sexuality is the domain of the devil and the true god reigns only over the spirits. They reject matter, and therefore the sacraments.

Jordan tells us that when Dominic discovered that the inhabitants of this region had been heretics for a long time, he was overcome with great compassion for so many lost souls. The host of the inn where they stayed, was a heretic and Dominic spent the first night talking to him step by step. Listening and friendship are his weapons. More conversations followed and eventually, the man returned to faith. (*Libellus* 15)

The journey seemed to be successful and they returned to Castile. But then they had to go get the princess and bring her back. So, they set out again and presented themselves at the court of Valdemar II in the years 1205 and 1206. To their disappointment, they had to return without the princess. Was she dead, or did she become a nun? (*Libellus* 16)

In short, then they decided to go to Rome to meet Pope Innocent III. Diego wanted to ask the pope for permission to be relieved of the government of his diocese of Osma so that he would be free to participate in the evangelization of the Cumans (Estonians? Romanians? Hungarians?). Dominic shared this project. They arrived in Rome in February 1206. The pope did not give him permission and sent them away, because he needed this bishop reformer.

On their way back, they visited Citeaux, and this was the beginning of very strong ties with the Cistercians. They arrived in Montpellier at the end of March 1206. They found the papal legates in trouble with the Cathars, because they were trying to bring them back to the faith, by preaching from on horseback, with many servants and leading a way of life which was not the way of life of the Cathars. As they were ambassadors of the pope, they had to maintain their rank. Innocent saw the problem. He wrote to them:

*We want and we urge you to proceed in such a way that the simplicity of your attitudes may be evident to everyone; close your mouths to the ignorant as well as to those without common sense. There should be nothing in your actions or words that even a heretic could criticize.*

Diego could make this important declaration: "It seems to me impossible to bring back to faith men and women who rely above all on examples, by words alone." Once again, we find what Dominic's creed will always be: preaching is a witness of life.

## Let's listen to Jordan:

20. *While they were thus holding council, it happened that the bishop of Osma passed through Montpellier where the council was going on. They welcomed the traveler with honor and sought his advice, knowing him to be a person full of holiness and maturity, justice and zeal for faith. A thoughtful man, well instructed in the ways of God, the bishop asked a few questions about the customs and conduct of the heretics. He noticed that their usual method of attracting people to their treacherous party was to confirm their arguments and preaching by the examples of pretended holiness, as they saw from the other side, the big number of the missionaries, the magnitude of their expenses, their crew and their clothing: "It is not so;" he said, "brothers, it is not thus that we should proceed. It seems to me impossible to reduce by words alone the faith of men who rely above all on examples. Look at the heretics: they show the outward appearance of devotion and give to the simple people, to convince them, the false example of an evangelical frugality and austerity. If, therefore, you come to display opposing ways of life, you will edify very few; you will destroy many and these people will refuse to follow you. Pursue one nail with another; put to flight an insincere sanctity by a true religious spirit; only true humility can overcome the vanity of these pseudo-apostles. Thus, Paul was compelled to play the fool and enumerate his true virtues, proclaiming the austerities and perils he had faced, in order to refute the arrogance of the people who boasted of their meritorious lives." "What advice do you give us then, very good father?" they asked. And he said, "Do what you see me doing!" Immediately, invaded by the spirit of the Lord, he calls his people and sends them back to Osma with his crew, his luggage and various ceremonial items that he had taken with him, keeping only a few clerics in his company. Then he declares his intention to linger on in this territory to spread the faith.*

22. *On hearing this advice, the missionary abbots, moved by his example, agreed to commit themselves in the same way. Each one sent home the baggage he had brought with him, retaining, however, the books that were necessary for the office, study and discussion. Under the direction of the bishop whom they made superior and, as it were, head of the whole affair, they began to proclaim the faith, on foot, without money and in voluntary poverty. When the heretics saw this, they began to preach with greater vigor.*

In Diego's decision, with which Dominic associated himself, something is worth noting: He did not break with the "official" Church, but acted within a mission ordered by the pope and therefore institutional. Throughout his life, Dominic took great care to remain united with strong links with the visible Church, without denying the evangelical inspiration that he bore. Marie Poussepin will do exactly the same: she is a woman of institutions, that is to say, a diplomatic woman who wants her work to last and who knows how to negotiate with the local Church even at difficult times.



*b. The experience of failure: To fructify is not to multiply*

In 1206, Dominic began to gather women who had returned to the Church. This is the foundation in Prouille. (*Libellus* 27). It was Dominic who was concerned especially about providing the nuns with a home and the resources necessary for their sustenance. "They had no other teacher to form them to live the life of the Order", says a sister from Bologna. Diego, at this time, did not intervene. This was the birth of the Order. Jean-René Bouchet comments: "The nuns appear as indispensable partners in the personal apostolic project of Dominic and then of his brothers. This is how Prouille came to be called 'Holy Preaching'; that is to say, the place from where a gospel word can spring forth; this is something quite different from a discourse, even a pious one" (p. 35).

It is really a profound story of friendship: Between Dominic and Cecile, between Jordan and Diane and between Marie Poussepin and Father Mespolie. It seems to me that preaching is born in the friendship that we have for one another, with respect for our differences and complementarities. For a time, the Cistercians joined the small group but it cannot be said that Dominic's preaching was a success. One report notes soberly that the preachers "convert a small number." They provided doctrinal teaching to the faithful Christians who were few in number and strengthened them in their faith. In another report which refers to the multitudes of the followers of the heresy, the tone is more bitter: "By God! I must say that these people care for the preachers as much as for a rotten apple. From then on, Diego did what could be expected: he left for his diocese, hoping to find new preachers there. He did not succeed, because he died in Osma in December. It was a hard blow for Dominic.

His preaching failed. The assassination in Arles on January 14, 1208 of Pierre de Castelnau, legate, triggers a crusade desired by Innocent III. It was murderous. Thus, on July 22, 1208, nearly 20,000 people were massacred, 7,000 of whom had taken refuge in a church that was let collapse. Women and children were killed. The Cathars mocked at Dominic: "Is this your gospel? What do you think of the devoted sons of your beloved Church? ". Even though the crusaders were his friends, while they were fighting, Dominic preached, not between Montpellier and Fanjeaux, but between Fanjeaux and Toulouse. He resided in Fanjeaux and was the prior of Prouille, 20 minutes away by foot.

*34. While the Crusaders were in the country and till the death of the Count of Montfort, Brother Dominic remained in his role as a diligent preacher of the Word of God. What persecutions he had to endure from the wicked! What traps he had to despise! One day he answered without being troubled, the people who had threatened to kill him, "I am not worthy of the glory of martyrdom; I do not yet deserve this death."*

*35. Nor was he empty of that supreme form of charity which gives one's life for one's friends. He had indeed met a certain infidel, whom he urged and exhorted to return to the faithful bosom of our mother Church. But the man invoked in response the need for material help, which obliged him to remain in the society of the infidels: the heretics assured him the sustenance which he had no possibility to obtain in any other way. Dominic, feeling compassionate to his very depths, decided to sell himself and redeem the misery of the soul in peril at the price of his freedom. He would have done so, if the*



*Lord, who is rich towards all, had not provided something to make up for the man's deprivation.*

In 1213, the bishop of Carcassonne made him his vicar to replace him in spiritual matters (but without judicial or administrative powers). In the same year he was twice offered a bishopric; he refused each time, feeling that his task as a preacher was more urgent. From the beginning of his mission, he did not let himself be called sub prior, but only "Brother Dominic". He continued to live with four or five co-workers in a house behind the church in Fanjeaux. On their preaching journeys, they did not take any money with them, but were content with what was given to them on the road or in the place of preaching. On April 25, 1215 after a long Good Friday in Fanjeaux, two "distinguished and capable" men from Toulouse, Peter and Thomas, made their profession into Dominic's hands. Dominic wants a kind of religious life at the service of preaching: he wants brothers "**who cry over the world and shout the Gospel of salvation**" (Jean-René Bouchet, p. 43).

### *c. Go and preach*

In June or July, 1215 Foulques, Bishop of Toulouse, issued a charter of approval for this small group and thus he instituted: "Brother Dominic and his companions, preachers in our diocese, whose religious purpose is to go on foot and preach the word of gospel truth through evangelical poverty." Bishop also gave them remuneration. At that time, there were 9 brothers, 6 in Toulouse and 3 in Prouilhe. (*Libellus* 38)

For the time being, he lacked the blessing and approval of the Apostolic See. So, in the autumn, he left for Rome with Foulques, Bishop of Toulouse, who supported him, and went to the Council, IVth Lateran Council, a giant council of 450 bishops, 800 abbots...

*40. Brother Dominic joined the bishop and both went to the council to pray with one accord, to the lord pope Innocent, to confirm the Order of Brother Dominic and his companions which would be called the Order of Preachers. They would also ask for confirmation of the remuneration assigned to the friars by the count and the bishop.*

Let us read Father Vicar:

*"One must assess the meaning of these words that Jordan of Saxony does not use at random. To confirm is not to approve. It is exactly to make it firmer. He who confirms at this time neither innovates nor gives: he only manifests the existence of an institution or of a previous gift to which he grants a greater solidity by his intervention. It is thus that one confirms an election already validated, a status already obligatory or validly constituted. In particular, to have the superior authority confirm it, is to remove from the aspirations of nullification or modification of the subaltern authority what it has disposed of by institution or by approval. (Marie Humbert Vicar, Saint Dominic, volume II, p. 20)*

The Council speaks of religious life and preaching. The traditional principle is that it is the bishops who form the "order of preaching". The Council is concerned about the itinerant preachers who sometimes say nonsense (and today??). But it also knows that the bishops need help. Therefore, the Council insists on the need for each particular Church to have preachers in addition to the bishop. *"The bishops appoint suitable men, powerful in deed and word, to fulfill the task of holy preaching, who, in their place, edify by word and example the people entrusted to them"*. Bread blessed for Dominic!

But they also ask that the multiplication of new orders be stopped (It will be good, if we do the same at present.): *"To assure that a great diversity of religious orders does not lead to serious confusion in the Church of God, we firmly forbid the creation of any new religious order in the future; whoever wishes to enter a religious order should choose one of those that are approved. In the same way, whoever wishes to found a new religious house will adopt the rule and institutions of the orders already approved. "*

The Order of Dominic was approved by Foulques before the Council, so it does not fall under the Council decision. They simply have to accept an existing rule.

41. When he had heard them present their request, the bishop of the Sea of Rome invited Brother Dominic to return to his brethren, discern the matter fully with them and then, with their unanimous consent, vow to follow some approved rule. The bishop of Rome would then assign them a church. Finally, Brother Dominic would return to the pope and receive confirmation on all the points.

The Order was confirmed in 1216. It is reported that while Dominic was praying in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Peter and Paul appeared to him. The former gave him a staff and the latter handed him the Gospels, with the words, "Go and preach, for God has chosen you for this ministry." Then he saw his brothers scattering all over the world two by two.

#### *d. "Preachers" and not "preaching"*

According to an ancient legal saying, "what affects everyone must be dealt with all and decided by all". This conciliating method (Jean-René Bouchet, *Saint Dominic*, p. 47) combines the agreement of hearts (concordia), minds (conspiratio) and behavior (conformitas). This proves that God is present. Then, they deliberate together according to this method that will become "chapter," and they adopt the rule of Saint Augustine which was practiced at Osma. Moreover, it does not go into details and allows for the addition of ordinary rules. For their part, the sisters of Prouille also adopted the rule of St. Augustine.

In the fall of 1216, the brothers established themselves in the church of Saint Romain. There were 20 of them around 1217<sup>3</sup>. In October 1216, Dominic returned to Rome to ask the pope to

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<sup>3</sup> It was then that Mathieu de France left the chapter of Castres where he was prior to find his friend Dominic. Having come from France with Simon de Montfort, this great religious would soon return to spread the new order there. A group of Castilians or Spaniards entered the community before the summer of 1217. Among them was Mannes, Dominic's own brother. Another came from the region of Osma: Michael of Uceru. Others were

confirm this small community with its mission, rule and location. But in July 1216, Innocent III died; so, it was Honorius III whom Dominic met. The bull of the confirmation *Religiosam vitam* is dated December 22, 2016 and is addressed "to his sons, Saint Dominic, prior of Saint Romain

de Toulouse and to his brothers present and to come, professed in the regular life, in perpetuity." On January 21, 1217, there follows a bull *Gratiarum omnium*, addressed "to the dear sons, the prior and the brothers of Saint Romain, preaching in the country of Toulouse (predicantibus in partibus Tholosanis)". But a papal notary supporting Dominic wrote *predicatoribus*, Preachers, this is what the friars are, and not just what they do. Knowing Dominic and his warm relationship with the pope, it was perhaps the pope himself who asked for this correction. It is remarkable how much institutional support Dominic received from Rome. He is undeniably a man of institutions, who knows how to put the institution at the service of the purpose of his Order, preaching. He knew perfectly well the government of the Church from within.

Because the Order is the Order of "preachers" and not of "preaching", and because preaching is a form of a state of life based on *Vita Apostolica*, there is no doubt, this is who we are!

#### 4. [The genius of Dominic: instituting fraternity](#)

In this last part, I would like to try to explain what I suggested in the introduction somewhat in a challenging manner: there is no Dominican spirituality. Unlike the monks he frequented and read (Cassian...), Dominic did not write any treatise on spiritual life; he did not build any "ladder for monks"; he did not ask for common life in the spiritual life of his brothers. His anguish is for the salvation of all. He wants to direct everything to the preaching of the Gospel, like the gentle and humble Christ. "Go and preach".

Becoming a monk was considered to be a way of nurturing evangelical perfection, that is, a very sure way to obtain salvation. From its part, the Order of Preachers established a new priority: to be useful to the soul of one's neighbor; this meant that the principal observances of the preacher's life were understood as means to this single aim: the salvation of souls. <sup>4</sup>

This remark is of primary importance. This explains, in my opinion, why the summit of prayer for Dominic is the prayer of intercession. It also explains the relationship with spiritual accompaniment: there is no tradition of spiritual accompaniment in the Order: it is the community that plays this role and also fraternal correction. (I remember the witness of a brother of my generation, who had a very powerful spiritual experience and who was surprised that his father, the novice master, did not ask him about it. But the novice master answered

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named Michael of Spain, Peter of Madrid, Gomez. Another brother came from England, Laurent the Englishman, a layman and Brother Didier from Normandy. Finally, the Cévennes provided Dominic with one of his best collaborators, Bertrand, a native of Garrigues near Alès, who was to be the first prior of Saint Romain, the first provincial of France, the socius and confidant of the founder. "(Vicar, II, p. 59)

<sup>4</sup> Dominique Collin, *Saint Dominique, homme d'évangile*, Fidélité, 2016, p. 53.

him: "If you are unbearable in common life, even if you have seen the Blessed Virgin, it doesn't matter. What counts is your capacity to live the common life"). The fraternal bond speaks of the spiritual bond. In conclusion, I would like to insist on three points.

### *a. The Vita Apostolica*

The genius of the order is therefore in the organization of common life, and in its flexibility, kept for preaching. This flexibility is supported by deliberation in the chapter which aims at unanimity and the search for the common good. It is supported by the fact that responsibilities rotate (and must rotate) and that a brother or sister who has finished his or her mandate is simply "one among many". This is what is called in the Order the Vita Apostolica, (in Latin) to signify that there is no common life on one side and mission on the other, but a single passion: the proclamation of the Gospel, whether within the common life or outside. It is inspired by the Acts of the Apostles. To indicate that it is the community that preaches, implies also to be part of a history that has preceded us and will continue after us and which we must prepare out of love for those who will follow us. In the Dominican tradition Government is par excellence an act of preaching.

By our way of welcoming like friends those who come to visit us in our houses, by being with them as equals, discreet, without asking intrusive questions and without giving moral lectures, we preach. When we accept, as Marie Poussepin did in her time, that a sister is absent, often, for a long time, because her apostolate requires it and when we encourage her by telling her that we are with her, well, through her voice and through her hands, it is the community that preaches. When we speak to each other in truth, and when our communities become shelters for the word of another, we preach. But this requires that we trust each other and that we can speak to each other in truth.

It seems to me that the Acts of the Apostles concretely recounts what the apostles experienced after the resurrection when they began to make real in their lives these words of Jesus: "I no longer call you servants, but friends." (John 15). "Preaching is not a work. It is a matter of being in the Church, a way of being: being with God, being together, being in the world" (Jean-René Bouchet). We must understand the treasure that Dominic leaves us in terms of the organization of common life oriented towards preaching. A common life where each one is free, is a "holy preaching". A convent of Dominican nuns is a holy preaching. The works of charity of the apostolic sisters, if they are born of the vita apostolica, are a holy preaching.

The vita apostolica is founded on the relationship of friendship and freedom that Christ has with his own and it unfolds in the friendship and freedom between us, between brothers and sisters, between each one of us and the laity we encounter every day.

### *b. The rule does not oblige us under pain of sin*

We must speak here about **dispensation**. The monks could ask the abbot for a dispensation for example, for reasons of health. The chapter of 1220 innovates by extending the dispensation to what could "hinder study, preaching, or the good of souls, since it is known that our order - the

chapter reminds us - from the beginning, was especially instituted for preaching and the salvation of souls and that our study must be inclined in principle, with ardor and with all our strength, to make us capable of being useful to the soul of the neighbor. "

The notion of dispensation is a key notion for Dominic. It is not a matter of ease but of a fundamental conviction: the rule does not oblige under pain of sin. To put it another way, sin is always against a brother or a sister and not against the rule.

"The rule does not oblige us under pain of sin. "Dominic is so convinced that the rule is aimed at the salvation of souls and not aimed at itself that it is said that he wanted to go to all the convents to scrape with his knife the rules which would oblige us to respect them under pain of sin. (Dominique Collin, *Saint Dominique, homme d'évangile*, p. 54)

Obedience is obedience to the brother, to the neighbor, to the circumstances, to the poor and not to the rule. The prior is the first to make the 'venia' before his brothers once he is elected. He is the first to obey. It is said that at night Dominic would go around the friars and pull up the blanket of the one who was cold and whose blanket had fallen off. This concern, perhaps idealized, says something about the lifestyle that we should have. In another field, Marie Poussepin (and this has always upset me) writes in the *Reglemens*. We find the same anguish as Dominic's for the salvation of all:

Since it is charity that must be the soul of the community, she will make the door open to all those who will withdraw from the world, by the desire of a sincere conversion. No distinction will be made either by country or by birth; but [...] those who are in greater danger of their salvation must be given preference. (R. XIV)

"Feudal in its conception of medieval obedience (oath of a vassal to his suzerain), with its concern to follow the canonical observances, the order was innovative in endowing itself with an original legislation, particularly well adapted to its purpose. "(Dominique Collin, *Saint Dominique, homme d'évangile*, p. 49). The constitutions of the friars are extremely precise, and it is this precision that gives to common life all its flexibility. The more precise the constitutions are, the more, we can avoid uncertainty and abuse of power.

### *c. Parrhêsia*

Love for the Word of God must teach us to speak and to speak to each other in truth. Dominican life must teach us to speak. To say what we think in truth, without fearing the judgment of others. There is a cultural dimension to this *parrhêsia*, that is undeniable, and we become aware of it in a more or less painful way in the international chapters and in common life. Yet.

The book of Acts ends with Paul's preaching beyond the borders of Israel: "He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full assurance (*pârrhêsia*) and without hindrance. (Acts 28:31). The assurance referred to is the Greek word *parrhesia*, which means "the ability to say things", boldness and frankness, the ability to speak on one's own behalf, something like the opposite of a loose tongue. Seen in the last verse of the Acts, this word offers us a horizon, a way of living the word and speaking the truth.

We find this term most often used at times of difficulties. In the Septuagint, the Greek Bible, the word '*parrhêsia*' is used to describe the way the people journeyed out of the slavery of Egypt: "I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk with your heads held high" (Lev 26:13). This is the tone of the prophetic word, which does not announce misfortune for its own sake, but for an awakening so that the misfortune may not take place. It is the way of being the one who prefers to face the trial without running away from it: before those who have oppressed him, "the righteous man will stand upright, full of confidence" (Wisdom 5:1). Finally, *parrhêsia* evokes freedom in the tone of the believer who prays. True humility presents this figure: the humble person stands unashamed before God, confident that he can expose everything about his life before Him and that everything can be examined, including his questions and his failure. Parrhesia is the quality of the speech of the free person, but moreover, it is effective and makes free the one who risks it.

According to John the evangelist, it characterizes above all the speech of Jesus. He speaks freely and openly, when he explains to them: "Lazarus is dead" (Jn 11:14). He does not run away from his approaching passion, nor from the difficulties that his disciples will have to face. And in front of the high priest, whose accusing words are the opposite of *parrhêsia*, Jesus says again: "I have spoken openly to the world" (Jn 18:20). This is how he was able to speak with equal confidence to the devil in the desert, to the powerful of this world, and to his own people, even rebuking them, when they wanted him to avoid the test. "Get behind me Satan". This is a sharp word that restores us to have the right relationship with Him, the truth.

Paul is one of those whose word is inhabited by this *parrhesia*, after his conversion. He confronts from within, those among the new Christians who do not consider going beyond their own little world. He, however, has discovered in his flesh that the law can kill when it is not founded on the Spirit of truth. He knows that it is necessary to go elsewhere, to go further, to do differently, so that the Gospel may be proclaimed to all, for, it is for all. So, he exhorts his people: "The letter brings death, but the Spirit gives life. ...] And since we have such a hope, we behave with great confidence" (2 Cor 3:6, 12). "Pray also for me, that I may be given a right word when I open my mouth to make known the mystery of the gospel with confidence" (Eph 6:19). It could be that *parrhêsia* is one of the fruits of prayer, when the man or woman who prays, stands in truth before God and no longer tells a story.

The word of the one who dedicates himself to *parrhêsia* is not pretentious; it does not advance with a banner. It never sticks out; it is not talkative. It does not provide ready-made answers to the questions we ask. The person who ventures into *parrhêsia* learns to call that which is there by its name, and in particular the sin of the Church and worldly illusions, including in one's own life, even when people do not want to hear it. It is often a mark of authority: there can be no *parrhêsia* without a deep humility which allows us to remain "head up" with perseverance, despite the contrary winds. Do we know to ask questions to others without knowing the answers - real questions the answers of which really interest us? How can we help each other to live in this pitch of freedom and avoid both duplicity and criticism which are not constructive?

*Parrhêsia* grows in the silence and the restraint of the one who has discovered that talking too much makes one lose control often. One must undoubtedly love the person to whom one is speaking in order to address him or her with this audacity. Above all, you have to listen a lot.

### Conclusion: Stories of friendship

In the new born Order, there are great figures: Reginald is one of them, Jordan of Saxony, another. It is Reginald who will receive Jordan. Reginald was a learned man from Orleans (my birthplace). Dominic's friendship overwhelmed him and he joined him. "His eloquence was a violent fire and his speech, like a burning torch, inflamed the hearts of all those who heard him: very few people had such a rock in their hearts that they could escape the effect of his fire. The whole of Bologna was in uproar; it seemed that a new Elijah had just risen. Master Reginald received many people from Bologna into the order; the number of disciples began to increase and many joined them." (*Libellus* 58). After Bologna, he was sent to Paris. At the time of his death, he was questioned:

64. I remember that while he was still living, Brother Matthew, who had known him in that glorious and difficult century, in all his delicacy, sometimes questioned him with astonishment: "Don't you feel some repugnance, master, for this habit you have taken?" But he, bowing his head, said, "I think I have no merit to live in this Order, for I have always found too much joy in it."

As for Jordan, he was a student in Paris when he decided to join the Order. Perhaps he was a master of arts or literature. One day he saw a poor man in front of Notre Dame Church on his way for Matins. He gave him his belt, because he had no money and found his belt around the loins of the Crucified One when he entered Notre Dame. To help a poor person is to serve Christ. So, he enters the Order and is received by Reginald. One of his friends, Henri is a canon. He shares the same room with the students and he manages to convince him to enter with him. They are three to take the habit together with Léon. It is still a story of friendship.

75. When the day arrived, when the imposition of ashes reminds the faithful of their origin and their return to ashes, we too decided, at a very appropriate moment to begin penance, to fulfill the vow we had made to the Lord, without the knowledge of our fellow students. So, when Brother Henri was leaving the house and a fellow student asked him, "Where are you going, Lord Henri?" "I am going," he said, "to Bethany." The other did not understand then what the word meant, but he understood later, after it was over, when he saw his entrance to Bethany, that is, to the house of obedience. The three of us met again at Saint Jacques and as the brothers sang the Antiphon "Immutemur habitu, etc." (Let us change our conduct...), we were able to see the meaning of the word. (Let us change our ways...) we arrived unexpectedly and very happily in their midst. Immediately and on the spot, we stripped off the old man and put on the new man, realizing within us what their songs asked to do.

Soon, Henri will become the prior of Cologne. Here is the witness of Jordan at his death:



77. "Mercy had claimed him for itself entirely. He radiated so easily on all hearts; he entered so easily into the society of each one that, if you had any relationship with him, you would have thought that he preferred you to all the others".

Jordan was also very close to Diana of Andalo, a young woman from Bologna, who was seduced by Reginald's preaching and she made her vows into Dominic's hands, before founding the monastery of St. Agnes of Bologna, four years later. The correspondence between Diana and Jordan is a marvel of friendship. "I have pain on your foot," she writes to him one day when he injured himself. This color of friendship is an integral mark of the Order and the relationships between the brothers and sisters.

Gifted for friendship, Jordan attracted many young students to the Order. It was he who welcomed the man who would become Albert the Great. He was soon in charge; became provincial of Lombardy and then successor of Dominic, as the head of the Order. He saw to it that the legislative work of the one he called his Father and his Master was continued.

That's it. Friendship and concern for the salvation of all go hand in hand: one must love people in order to desire that they be saved from despair, violence, or any other form of slavery. This was the driving force of Dominic's life, and I believe that of Marie Poussepin.