

Lay Dominican Formation Program Province of Saint Joseph

Novitiate-Session 5 COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY

OUTLINE

MAJOR POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- A. Community as a group of people who are bound to one another in a "fellowship of grace" in the "unity of the Holy Spirit".
(A major source book here is the Acts of the Apostles)
- B. As Dominicans, we need to understand that this "fellowship of grace" is not merely a place to meet every month, it is the womb always giving birth, again and again, to the Word of God, in itself, as well as in new members.
- C. The relationship of the community to each member and each member's relationship to the community is obviously a two-way street. Thus communal commitment is reciprocal. It creates an atmosphere for three activities:
 - 1. birthing
 - 2. nurturing
 - 3. maturing.

SUMMARY:

- A. COMMUNITY AS A "FELLOWSHIP OF GRACE"
- B. COMMUNITY AS THE "WORD-NURTURING" CENTER
- C. COMMUNITY AS MAKER OF "WORD PEOPLE".

COMMUNITY AS A FELLOWSHIP OF GRACE

Reflecting back on postulancy, we can recall that God is the first community; the Triune community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is an existence of 3 distinct Persons, each of which lives in full knowledge and love of Self and o(o)thers.

Just as God is both One and Three, He deals with us both individually and corporately. But it is important to remember that His individual dealings are purposefully mediated through His people as a whole.

In Israel, He mediated His covenant through Moses; the conquest of Canaan through Joshua; David and the kings; Isaiah and the prophets. And today? He speaks through Christ, His Son... "His radiance through eternal days."

But how does the Risen Christ Crucified speak to us today? Surely, it is through His Church. The Church, then mediates Christ to the world; and the Holy Spirit witnesses to Christ in His Church.

Because we are called, as a Dominican family, into a fellowship, we know that the Spirit has a special mission for us, individually, and as a community. It is a fellowship of grace because He called us, here today. Here, in the community, we discern His call, and respond in prayer, study and apostolate. This discernment and response has always occurred in and through the community in Dominican heritage. We are therefore, primarily, ecclesial people with a profound respect for the Magisterium (the teaching Church), as well as our need for Dominican community.

COMMUNITY AS WORD-NURTURING CENTER

On this point we want to stress three (3) things:

1. Community must respect, indeed welcome, the natural gifts and talents of each of its members. In this way, the "fellowship of grace" will be respecting the dictum that...'grace does not destroy nature; it builds upon it, and elevates it to become a sharer in Divinity.'

While each member ought to be receptive of communal discernment, the community must not do violence to the individuality of anyone. If indeed ..."the Word of God, rich as it is, dwells in each of us...", then this mutuality is a fitting respect for God's multi--faceted self-expression in and through His One, Eternal Word.

2. Just as the Spirit called our community into existence, we now must share His mission of proclaiming to a hungry world, that Jesus Christ is the Life-Giving bread, Who has been broken for us all. Toward this end the community needs to pray together whenever possible. It needs to study and share their gifts and insights with one another. It needs to work together in proclaiming the Good news.

3. In this way the community of Lay Dominicans provides a powerful theater in which we interact with God and our brothers and sisters in Dominic. Here, in community, we nurture the Word of God in our minds and hearts, creating a domain of grace out of which we preach the good news.

COMMUNITY AS "MAKER OF WORD-PEOPLE"

As lay Dominicans, we need to see that community, for us, is just as necessary as community for Religious. Yet our lay version of it will necessarily characterize our "way of being Dominican" as distinct from our religious counterparts.

For them, their prayer, work and apostolate are integrated under the one monastery/convent roof: a condition conducive to community.

Most of us must struggle over miles and conflicting schedules to meet once a month. Therefore, community for us must not be a place, a meeting or an undefined "something", imposed upon us just because religious share it.

Community for the lay Dominican must be understood as a function of the mission of the Order. If the mission of the Order is "...preaching for the salvation of souls...", then community must be the arena of grace where the Word of God transforms each member into, as He told Augustine, "...another Himself...".

If the mission of the Order requires people to proclaim the "good news", both in season and out, then community must be a "womb", which gives birth to the Word of God in the souls of its members. This is important because a preacher cannot preach what he doesn't know intimately. One cannot give what one doesn't have!

How can we give birth to the "Word" in the soul?

How can we nurture this "Word" in us?

What are the community's responsibility for this?

What are the individual's responsibility toward the community?