

# Lay Dominican Formation Program Province of Saint Joseph

## Novitiate-Session 8 DOMINICAN DEVOTIONS - IN-DEPTH VIEW

### I. Brief Review and Introduction

The previous session dealt with the importance of the sacraments, especially Eucharist, in Dominican Life. Fr. William Hinnebusch, O.P. states that the Mass was the very center of St. Dominic's life.

In this session we will explore devotion in the wider more theological sense of appreciation of God's goodness and our response to Him in a relationship of love.

Secondly, we will discuss particular "Devotions" or "practices" in the Church and Order which flow from and/or symbolize appreciation and love of God.

### II. The Meaning of Devotion: Esteem and Devotion

Esteem is the intellectual respect we have for a person based on the truth about that person. The emphasis is on the mind and involves our knowledge of the person. We esteem Jesus as Son of God and Savior of the world based on our knowledge of Him.

Devotion, however, is the appreciation of the person based on the goodness of that person and it evokes love. The emphasis here is on the heart which establishes a relationship with the person.

Relationship (devotion) develops through three stages.

1. Acquaintance: occasional presence
2. Friendship: frequent presence
3. Intimacy: constant presence

### Devotion vs. Superstition

Devotion which is not founded upon truth (knowledge) and love is not devotion but superstition and has fear as its basis.

The emphasis here is on some exterior (magical) act. There is no relationship based on trust and confidence involved.

Example: The story has been told of a woman who made a novena of novenas; on the last day of the ninth novena she lost her prayer book. The poor woman was distraught over the fact that now her prayers would not be answered and all that time was wasted.

She had no relationship of confidence and trust in the loving Father who gives even before we ask and indeed, inspires our asking, but only the fear that since she had failed to perform the required prayers, God would not hear her. The emphasis for her was on the external (almost magical) act of prayer rather than on the loving relationship with the God who was being prayed to.

### Deepening Devotion

Knowledge precedes love. The more we know (truth) about a person's goodness, the more the heart responds in love (appreciation). The more time we devote to (are present to) the person, the stronger and deeper that love becomes. In this way, the esteem we have for God through our knowledge of Him, becomes devotion the more we are present to Him. We become

increasingly more present to Him by means of reading sacred scripture, pondering it in lectio (Postulancy Program), meditation, and other forms of prayer, especially liturgical prayer.

## **Development of Particular Devotions in the Church**

Religious practices called "devotions" which have the Persons of the Trinity, Jesus, Mary, the Saints, and certain mysteries of Christ's life as their object have developed and continue to develop in the Church. -These devotions have both temporal and eternal or spiritual aspects.

The temporal aspect includes the historical setting, the temporal needs and the temperaments of the people where the particular practice or devotion began.

The eternal or spiritual aspect embraces the spiritual needs of the Church and some of the ways God chooses to sanctify her at any moment in time.

## **Devotion: Dominican Point of View**

For Dominicans, the basis of all devotion begins with the source of all good, God. In the life of the Trinity, the Father and Son know each other perfectly (esteem) and the mutual appreciation of perfect Truth and Goodness, proceeds from them in Love, the Person of the Holy Spirit (devotion). Jesus is the most perfect model of devotion, He sought every moment of His life to know the will of the Father and to follow it with all His heart, no matter what the cost.

"Behold, I come to do your will, O God."

"Did you not know I must be about my Father's business?"

"Father . . . not my will but yours be done."

Mary follows closely in the footsteps of her Son, exemplifying His teaching in her own life. In the name of human-kind Jesus cries **out**: "I come to do Your will" and Mary echoes: "Be it done to me according to Your word." Mary strove for an ever deeper knowledge and appreciation of the will of God. "She kept all these things and pondered them in her heart," and was rewarded by the words of her Son, "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." What are Mary's instructions to us who by our vocation receive the "office of the Word?" "Do whatever He tells you."

## **Dominican "Devotions"**

Considering the above it is not surprising that the Rosary is the Dominican devotion par excellence. Through the study of sacred scripture we increase our knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of Christ, while the practice of lectio feeds the heart, making it ever more present to Jesus in love. As we participate in the mysteries of the Rosary, we are taught by Mary, our mother and Mother of the Church, (Mariales Cultis.Paul VI) to "ponder these things in our heart" and to "do whatever He tells you." As we touch upon other particular devotions that have developed within the Order ' it is evident how naturally they spring from and compliment the Rosary.

When speaking of Dominican devotions, we must bear in mind that these devotions are not exclusively ours, but spring from the life of the Church, and that the Order has embraced them in a particular way according to the spirituality of the Order.

## Devotion to the Passion

Looking back through the history of the Order, we see a deep and ever-growing devotion to the Passion of Christ in all its aspects.

Of the many testimonies to St. Dominic's devotion to the suffering Christ, two in particular stand out, the words of the Eternal Father to St. Catherine of Siena: "Your Father fed His sons at the table of the cross," and silently but eloquently in the works of Bl. Fra Angelica. Studying the frescos, it is remarkable how many crucifixion scenes there are, and always Dominic is at the foot of the Cross. Comparing these with the other mysteries of Christ's life in which Dominic appears, we see that in all others Dominic seems to be a bystander, quietly contemplating the event. In the Passion scenes, however, Dominic is a participant, a sharer in Christ's suffering. His expression no longer shows the serenity of contemplation but the agony of participation. Perhaps this reflects to some extent Angelica's own devotion to the Passion, strengthening the concept that Dominican spirituality is rooted in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Under the heading Dominican Spirituality, the Catholic Encyclopedia states: "Dominican love of Christ centers on the Crucified, the Sacred Heart, Precious Blood and the Holy Name." It goes on to trace these devotions through our history in the lives of Dominicans.

Bl. Henry Suso particularly venerated the pierced Heart of Christ, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Catherine de Ricci experienced a mystical exchange of hearts with Christ. French Dominican Tertiaries suggested the building of Monmartre basilica in Paris as a national act of reparation to the Sacred Heart.

St. Catherine of Siena spoke constantly in her Dialogue of "the Blood;" she and St. Martin de Porres drank mystically from the pierced side of Christ.

There have been approximately 83 Dominicans who have experienced the stigmata.

Bl. John of Vercelli was devoted to the Holy Name of Jesus, preached it everywhere and began the custom of bowing the head when it is spoken. Bl. Henry Suso carved the "sweet name of Jesus" in the flesh over his heart. Henry also formulated a Way of the Cross having 100 stations in order that "Christ's every pain would be remembered."

In emphasizing devotion to the Passion, we do not wish to suggest that Dominicans are devoted solely to the Passion. Dominican Spirituality is Christocentric and embraces every phase of Christ's life, death and resurrection.

## Dominican Saints

The present Rule reminds us to cultivate a special love for St. Dominic and St. Catherine of Siena and we should extend that love to all the Saints and Blesseds of the Order. They are in a spiritual, but very real sense, our "flesh and blood," our brothers and sisters who have gone before us but who look back with love and concern to us in our moment of time. It is important for our spiritual growth to know and love them that we may learn from them how to be true children of Dominic. We must reach toward them as they reach toward us until that time when we will all be united under Mary's mantle. For a Dominican, the doctrine of the Mystical Body is an important daily reality. Among the Saints to whom we have a special devotion, shouldn't those who have lived the same Dominican vocation as we do, and who did it so well, hold the highest place?

Novices should devote themselves to learning all they can about the Dominican Saints, and Sr. Mary Jean Darcy's book, St. Dominic's Family should be in the personal library of every Dominican intent on finding his/her place in that Family.