

Lay Dominican Formation Program

Province of Saint Joseph

NOVITIATE - Session X CHARISM OF PREACHING

As postulations, you heard and saw who St. Dominic was and became ever more aware of his spirit and aims, and the manner in which they endure in today's world, through his committed sons and daughters.

Yet as novices, you have penetrated deeper into the mystery of Dominican vocation. Perhaps you asked yourself, "what am I doing here?" Or maybe you questioned whether or not the Dominican response was the correct one for that vocational call you feel in your heart. These questions might very well continue to arise in varying degrees throughout your lives. Indeed, they plagued many saints throughout the course of their lives. Yet, even though many of them felt weak-kneed and inadequate to respond sufficiently, they did not allow fear and/or ignorance to make their decisions for them.

Even though these questions are deeply personal, it seems that they are best considered only from within the shadow of the cross; that is, in the light of God's mercy and unconditional love for us. In that way, we can, with St. Paul, take courage from the knowledge that...'He who is faithful and true will bring to completion that work which he has begun in us.'

Such is the inspired wisdom that permeates our hallowed Dominican tradition. Once we begin to glimpse, no matter how slightly, the reality and authenticity of our lay Dominican vocation, then we will see more clearly that which we must do: become Word-people whose lives draw meaning in, through and with the Divine Person of the Word of God; Who became Flesh and dwelt among us.

A WORKING OUTLINE FOR NOVITIATE MEETING # 10

I. OPENING PRAYER

II. An Exploration of what makes the Dominican, "unique" in the Church.

Here we invite everyone to reflect, briefly, on the past 18 months of spiritual journey. One might begin this reflection on St. Dominic; what was "special" or "unique" about him in his own historical situation Does any of this "uniqueness" endure in his Order today, in the Church in the modern world? If so, then what is it? Can we claim that this, or any other characteristic distinguishes us, as Dominicans today? Why?

III A Proposal: that the Dominican vocation, lay or religious, is firmly rooted in the dynamic charism of preaching. This means that we ought to explore "grace", in its many dimensions. Here we need to see that Dominican life is first and foremost an absolute reliance on Divine grace. It is within this "mystery of grace" that the Dominican layperson lives out his or her vocation. All apostolic activities related in any way to the Dominican mission of "preaching for the salvation of souls", must find its origin and sustenance in grace.

IV. The Charism of Preaching

A. Three- part description

1. Charism as gift. Here we explore the gratuitous nature of grace.

B. Charism as ennoblement. This section stresses that the charism of preaching is indeed, a power. It transforms our minds and hearts so that we think and feel with the heart and mind of

Christ. We become "theo-knowers and theo-lovers". It is this power that give our words and deeds "redemptive significance".

- C. Charism as claim. here we stress that this "power of grace" not only makes us special, it also increases our responsibility. We have never "arrived"; we are always "on the pilgrim way". It is this pilgrim preacher that seeks to transform the world around him/her. Just as grace seals us as belonging to Christ, so we must claim the world for Him. It is grace which establishes and makes possible precisely this claim.

AN OUTLINE FINAL NOVITIATE SESSION

- I. OPENING PRAYER
TO SET THE THEME FOR THE NIGHT, IT SHOULD INCLUDE SOME REFERENCE TO AND/OR AWARENESS OF GOD'S GRACE, OUR CONSTANT RELIANCE ON HIS UNCONDITIONAL MERCY AND LOVE.
- II. Tonight we pose the question which we pondered at the beginning of our Dominican journey; way back in the early days of postulancy. (about 18 months ago): What is it that characterizes us, as Dominicans, as unique in the Church in the modern world? What makes a Dominican, Dominican?
- III. Tonight we also suggest an answer: the CHARISM of PREACHING.²

It will be helpful if we understand the question and answer as a dialogue between our own inner voices and the universe in which we find ourselves immersed. It should not be a question of what makes us different from the Carmelites or Franciscans, however useful such a study may be. It should be a dialogue that courageously proceeds within because only God sees us truly as we are. Meister Eckhart captured this experience in the following words.- "the eye by which my Father sees me, is the same eye by which I look back at Him.³

Therefore, let us not be content to say what we are not,(e.g. "we are not Jesuits, we are not Benedictines"); rather let us explore the charism of preaching as the distinctive characteristic of Dominican life. Perhaps You want to object, with Fr. Simon Tugwell, that lay people don't preach and therefore would not be Dominican by this definition. However, as you will see, this view of preaching is not only too narrow, but it also betrays Vatican II as well as the spirit of the new code of Canon law.⁴

IV THE CHARISM OF PREACHING

- A. As Garrigou-Lagrange tells us,⁵ the Church has traditionally divided grace into two general categories; gratia gratum faciens, and grtia gratis data⁶. Whereas the former makes us pleasing to God and is called sanctifying grace; the latter means 'I graces freely given' and it is intended to build up the body of Christ. In other words, where sanctifying grace is freely given to me by God in order that I may live in Him; the other graces, or charisms are given to different people within the Church in order to build up the Body of Christ. If (speaking crudely) we say that sanctifying grace establishes our vertical relationship to God, then the charisms are to edify our horizontal relationships in the Mystical Body. St.Paul lists some of these in his letters.⁸

- B. Recall St. Dominic profound reliance on grace; his deeply contemplative spirit, forged during his Osma years, made him ready and able to hear and respond to God's special call.
1. Why did he begin preaching?
Surely he was so attuned to the movement of the Spirit in his soul, that he could readily discern in his own historical situation, the Spirit's gentle call. Could we hear the Spirit if he called us today?
 2. Dominic's 1st preaching failed; so did St. Paul's. But each learned that man's wisdom is God's foolishness; that preaching is a gift dependent on God's timing. "One plants, another waters, but God gives the increase."⁹
- C. One cannot earn charism; it is freely given for the Mystical Body of Christ. But, one can prepare to receive it by listening in the quiet places of our hearts. Good preachers must be, first of all, good listeners. It is for this reason that contemplation is not an option for Dominicans; it is necessary for vocational fulfillment. And not just contemplative prayer "styles", either. Rather, a fervent child of Dominic will approach prayer, study and apostolate as contemplative persons. Only then will we be able to "speak in the light, what we hear in the dark."
- D. What is this charism of preaching?
This question ought to be considered under three headings, each of which illuminates our original question, "what makes a Dominican, a Dominican?".
1. charism as gift
 2. charism as ennoblement
 3. charism as claim

CHARISM OF PREACHING AS A DIVINE GIFT

We have already made reference to the gratuitous character of charism. But Dominic, especially, exhibited the profound humility that is pleasing to God. It was this humility that rendered him docile to the movement of the Holy Spirit in his soul. Because of this, he was able to hear the Words of the Word-Made-Flesh and consequently, to preach effectively.

Good preaching is always initiated by grace, and sustained by grace. Dominic knew this, and imparted this wisdom to his sons and daughters. Just as God calls each of us in a unique, unrepeatable way, He also supplies us with what is necessary for an adequate response. And given that we are required to cooperate with His grace, His gentle promptings could never be destructive to our nature. Therefore, if you find yourself called to follow Dominic de Guzman in his special mission, then know and be thankful for the fact that this special charism has already begun to transform your heart and soul by the "renewal of your mind".

CHARISM OF PREACHING AS ENNOBLEMENT

By ennoblement, we simply mean that the Holy Spirit, by conferring His various charisms, empowers those He chooses to "bring to completion that which He has begun in us". That is, He enables them, from the inside out, to be the voice of the Word-Made-Flesh. Surely we can understand this. Didn't 12 fearful men bolt themselves out of sight for forty days after the death of Our Lord? But after these days, didn't these same men proclaim boldly, even defiantly, that "this Jesus whom you put to death is the Holy One of Israel"? What made the difference? The ennobling character of the charism of preaching. The Holy Spirit clearly empowered these "non-professional preachers with all they needed.

And what about Dominic ? How do you think he experienced the ennoblement of this charism?¹⁰ Perhaps Dominic understands that a significant difference has occurred between the infant church of Apostolic fame and the church of his own day. The establishment of a more clearly defined hierarchy is not the least of these differences.

Considered as a fellowship of grace, as the Mystical Body of Christ, we are all sharers in the Divine life of God. And here, each receives according to his/her capacity. But precisely because we are a fellowship of grace, we need a means of receiving this grace. In His wisdom, God has chosen the sacraments and the priesthood as the principal means to mediate His grace in the church. Therefore, the priest has a special function in the church and a part of his function is preaching. Of course, we must respect the right order of things.

But what then becomes of the laity, with respect to their participation in the work whose origin is the charism of preaching? This is a crucial question and might be, for clarity sake, reformulated thus:¹¹ When Dominic went to Rome, he secured from Pope Honarious III, permission to form an Order whose reason-for-being is preaching for the salvation of souls. As Father Hinnebusch tells us, profession to the Master General is the passage, through which each person becomes a sharer in the mission of the order. Yet, precisely because the charism of preaching is what enables the Order to execute her mission, each person also becomes a sharer in this charism. So how then, are lay Dominicans able to experience the charism of preaching if they are not called to preach? Just what does the charism of preaching enable laypersons to do?

First of all, we ought to consider that preaching cannot be limited to what transpires in the pulpit. In addition to canonical preaching (that which is within the strict purview of the hierarchy), we also need to include catechesis, teaching, exhortation and bearing witness by word and deed. (read Vatican II document "decree on lay spirituality.")¹²

As the Vatican decree says - we're all called to bear witness by example. And what's more, the council Fathers recommend all faithful Catholics to be solicitous for occasions to share the Good News "both in season and out."

If this is true of Catholics in general, how much more is it true of us, lay Dominicans, who will, through profession, become authentic participants in the charism of preaching!

CHARISM OF PREACHING AS A DIVINE CLAIM

To suggest that the charism of preaching establishes a claim on us, is to suggest that this grace has a powerful transforming power requiring of its recipient a new and different quality of responsibility. As Dominicans, we can never delude ourselves into thinking that we "have arrived"; or that we "have it". On the contrary, the grace in question not only enables us to "do" preaching and the activities that fall within its orbit; it also enables us to "become" a certain type of person. This is a Word-person, or one whose life finds its absolute meaning in the Divine Person of the Word of God, who was made flesh and continues to dwell among us in His church.

And finally, we need to clarify, that the charism of preaching is a special grace given, in perpetuity, to Dominic and his followers. It was given to them in order carry out the preaching of Truth, in all its sacred dimensions. But because we are in the order the same way that we are in the Church, each of us will share

in the mission of the order according to our proper function in the church. What belongs to the function of priests in the church, will belong to priests in the order. And likewise, what belongs to laypersons in the church, will belong to laypersons in the order. Therefore, we can best fulfill the mission of the order only insofar as we function in a spirit of obedience to the church.

FOOTNOTES

1. REFLECT ON AND SUMMARIZE WHAT YOU HAVE GLEANED DURING THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF PRAYER AND STUDY. YOU MIGHT INQUIRE :

A. FROM POSTULANCY TO NOVITIATE, HAVE YOU DEVELOPED DIFFERENT IDEAS ON WHAT MAKES A PERSON, A DOMINICAN?

B. DID THOMAS AQUINAS CAPTURE THE SPIRIT OF THE ORDER AND HER MISSION IN THE FOLLOWING WORDS "...CONTEMPLATE AND SHARE THE FRUITS OF YOUR CONTEMPLATION WITH YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS."?

2. BY SUGGESTING THAT THE CHARISM OF PREACHING CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF "WHAT MAKES A DOMINICAN" WE DO NOT MEAN THAT IT IS THE ONLY WAY TO DEFINE WHAT IS UNIQUELY DOMINICAN. RATHER, WE MEAN THAT THIS PARTICULAR CHARISM IS THE GENETIC MATERIAL WHICH GIVES BIRTH TO THE MANY DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY. WHILE ALL ASPECTS (E.G. PRAYER, STUDY APOSTOLATE, ETC.) ALL DELICATELY BALANCED IN THE LIFE OF DOMINICAN, IT IS THE "GRACE" OF PREACHING WHICH INTEGRATES AND GIVES MEANING TO THEM ALL.

3. . IN ORDER TO HEAR WHAT GOD IS CALLING US TO BE TODAY, WE MUST LEARN HOW TO LISTEN WITH HOW TO LISTEN WITHIN OURSELVES OUR OWN TRADITIONS. HERE, IN THE QUIET RECESSES OF OUR HEARTS, WE WILL PRAYERFULLY DISCERN HIS VOICE.

4. CF. "DECREE ON LAY SPIRITUALITY (CHAP. 2, NO. 6) "DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II ; ED. AUSTIN FLANNERY, O.P.; PAGE 772-773

5. CF. GARRIGOU-LAGRANGE. LOUIS; THREE AGES OF THE INTERIOR LIFE (HERDER: NEW YORK) 1949 VOLUME II pp 575-577 REFERENCE CAN BE FOUND ON XEROXED COPY IN THIS PACKET.

6. IBID.

7. CF. I COR. 12:4, 7-11. ALSO ROM. 12:6.

8. IBID.

9. HERE WE MUST ASSERT THAT ALL PREACHERS EXPERIENCE FAILURE AND DISCOURAGEMENT. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE KNOW THAT PROVIDENCE ALLOWS THESE THINGS TO OCCUR AND WHERE HE WILLS THEY ARE EVEN USED AS A MEANS OF GRACE. THEREFORE LET US NEVER BE DEFEATED BY DISCOURAGEMENT FOR AS THE MASTER IS, SO SHALL THE SERVANT BE, AND PIERCED ARE THE FEET THAT FOLLOW THEE. CANST THOU HAVE FOLLOWED FAR, WHO HAS NO WOUND, NO SCAR ?"

10. IT IS IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE CHARISM OF PREACHING ENABLED DOMINIC TO DO MORE THAN CREATE PERFECT SERMONS FROM THE PULPIT. IT ALSO HELPED HIM TO INTEGRATE THE TOTALITY OF HIS EXPERIENCE INTO A COHESIVE RESPONSE TO THE NEEDS OF HIS DAY. E.G. HIS REACTION TO THE "PEOPLE BEING SCANDALIZED BY THE CLERGY'S VULGAR DISPLAY OF WEALTH. WAS A RENEWED COMMITMENT TO THE LIVING OUT OF EVANGELICAL POVERTY AS A COUNTER SIGN FOR THE PEOPLE.

11. THE HOLY SPIRIT MOVES WITHIN THE CHURCH. HE DISTRIBUTES HIS GRACES IN AND THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF THE CHURCH. THEREFORE PREACHING SHOULD ALWAYS BE ROOTED IN THE AUTHORITY AND VITALITY OF THE CHURCH.

12. CF. CONGAR YVES "LAY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH" (CHRISTIAN CLASSICS: MD) 1985 pp 294-307 THIS ARTICLE WILL MASTERFULLY EXPLAIN THE PROPER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAY PEOPLE. THE CHURCH AND PREACHING. THE TEXT CAN BE FOUND IN THIS PACKET.