

800th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF SAINT DOMINIC

(August 6, 1221 – August 6, 2021)

“*Veritas*”

A sermon for the Feast of Saint Dominic (August 4)

given in Avrillé (France)

IN THE WORDS that Jesus spoke on earth, three resonated in the soul of St. Dominic that must resonate in ours. These words are: “*Misereor super turbam*”, I have mercy on the crowd (Mk. 8:2). St. Dominic transposed them, saying: “*Quid fient peccatores?*” “What will become of sinners?” **This pity for souls and the salvation of souls—is the secret of St. Dominic’s vocation, the fundamental impulse that moved him.** That is why he is called: “*Apostolicus Pater Dominicus*”, the Apostolic Father, the father concerned about souls, who saw how far men are from the divine Truth, how much they ignore or despise this Truth; who therefore wore himself out in the service of the Truth, in order to contemplate it, and then to communicate it to souls and to organize an Order whose purpose would be to preach it.

These three things, in fact, summarize the life of Saint Dominic. This life, at first sight, is complex, but in reality it is simple. It is one because it rests entirely on a single principle: *the Truth*. **The principle of unity in the life of St. Dominic and his Order is Truth.** Therefore, we must grasp the life and work of St. Dominic in truth, starting from this fundamental inspiration of his apostolic soul, in the light of the principle which has become the motto of the Order which appears on his halo: *Veritas*.

The life of St. Dominic has three phases:

- The first is that of maturation in Osma, Spain;
- The second is that of the external apostolate, in Languedoc, in the middle of Cathar country;
- The third, which is the most fruitful — of a more hidden fruitfulness than the previous one, but more lasting — is the foundation of the Order. Each of these phases lasted about a decade. Each one, above all, was placed under the patronage of the Truth.

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The first phase is that of maturation in Osma, in silence, strict observance of the religious rule, prayer, and study; it is the stage of knowledge and contemplation of the Truth.

Saint Dominic, in fact, began by drinking from the source of divine Truth for many years, by filling himself with its light, before communicating it to others. For, in order to be able to preach the Truth, to become “*champions of the faith and true lights of the world*”, as Pope Honorius III would say of the first Dominicans, one must first be deeply imbued with the faith and the first Truth, which is God

Faith makes contact with the divine Truth. Saint Thomas says with his usual precision:

“There is for us, even in this life, a certain participation and assimilation to such a cognition of divine truth, inasmuch as through the faith which is infused into our souls we adhere to the very First Truth on account of Itself. – *fit nobis in statu viæ quaedam illius cognitionis participatio et assimilatio ad cognitionem divinam, in quantum per fidem nobis infusant inhæremus ipsi primæ veritati propter se ipsam*”¹

St. Dominic, therefore, began by living by faith, by knowing the first Truth in and for itself, without any utilitarian aim. Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, says of St. Dominic that **since his birth he married the Faith, just as St. Francis married Poverty** (*Paradise XII, 61*).

This phase of our holy father’s life is essential, and we too must reproduce it with extreme fidelity, embracing faith in our turn through contemplation and silent and assiduous study of the First Truth. How, in fact, can we serve this divine Truth and preach the faith, if we are not intimately filled with it? We would fall into that inconsistency which, under the pretext of life and action, sinks into activism and sacrifices the absolute for the contingent that passes away; the divine for the human. Those who give in to this tendency, if they do not deny God or the reality of Revelation, are logically led to believe that God is conditioned by His creation and to erase from the Gospel the very idea of the divine attributes. They subordinate the primary Truth to passing truths or even to the opinions of the world, and become incapable of giving God to souls.

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The second phase of St. Dominic’s life is that of the apostolate, of the preaching of the contemplated faith, of the expansion of the Truth. For about ten years, the saint traveled throughout Languedoc and preached to the heretics.

For truth is communicable. “*Credidi propter quod locutus sum*” – I believe, and that is why I have spoken, says St. Paul (2 Cor. 4:13): the evidence of faith irresistibly inclines us to communicate its content; hence these apostolic accents of St. Dominic, accents of tenderness for sinners, which recall those of Jesus: “What will become of poor sinners?” Not that these men are simply miserable or starving, but they do not know the Truth. This is the real misery, the most serious.

Jesus said of himself: “I am the Truth” (Jn. 14:6). He was moved by the desire to communicate the Truth that he had to proclaim, *because He himself was the Truth in action* in the bosom of the Father. In the same way, St. Dominic preached the Truth because he was filled with it, because he had espoused it, because he had made it his own. He had not forgotten the first phase during the second: the preacher must remain a contemplative, on pain of no longer preaching the word of God, but of preaching himself: “***Contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere* – to contemplate and transmit to others the truths contemplated.**” **Preaching must be nothing but the overflow of contemplation;** what is preached must be nothing but the fruit of contemplation. And so, in the very structure of St. Dominic’s life, we find the economy of the life of Jesus: thirty years of silence and preparation, three years of preaching, and finally the sending of the Apostles on a mission throughout the world. This shows with what supernatural spirit the preaching of the Truth must be considered. It is grafted onto the faith; it is itself an act of faith, and this is what ensures its victory.

¹Expositio in libro Boëtii de Trinitate, Proœmium, q. 2, a. 2

This second phase had all the hazards of a battle, with alternating failures, tribulations, and successes. For preaching is an adventure, so to speak: there is the Holy Spirit who instructs souls from within, there is the one who speaks externally, and there are those who listen – the agreement is not always easy. St. Dominic himself experienced the failure and hardness of souls who rebel against the Truth. But this, too, is part of the divine plan. And precisely in the hour of failure he saw souls close up to his word, he made a pact with the Virgin Mary, a pact that lasts for eternity. The Mother of Preachers, “the One who believed”, as the Gospel calls her, then gave St. Dominic an invincible weapon to touch souls and effectively communicate the Truth to them. **This weapon is the Rosary – the Rosary, which transmits the substance of the faith and is both a prayer and a sublime means of preaching the great divine truths.**

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The third phase of St. Dominic’s life was the foundation of the Order of Preachers and the sending of the friars to the whole world.

After having hoarded the Truth and after having proclaimed it, the Saint organized its preservation, fruitfulness, and diffusion in time. For this he founded an Order. If the grain remains piled up, it dies; but if it is sown, it produces fruit.

An Order is the fruit of an act of wisdom (*sapientis est ordinare*); it is an organic whole of which one element is the principle of the others. One is part of the Order only if one is connected to the principle. The principle of our Order is St. Dominic; but more primitively, it is the Truth. To the extent that we guard and carry the Truth, we are part of the Order of Preachers, rightly called “the Order of Truth”; this is its trademark, its essential note, so to speak.

This third phase, like the second, was marked by success and trials. And this has continued in the history of the Order. There have been, there are, especially in our days, betrayals and defections within our Order. This is the crucial proof given by Our Lord himself: “You will know them by their fruits.” (Mt. 7:16,20). The fruits are the works of the Truth; where they are lacking, it is a sign that the Truth is no longer served; or, as St. John says: “They went out from us but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would no doubt have remained with us.” (1 John 2:19). They were not of us because they did not serve – or did not fully serve – the Truth.

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These three phases of St. Dominic’s life are certainly successive, but one does not replace the other; they are linked and remain one in the other; there is penetration of the first into the second, and of the first two into the third.

And it must be so. For it is the depth of contemplation that preserves from activism in the apostolate; so it is necessary that the first phase penetrate the second. And it is also necessary that the first two phases unceasingly inspire the third. For only the contemplation of the Truth and zeal in the service of the Truth can preserve one from the sclerosis and decadence that threaten any work on this earth, even if it is holy and inspired by God, as a religious Order is. In short, we must carefully keep the principle: *Veritas!*

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Saint Dominic left us his testament. This testament can be summed up in three words: **“This, my brothers, is what I leave you as an inheritance: have *charity*, keep *humility*, possess voluntary *poverty*.”**

But we can say that these three words are summarized and merged in this small word of seven letters which constitutes the motto of the Order: *Veritas*, Truth. For Dominican charity is above all the charity of truth; and the preaching of truth can only bear fruit if it is founded on humility and poverty.

This is what God revealed to the most illustrious daughter of St. Dominic, St. Catherine of Siena:

“St. Dominic wished to make the light of Truth the principal object of his Order. [...] This why he appeared in the world as an apostle and sowed the seed of my word, full of light and truth, dispelling the darkness and distributing the light. [...] Dominic is thus in harmony with my Truth, not wanting the sinner to die, but to be converted and live.”

“*Veritas de terra orta est.*” Truth springs forth out of the earth. Our earth, our roots, our father is St. Dominic. He bequeaths to us the Truth, thirst for the Truth, love of the Truth, and asks us to be faithful to the Truth. Let us strive, by our three vows, by our contemplative life, by our prayers and studies, by our doctrinal preaching, by our whole life, to be TRUE.

Holy Mary, Mother of Preachers, pray for us!

