



DOMINICAN
INSTITUTE
OF TORONTO

www.dominicantoronto.org

@TDominicans

When women and men – both Religious and Lay – enter the Order one of the first discoveries they make is that Dominic left behind very little written material for his preachers. It was as if he wanted to leave us a different legacy. For some members of the Order this means that Dominic's homilies continue in the life of every Dominican. In the words of Master Gerard Timoner, "we are part of the ever-expanding text of his sermon." For others, it means that Dominic, like John the Baptist, always points away from himself to the one who is greater, the Lord Jesus Christ. Today's commemoration highlights for us that even in death Dominic witnessed to this humility and simplicity. We learn from Jordan of Saxony that the translation of St. Dominic's remains to a more auspicious resting place really was only at the insistence of Pope Gregory IX and not the friars themselves. As Dominicans we honour Dominic best by meditating on the words of Jesus in light of the "living homily" that comprises our Dominican tradition.

Today's gospel is Matthew's account of the disciples' final encounter with the resurrected Lord. Also known as the Great Commission, the words of Jesus (Matt 28:19) resonate with the Dominican charism because they go to the heart of our mission to be preachers in the world. Fr. Timothy Radcliffe gives the Dominican family his view of the mission. He describes it in this way:

To be a preacher is to be sent by God, but we are not all sent in the same way. For the sisters and the brothers this will often mean, literally, being sent to another place... But for many members of the Dominican family being sent does not mean travel... being sent...means being from God. It is our very being... Being a preacher means that every one of us is sent from God to those whom we meet. The wife is sent to the husband and the husband to the wife. Each is a word of God to the other. The nun may not be able to leave her monastery, but she is just as much sent as any brother...Sometimes we accept our mission by remaining where we are and being a word of life there.



DOMINICAN
INSTITUTE
OF TORONTO

www.dominicantoronto.org

@TDominicans

These words by Timothy Radcliffe struck me as being so very timely in our situation today. The past two months of confinement revealed just how much the first place to which we are called as preachers is to our home and family community. Over the past two months, some spouses discovered that they had to get to know each other all over again. Parents discovered just how amazing their children are while children realized that they are grateful for their parents. As members of Religious Communities, we too might have had our own surprises. In one of the communities of my own Congregation in Trinidad and Tobago the experience of confinement turned out to be an opportunity for a different kind of encounter as two Sisters combined their talents in a way they never had before in order to serve the wider community. One Sister who is very good at sewing decided to make masks for distribution while the other who is very artistic designed prayer cards to be inserted into the packages.

The Dominican theologian and ethicist, Fr. Benedict Ashely also provides his perspective on what it means to be sent to be a preacher. It is different but as a Religious Sister I find it equally informative. He explains that while Dominicans do not have a monopoly on the ministry of preaching what is unique to the Order is that it “seeks to give an example, to train others, and to stir up others to preach, even to the least members of the Church according to their gifts and calling.” He states that, “the Order...strives to waken all to do their part.” In this sense, I would say that Dominicans are also sent to help Christians recognize and live out what it means to belong to the priesthood of all the faithful.

“Make disciples of all nations,” Jesus continues, “baptize them” and “teach them to obey the commandments I have taught you” (Matt 28:19-20). Again, we can look to the “living homily” of our Dominican tradition for pertinent insights into how the members of the Order have grappled with this particular command of Jesus. Fr. Dominique Pire, the Belgian Dominican who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1959, recounts the disdain he received when he disclosed that he had not brought a single refugee into the Catholic Church after all his dedicated work attending to their welfare. Fr. Pire explains that he was not indifferent to the souls of these displaced persons but that his method was different. This is what he says about his method: “Mine stems from the principle: ‘The more you seek, the less you find.’ I believe simply in the force of example and the power of prayer and secret sacrifice...what I am trying to do in my own small way [is] achieve catalysis, not conversion. In actual fact, no one ever makes a convert, only God can do that! We are only God’s crystals. His light shines through us to fall on others. All we can do is polish the glass, so that the ray shall shine through brightly.”



DOMINICAN
INSTITUTE
OF TORONTO

www.dominicantoronto.org

@TDominicans

The motto of our Order “preaching and the salvation of souls” is not viewed narrowly because from the beginning our tradition has been concerned with the whole person, the integral human being. Professor Mary Catherine Hilkert, of the Dominican Sisters of Peace puts it in this way: “...the very kind of conversion that is the goal of all preaching [is] freedom, wholeness, reconciliation, and human flourishing that overflows in joy and praise.”

Katarina Pajchel is a Dominican Sister and a physicist who works in nuclear research at the University of Oslo. She views the mission of discipleship as a call to accompaniment. This is how she describes her vocation: “As Dominicans, we pass on the things we have learned, not as teachers from above or by giving ready-made answers, but by accompanying people and being honest. Even when we are walking in the desert and seeking faith, we are still serving others as we all share the same questions in our secularized Western society, which is suffering from spiritual poverty.” In December 2016 a group of millennials in the US who identify as NONES embarked on a unique project with Dominican Sisters. Part of it involved actually living alongside the Sisters for a few months. The initiative began because they were attracted by the “gift of intentional, meaningful community” lived by Women Religious as well as the Sisters’ passion for social justice. Wayne Muller, one of the pioneers of this initiative, explains it like this: “I knew that the sisters were not that unlike the millennials, in that they were much more horizontal than vertical in their understanding of organizational structure...They tend to prefer to stay closer to the ground, work on the margins of unmet needs and are drawn to similar social issues, such as immigration, anti-poverty, and anti-racism efforts.” From a Dominican point of view, it seems to me that this exciting initiative could only be realized because of the Sisters’ commitment to the mission of discipleship and teaching as a process of dialogue.

For Sr. Faustina Jimoh of Nigeria, the commission to make disciples is about the gift of presence. She speaks about the importance of her community’s witness as a Christian presence in the north-west region of the country which is predominantly Muslim. She is one of many Dominicans who carry out their preaching mission in places where life is hard and good news seems a long way away. Many members of the Order are sent to be preachers in the context of struggle, poverty, and injustice. In these contexts, the mission of discipleship, baptizing and teaching becomes one of discerning what Mary Catherine Hilkert calls “the responses of protest, hope and sheer endurance” of the people in order “to name the ‘echoes of the gospel’ that can be heard there.” In other words, Dominicans are called to “name the grace.”



DOMINICAN
INSTITUTE
OF TORONTO

www.dominicantoronto.org

@TDominicans

These Dominican sisters and brothers whom I highlighted this evening are inspiring examples of men and women who have lived today's gospel in the Dominican Way. As a Religious Sister, I see the call to make disciples of all nations as an invitation to live a life that manifests faith in God's abiding love and a commitment to the universal common good. The summons to baptize is about giving new life and proclaiming grace by our words and our presence. The commission to teach is above all a call to mutual dialogue and practical action. We come to this mission as Dominicans attentive to the Holy Spirit and confident that God is with us through it all. May today's commemoration of the translation of St. Dominic renew the zeal of the Dominican family to be preachers of grace by the power of word and the witness of example, in the knowledge that we too are participants in the "ever-expanding sermon" of our Holy Father Dominic.

Light of the church, teacher of truth, rose of patience, ivory of chastity, you freely poured forth the waters of wisdom; preacher of grace, unite us to the blessed. Amen.

Carla M. Thomas, O.P.