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*Letter to the Tertiaries of Penance of Saint Dominic*

***N° 58******July 16, 2006***

***Our Lady of Mount Carmel***

*Dear Tertiaries,*

You will find here enclosed a text on our holy father St. Dominic, a text that contains without doubt some of the most beautiful words ever been written about him, words written especially for those who, like ourselves, belong to the Order he founded and that explain the reasons that found the very special devotion we must have towards him. As the title will show, they were written for the members of the Province of Toulouse by their provincial on the occasion of the seventh centenary of the canonization of St. Dominic in order to foster in them precisely this devotion, to deepen it and inflame it. They admirably attain their end and thus we send them to you for this same reason, in order to help you celebrate the feast of St. Dominic which is fast approaching.

The author of this letter is Fr. Étienne Vayssière, elected Provincial of the Province of Toulouse in 1932, an office he kept until his death in 1940. The story of Father Vayssière is a very encouraging one, for it shows how a soul who generously accepts the trials God sends can attain to the heights of sanctity, in spite of handicaps which seem insurmountable. As a young novice and student in the Order, Fr. Vayssière was tremendously interested in study and progressed rapidly in his acquisition of the science he loved so much. Then one day, near the end of his studies for the priesthood, he was struck by a sickness which affected his nervous system, to the point that he became utterly incapable of studying or preaching at all. Ordained nonetheless, he was assigned to various tasks but soon showed himself quite unable to do anything. Finally it was decided to send him to « La sainte Baume », the hermitage of Saint Mary Magdalen in a grotto in the south of France near the town of Saint Maximin, where are now found her relics. All alone with a lay brother in this lonely place up on the side of a mountain, he began to get into the habit of going down every day to the guest house where he could talk to people, read the newspaper, etc. One day however, as he was going down, he came to the place where the path that descends meets another path that leads up to the very top of the mountain where St Mary Magdalene used to go to pray. A sudden light showed him the emptiness of what he was doing : « What are you going down there for ? To find some distraction ? No, you aren’t going ! » And he took the other path, the path of his new vocation, the vocation of a contemplative. He began to live the life of a real hermit : solitude, silence and prayer, above all prayer, several hours every day, to the point where he would sometimes say 6 full Rosaries a day. He spent 30 years in his grotto and gradually became more and more known, especially because of the spiritual direction that many sought from him, until finally he was elected provincial.

May his example and his prayers help us too to become true contemplatives and true sons of our father Saint Dominic.

 Father Albert +

*From a circular letter addressed on Easter Sunday 21st April 1935, by Father Marie-Étienne Vayssière to his religious subjects in the Province of Toulouse on the occasion of the seventh centenary of the canonisation of Saint Dominic.*

***The foundations of the devotion to Saint Dominic***

Studied in the truth of history, there is no saint whose character appears more attractive and congenial than that of Saint Dominic. It is true that the hatred of the enemies of the Church has endeavored to disfigure his character and the popular imagination, misled by the unceasing calumnies, has seen, and too often sees still, the gentle Patriarch of the Preachers only through the instruments of torture and the flame of the executioners' fires. But, it is necessary to state, the truth is at the opposite pole. In the far off 13th century, no one among his contemporaries appeared more charmingly courteous than this Poor Man of Christ, this humble and indefatigable missionary of Truth, making his way on foot; knapsack on his shoulder, singing canticles to the Virgin, weeping over the fate of sinners, going down on his knees at the entrance of towns and begging the Lord with tears not to chastise them because of his sins: a living image of the Saviour of the world, gentle and humble of heart, passing in the midst of men while doing good.

***The natural characteristics of our blessed Father.***

We know the handsome portrait of Dominic described by Sister Cecilia [[1]](#footnote-1):

He was of middle height, well proportioned, his body slender and agile, his countenance handsome and ruddy, his hair and beard auburn; from his forehead, between his eyebrows, a radiant light shone forth which drew everyone to revere and love him. He was always joyous and pleasant, except when moved to compassion by some affliction of his neighbour; he had long and beautiful hands, a noble and musical voice; he kept his religious crown entire, mingled only with a few white hairs. The Creator's hand itself fashioned this delicate body and enriched it with His grace, in order that it might be a sanctuary of the Holy Ghost, worthy of His gifts and of His working.

The portrait which Blessed Jordan traced of the Blessed Father is no less attractive:

There was in him, such a purity of life, so great a movement of divine fervour, so impetuous an impuIse towards God, that he was truly a vessel of honour and of grace. Nothing ever troubled the equanimity of his soul, unless it was compassion for the ills of his neighbour. The beauty and joy of his features showed his interior serenity, which was never ruffled by the least movement of anger; his goodness won all hearts; scarcely had one met him when one felt oneself irresistibly drawn towards him; he welcomed everybody in the depth of his charity; loving all men, he was loved by all; he gave the night to God and the day to his neighbour. Nothing seemed more natural to him than to rejoice with those who were joyful and to weep with those who wept; in his conduct there was never the shadow of concealment; nothing equaled the simplicity of his heart. Who will ever attain to the virtue of this man ? We can well admire him, but to be able to do what he could do, to imitate what he did, belongs only to a singular grace, which God gives only to those whom He wills to raise to the heights of sanctity.”

*The human glory of Saint Dominic.*

Following this, need we be surprised at the irresistible allurement exercised by Saint Dominic in his lifetime ? And is it not still the secret of his ascendency, throughout the centuries, and even to our own days ? Like to that heavenly perfume which, at the time of the translation of his relics, enraptured with ineffable delight those who witnessed it, the aroma of his holiness and the sweetness of his grace have, throughout the ages, never ceased to attract and conquer souls. The history is there for us to retell it, in a diversity of voices: the voices of popes and of the great ones of the earth, the voices of the low and humble, the voices of peoples, the voices of poetry, of art, of eloquence, the voices of all that here on earth, can resound and sing, all are united in celebrating Dominic and making us see in him one of the highest messengers of divine love on earth, one of the most venerated Patriarchs honoured by the Church.

But — dare I say it ? — this human glory, this admiration and these sympathies, whatever joyful pride they may arouse in the hearts of his sons, cannot, however, be the true support of their devotion and the deep source of their love and their confidence. Saint Dominic’s glory has a higher origin and must be established on a more solid foundation. The true glory of the saints appears especially in the devotion with which the Church honours them, and this devotion is measured by the radiance of the divine life in their hearts and in the supernatural mission with which they are invested.

*Our Predestination in Saint Dominic.*

In the formation and development of the Mystical Body of Christ, the divine goodness is, without any doubt, infinitely sufficient of itself, it has no need of exterior help in achieving its ends, but, for love of the creature and in order to augment the creature’s glory and happiness, it often pleases God to appeal to its collaboration, and to associate it, as a secondary cause, with the infinite divine activity. In this way, says Saint Thomas, the angels of superior hierarchies enlighten the angels of inferior hierarchies. There is the same law in the world of grace and of glory. From the heart of Christ, the divine hearth where it abides in its plenitude, grace descends and is poured out in the saints according to the measure of the gift which is granted to them. And here is the starting point of the devotion which we owe to Saint Dominic.

What is Dominic to the eyes of our Faith ? He is our Father. God has associated him to the ineffable mystery of His Paternity. The eternal love which, in the beginning of things, disposed everything with an infinite wisdom, willed, chose and predestined us in Saint Dominic. He made us his children. He united us to him by an ineffable and vital bond. He willed that Dominic, like Abraham, should be the Father of numerous generations. He gave him the grace of the Patriarchs.

And, let us note well, this paternity is not a simple title of honour: it is accompanied by a grace proportionate to its great mission. Just as God has given to His Christ a plenary, capital grace, which, from His heart, is poured out over the whole Mystical Body, in the same way He has given to Saint Dominic, as to the diverse Patriarchs of the religious life, that plenitude of grace in which their posterity ought to live, a plenitude received from Christ and, through that intermediacy, flowing into the souls of their children.

*He is our mediator of intercession*

Another privilege also: just as Christ is to the world of the elect the Mediator of redemption and of life, in the same way Dominic, always in dependence on Our Lord, is the mediator of intercession for his religious family. On high, close to God, he represents his children, carrying them in the arms of his tenderness, offering them without intermission to the infinite Mercy, a channel of life which nourishes them, wisdom which leads and directs them, tenderness which presses them unceasingly to his breast, where there murmurs like a far away echo, faint without doubt, but nonetheless real, the great and eternal words: "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee”. Behold what Dominic is, behold what we are; he is our Father and we are his children. An ineffable certainty ! And in that certainty what a bright and radiant light on the relations which ought to unite us to him, how powerful and intimate they appear to us !

And that light becomes brighter still if, after having considered the mystery of our predestination in its origin, we study its consequences in the future, at the final end of the ages, at that supreme hour when, time having run its course, the Son will give back all royalty to his Father.

*Our glorification in Saint Dominic*

Children of Saint Dominic, what will be our place in the splendour Of the saints ? In God, undoubtedly, in Christ who will be all in all to us; in Mary, always our Mother, in heaven, as She has been here on earth; and then, I do not hesitate to add, in the very heart of the glorious Patriarch. The gifts of God are in fact not repented of. The laws laid down by Him are developed in a harmony and fidelity guaranteed by His infinite wisdom. Our glory, in heaven above, will be the very crowning of that grace in which we have been predestined and conceived. Predestined in Saint Dominic, we shall be glorified in Saint Dominic. The Dominican family, willed and arranged by God from all eternity for a special purpose in the bosom of the immense family of Christ, after having fulfilled in time its providential role, will find itself again, on high, in the integrity of its first predestination, that is to say in Saint Dominic, animated by his patriarchal grace, transformed in the reflection of his glory, sheltered still in that heart itself where God placed its origin and where, after having drawn its life there in time, it must taste eternal rest, and, in him and with him, must sing endless praise. During the days of his mortal life, the old chronicles tell us, at the hours of psalmody and prayer, in the midst of the choir, Dominic's voice was raised, ardent, on fire, to urge on and rouse the Brethren: *Viriliter, fratres* !, he loved to say. In that day of praise without end, in the embrace of the eternal and supreme psalmody, is it not permitted to our devotion and our faith to contemplate Dominic still, in the fervour of his voice, in the rhythm of his heart and his gestures, urging on his children in the canticle enflamed by the Eternal Love ?

*Our vocation and our life in Saint Dominic*

Here then is our eternity: always in Dominic and with Dominic. You perceive the conclusion: do these visions of eternity not place in a decisive and victorious light our life in time ? Is glory anything other than grace expanded and raised to its highest power ? Does the intimacy of our union with Saint Dominic, prepared by our predestination and so much alive in the eternal ages, not tell us better than any reasoning how deep that union should be in time and with how much vigour we should preserve the bond of devotion and love woven by God Himself to attach us forever to our Blessed Father?

And this duty appears no less pressing in the light of a new consideration which we cannot neglect; let us not forget that our Dominican vocation has been purchased and achieved by Saint Dominic at the price of the most severe sacrifices.

When, in the course of his apostolic journeys, Dominic, solitary and saddened by the sight of triumphant heresy, traversed the plains of Languedoc; when he went about, mocked, contradicted, persecuted, sending heavenwards the great cry of his apostolic soul: "Lord, what will become of sinners ?"; when, in his long days of journeying, letting his companions go on ahead of him, he conversed heart to heart with his beloved Saviour, or else, with his strong voice, sang out to the echoes of the plain the strophes of the *Ave maris stella* or of the *Veni Creator*, what did he ask of the divine Spirit and of the Queen of the Rosary ? Undoubtedly the conversion of the heretical people who surrounded him, but also, and without doubt, it is certainly permitted to think he asked and called for with all his soul the future legions of Preachers; the victorious Order that was to multiply and perpetuate him in the Church; these lights of the world, these athletes of the faith, these preachers who would he the labourers of the future, the labourers of the harvest which he already perceived on the horizon, the whitening dawn. For them, without limit and without respite, he lavished prayers and hardships, in a word, the best of his life.

See then where our religious vocation takes its birth also. After its awakening in God, in the hearth of the eternal Love, it flowed from the very depths of the soul of Dominic; we are the children of his heart, the fruits of his prayer, the trophies of his blood.

Consequently, in these days of the centenary, while seeing our Blessed Father so gloriously exalted, let us not be content with the thrilling of a holy and filial pride, let us also and especially be conscious of the duty which imposes itself. In the presence of the Catholic world which admires him and sings of him, let there sing and resound, still more ardently in the depths of our hearts, the filial tenderness which we owe him. He is our Father, it is in his grace that our Dominican life took birth. Let us be his true children*.*

1. — Fr. Vayssière refers to Blessed Cecilia, who, as a young sister at St. Sixte at Rome, had the opportunity to see and hear St. Dominic personally. Her testimony, carefully recorded many years later, is a precious legacy for the whole Order. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)