

What is the Dominican Third Order?

As its name indicates, it is the third part of the Order of Friar Preachers. The First Order is composed of fathers and brothers, who make solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The Second Order is composed of contemplative nuns who, by their life of prayer and penance, make fruitful the apostolate of their brothers in the First Order. Then there is the Third Order, which is subdivided into the Third Order regular, whose members live according to a common religious rule – for example the teaching Dominican sisters and those communities who have in the past devoted themselves to nursing and other apostolates – and the Third Order secular. It is this last, the Third Order (secular) of Penance of Saint Dominic, that we want to speak. The Dominican Third Order is in fact an association of faithful who, living in the world, desire to attain Christian perfection in the secular life under the direction of the Friar Preachers according to their spirit.

The Origin of the Dominican Orders

Saint Dominic, who lived from 1170 to 1221, founded four distinct organizations, all of which have perpetuated in the world the past eight centuries, thanks to the Saint's far seeing wisdom and to the organization of each of these distinct entities and to their relationship toward each other.

There is no doubt that the idea of an Order had been formulating in the mind of St. Dominic for quite some time. While prior of the Augustinian Canons at Osma he received a request from the Bishop to accompany him on a journey, taking them through Southern France, where they were both dismayed to find the large number of people lost in the Albigensian heresy. The journey then led them to Rome, where, in the year 1204, Pope Innocent III sent the Bishop and St. Dominic back to Languedoc to join forces with the Cistercians, to whom he had entrusted the crusade against the Albigenses. Dominic lost no time in battling the heretics, the weapon at his disposal was Divine Truth, it was theological arguments and thus his education in Spain, his life of mortification, and his daily practice of contemplation of the Truth served to be invaluable. The heretics, unable to refute his arguments or counter his preaching, hurled insults and threats of physical violence.

Early in his crusade against the Albigenses, Dominic realized the necessity the need for an institution that would protect the women that had converted from the evil influence of Albigenses: their

own friends, and families. To do this and to help these women maintain the Faith, Dominic, with the permission of Foulques, Bishop of Toulouse established a convent in Prouille in 1205. These women were cloistered for protection from the outside world, and they were given the charge to pray for the efforts of Saint Dominic and his followers. To this community he gave the Rule and Constitutions which have ever since guided the nuns of the Second Order of St. Dominic.

In 15 January, 1208, a Cistercian legate was assassinated by the Albigenses. This precipitated another kind of crusade, led by Simon de Montfort – one of not only theological arguments and debates, but one wherein the laity became involved protecting, with force, property and persons of the Faith. Saint Dominic met Simon de Montfort about September, 1209. It was sometime about this date that the Saint established the *Militia Jesu Christi* (Soldiery of Jesus Christ). This institution also owed its origin to Foulques, Bishop of Toulouse. Dominic charged the *Militia Jesu Christi* with bearing arms for the protection of the Faith and directed them to say prayers – there was to be nothing political with this profession. They were only allowed to fight in the defense of the Faith, the Gospel, and of the interests of the Church. As these crusaders followed the Rule established by their Founder, their wives began to join them in their prayers and the other pious practices. Saint Dominic, seeing these practices, admitted women to the Order of the Militia of Jesus, charging them to wield only the spiritual arms of prayer. Saint Dominic and Simon de Montfort, who by the way was one of the first members of the Militia of Jesus, remained close friends until the brave crusader's death at Toulouse in 1218.

Simultaneously, with the establishment of the *Militia Jesu Christi*, about 1209, there developed another group of laity that attached itself to Saint Dominic and his followers – this group became known as the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, and later the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of Saint Dominic. These lay people relied on their spiritual guides, Dominic and his followers. They too were given prayers and pious practices to follow, for the purposes of leading them to Christian perfection. Eventually, this group and the Militia of Jesus formed into what is now known as the Dominican Third Order of Penance. In 1285, a specific Rule was drawn up for these people to follow, by Muñon de Zamora, the seventh Master-General of the Dominican Order. On 28 January, 1286,

Pope Honorius IV gave the Order its canonical existence.

Interestingly, on 12 September, 1213, during the crusades against the Albigenses, while the army was on the battlefield at Muret, Saint Dominic knelt at the foot of the altar in Saint-Jacques Church praying for the triumph of the crusaders. Simon de Montfort thought the victory so remarkable; he attributed it to be miraculous. To thank God for the decisive victory he erected a chapel in the church of Saint-Jacques and had it dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. Obviously the devotion to the Rosary had already begun and it is about this time that the Rosary Confraternity was established – one of its first Confraternities was established in Valencia in 1221, the year of Saint Dominic's death.

The First Order, the Order of Friars Preachers, received their canonical existence on 22 December, 1216. From that point on, all the foundations of Saint Dominic attached their futures to the fortunes of the Friars Preachers. The First Order assimilated ancient forms of religious life; the monastic and the canonical, but made them subservient to clerical and apostolic life, which makes the Dominicans unique and its aims essential; contemplation on Divine Truth; the preaching and propagation of the fruits of contemplation of that Truth; and the Salvation of Souls. It's no wonder that the motto of the entire Dominican Order is *Veritas* – Truth. Now, some eight hundred years after establishing the First, Second, and Third Orders, as well as the Rosary Confraternity, all that Our Holy Father Saint Dominic founded still exists today – even in the troubled times we live under.

The Object and Spirit of the Third Order of Saint Dominic

As mentioned earlier, Saint Dominic saw as one of the objects of the Third Order to help its members arrive at Christian perfection. But shouldn't that be the goal of all Christians? you might ask. Clearly it is, as Our Lord said "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect." (**Matt V, 48**). There are degrees of Sanctity – "he that is just, let him be justified still; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still." (**Apoc. xxii, 11**). We must always seek to be moving up higher in the spiritual life – for he who is not advancing will be descending. The object of the Third Order is to help men and women living *in* the world but not *of* the world.

Saint Dominic in the Third Order wanted to furnish those who are involved in their necessary vocation in the

world with the means of becoming religious without entering into a monastery or convent. As the holy Dominican Tertiary Saint Catherine of Sienna he desired them to build a cell in their hearts. He hoped that by following pious practices and a certain Rule the Tertiaries would stay “unspotted from this world.” Tertiaries ought to make Our Lord, in a very special way, their model, their standard by which to measure up to. They ought to wear His virtues as they would a garment: they ought to wear His poverty by detachment from material goods; His obedience by submitting themselves to lawful superiors and to a Rule; His suffering by living a life of penance; and His apostolic life by zeal.

The Third Order exists to promote a great union of prayer. Its members form a choir in their homes, each cloistered in their own house of prayer forming hundreds of cloisters throughout the world singing the prayer of praise. The Tertiary prayers are melded together with those of the regular Third Order, with those of the Office of the Sisters of the Second Order in those enclosed cloisters, and with the daily services and Offices of the First Order. The Third Order is an Apostolate of united Prayer.

Saint Dominic brought men and women of good will together; men and women obedient to God’s commandments, with acceptance of their duties and state of life, so that they might pray, do other pious practices, and perform good works together – that their good will may be strengthened by a mutual support. Loyalty to the Church; reverence and devotion to Her Ministers and Her services – all these are required and specifically said in the Rule. As the collect for the Saints of the Order prays: “Grant, we beseech Thee, Almighty God that the examples of the Saints of our Order may incite us to a better life.” The Third Order was intended to be an Apostolate of Example.

The New Testament law of charity and good works is another Apostolate that Saint Dominic instilled into the Rule, desirous to see his Tertiaries follow his spirit with ardent and generous hearts for the glory of God and the salvation of their neighbor. Mindful of the Holy Founder’s intentions and example, the Rule incorporates emphasis on the Truth of the Catholic Faith, for the Church and the Holy See, and charges the Tertiaries to be fearless defenders of the sacred rights of the Catholic cause, even when attacked by neo-modernist Rome.

They are, as the name suggests, Brothers and Sisters of Penance. By mortifying and denying themselves, by

abstaining from worldly activities, by fasting, some of which is prescribed in the Rule and others sought by a spirit of self-sacrifice, the Tertiaries have to make expiation for sin, not just their own sins, but the sins of the whole world – there are so few people, and Christians alike, making reparation for the many and grievous offences committed every minute of every day against Our Lord and Our Lady. Thus the Third Order is an Apostolate of Penance – the Tertiaries can preach the gospel of penance to modern man.

The Rule itself, which in no part obliges under pain of sin, may be summarized under three principal points: the habit, prayer, and penance. One could even reach here to the spirit of the First Order Rule, which also does not oblige under pain of sin, but rather under pain of doing penance. This too can be said to that the Third Order be led and directed by the spirit of the First Order of Friars Preachers.

The Privileges of the Third Order of Saint Dominic

There are many advantages and privileges to being Dominican. One is practicing a Rule that is virtually unchanged for the better part of eight hundred years and that has guided and nourished holy and saintly men and women down through the ages – many who have been officially pronounced by the Church to have reached heavenly sanctity. An Order that has done great service for the Church – and whose efforts have not gone unnoticed by the Church and Her popes – popes who time and again have lauded praise, honors, privileges, and indulgences upon Her devoted son, the Dominican Order.

What a privilege to look upon heaven and to call Saint Dominic “Father,” and to know and call upon his sons and daughters there who hear our prayers and who pray for our efforts here in this valley of tears. A privilege, indeed to call “Brother” and “Sister” saints like Thomas, Raymond, Peter Martyr, Hyacinth, Lewis Bertrand, John of Cologne, Rose of Lima, Catherine of Sienna, Vincent Ferrer, Martin de Porres, Pope Pius V, Louis-Marie de Montfort, and others too numerous to mention. To know the Rule and Spirit we are following is the same that they too persevered in – they pray for us in the Communion of Saints – but as Brothers and Sisters with the same heritage, the same Holy Father.

Each Tertiary shares in prayers with each other, as mentioned above, but the Tertiary also participates and shares in all the prayers, merits, masses, and good works done for God and for souls of all the other members of

the entire Order – from the First Order through the Third Order – every prayer, every merit, every mass, and every good work from the very inception of the Order eight hundred years ago up to now and till the end of time.

Tertiaries also by virtue of “the communication of privileges” gain much which others who do not belong to a Third Order are deprived of – that is the participation of Indulgences and Privileges that have been accorded to the Mendicant Orders of the Church – which include the Dominicans, the Franciscans, the Hermits of Saint Augustine, the Servites, the Minims, the Trinitarians, and the Friars of our Lady of Mercy. This favor of intercommunication of Privileges and Indulgences has been granted by the previous Pontiffs and confirmed by the Dominican Pope Benedict XIII, in his Constitution *Pretiosus* of 28 May, 1727.

Let us leave the last word to Pope Benedict XV, Letter of 4 August 1919: “The earnest desire to promote the salvation of souls presses Us to point out to the faithful the means of holiness which will preserve them from the dangers which threaten. Therefore, We exhort all those who desire to sanctify themselves and to sanctify their neighbor to be enrolled under the sacred banner of Saint Dominic, for, thanks to the special protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his illustrious Order has exercised across the centuries, and will exercise still more amid the needs of our era, providential mission.”

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