

REFLECTIONS

God's Spirit is on me; he has chosen me to preach the message of good news to the poor, sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to set the burdened and battered free, to announce, 'This is God's year of favour.' Luke 4:16-21.

Following on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – the unchangeable heart of our faith - the common ground of our Dominican charism in the eyes of the living Church, is the dignity of the human person and their flourishing, their salvation. This is preeminent. This means not just providing the means for economic development, but also the guidance and development of moral/ethical/spiritual values and behaviours. Everything is our teacher.

Dominic put himself directly on the path of the early church in establishing the Order of Preachers as a way of being Christ's sacred presence in our world – this is our same privileged task today wrought by our faithfulness to the rhythm of our charism: Prayer, Community, Mission (presence) and the Study of Truth to be effective Preachers. We know that this is why Dominic put such store in community – that we would know our strong need and reliance of one another to be all we could be, with God's own power, continually searching for truth, spent for others.

This search will find us always caught up with aspects of human dignity and respect for each person's inalienable rights and an urgent need to speak truth wherever these are compromised, in whatever humble way we may advocate for and on behalf of others. The corollary will also be the preservation of earth's resources and its environment. We are one vast web of connection, one aspect cannot exist or be divorced from the other; both require such dignity, opportunities for sustainability, and flourishing. This is in our hands, underwritten by our faith, following on the dream of Jesus, reiterated by Dominic, left to us in all our current vulnerability to give flesh to. We do not belong to ourselves but to others.

This calls for discernment, in the Dominican context, learning, filtering what is really happening in our world, growing in understanding of the structural injustices that prevail due to the market-driven, consumer-demand system and the pressure for profits from transnational corporations. To alleviate, or even be aware of, these injustices call for a firm commitment to social reform and renewal which can only happen when we commit to be truly in relationship with one another and understand the vast discrepancies of experience that haunt our globe, recognising our sometimes complicit stance. This presence we offer, called in God's name, has as many myriad manifestations as there are Dominicans, from our bedrock of prayer intercession on behalf of others, advocacy, care of others, of asylum seekers, etc., equally present from the front-line activist to the bedridden among us, in mission.

This premise of right relationship, that we are all God's people in this mission of redemption, challenges any social system where the weak remain neglected, the discriminated sidelined, the poor unjustly treated. The gospel calls for injustice, inequality, violence to be rooted out, determining that any such reflected behaviours are abhorrent and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel.

This is a Kairos moment, a graced moment, to renew ourselves. To invite everyone in to be part of this scouring - yet equally part of this joy - to offer each other, all those we are committed to, a word of hope for the future and that our earth – because of our choices - will last unto future generations. I know I seek courage to be this for others, and your company and prayer, to be faithful.

– *Sheila Flynn OP*, June 2021, reflecting on our times, our charism, our graced lives.

DOMINICANS IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE

[Dominic's] mother was most merciful. Once it happened that the venerable Felix, Blessed Dominic's father, went on a trip. Noting the misery of the afflicted and having already given them many of her goods, his mother completely distributed to the poor a huge jar of wine which she had, and this was known throughout the whole area. When, returning, her husband was near Caleruega, his neighbours went to meet him. Some of these persons were whispering about the wine given to the poor. When he reached his home, he told his wife to have the neighbours present receive wine from the aforementioned jar. Fearing considerable confusion for herself, she quickly went to the cellar where the aforementioned wine was, and, kneeling, asked the Lord, saying: "Lord Jesus Christ, although I am unworthy to be heard on the basis of my merits, Yet hear me for the sake of your servant, my son, whom I have given over to your service." For the mother knew the holiness of her son, and rising, fully confident, she went immediately to the jar and found it full of wine. Giving thanks to the Giver of all Graces, she had this wine served abundantly to her husband and others, and everyone was surprised.

– *Rodrigo of Cerrata*

Rodrigo actually visited Caleruega in the 1270s to seek out information about Dominic's childhood, so we may give this miracle story some credence. At any rate, the story suggests that *concern for the poor* was something our patron learned at his mother's knee, for it emerged in the young Dominic – now a teenaged student – when he sold his books in Palencia to buy food for famine victims.

St Thomas Aquinas wrote that "justice is the most excellent of the moral virtues" (*Summa Theologiæ*, I II, 66, 4), and a passion for justice has been present in the Order over the eight centuries following the founder's death.

Francisco di Vitoria (1483 – 1546) was a Dominican thinker who applied the principles of justice to international relations. He has been called by some "the Father of International Law". In particular, of course, he turned his attention to what Spain was doing in the New World. He insisted that "the natives undoubtedly had true dominion in both public and private matters, just like Christians, and that neither their princes nor private persons could be despoiled of their property on the ground of their not being true owners." He denied that they could be understood as "slaves by nature" in Aristotelian terms, adopted from Aquinas the Roman law concept of *ius gentium* ("the law of nations"), and found the conditions for a "just war" – a concept which he elaborated – were utterly lacking in the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Another notable defender of the native peoples of the new world in the same era was **Bartolomeo de Las Casas** (1484 – 1566). Landowner (and therefore slave-owner) turned friar and later made bishop, Las Casas had partial success in getting the New Laws of 1542 passed by Spain in defence of the Indians. Of course, powerful forces worked to undo his reforms. Nevertheless, he is often considered to be one of the first advocates for a universal conception of human dignity and human rights.

In our own time and our own place, the parish *Social Justice Group*, the *St Vincent de Paul Society* and the *Welcoming the Stranger Committee* undertake valuable work in support of the needy and the defence of human rights.

FACTS AND TRIVIA



WHO LET THE DOGS OUT?

What is it with Dominicans and dogs? If you look up at the windows above the apse in St Dominic's, there is a dog (with a torch in its mouth) sitting under the throne from which the Virgin Mary is handing St Dominic the rosary. In the frescos of the "Spanish Chapel" in Florence (see at left), there are dogs all around St Dominic and his friars as he disputes with the Albigensians. So why dogs?

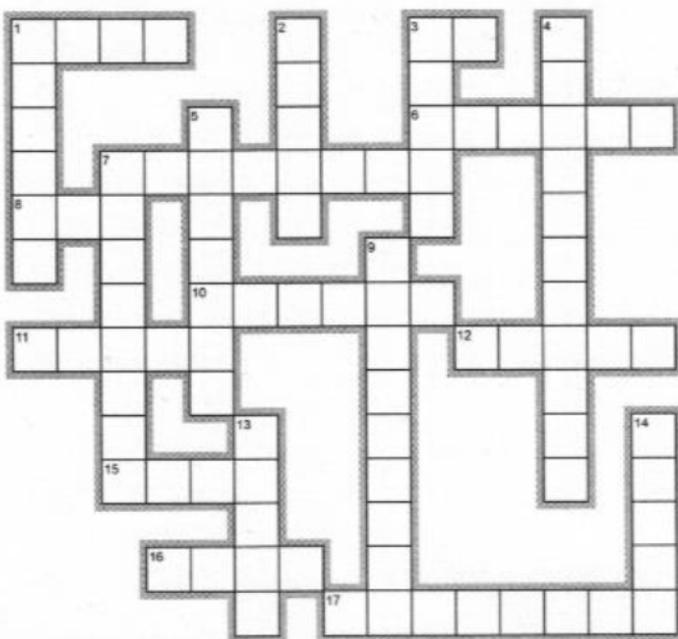
In fact, there are a couple of explanations.

Blessed Jordan tells us, "During this time a boy named Dominic was born in this diocese in the town of Caleruega. Before his mother conceived him, she saw in a vision that she would bear in her womb a dog who, with a

burning torch in his mouth and leaping from her womb, seemed to set the whole earth on fire. This was to signify that her child would be an eminent preacher who, by "barking" sacred knowledge, would rouse to vigilance souls drowsy with sin, as well as scatter throughout the world the fire which the Lord Jesus Christ came to cast upon the earth."

Added to this, there is a pun. "Dominicans" in Latin is "Dominicani", and "Dogs of the Lord" would be "Domini canes." Combine the pun with Blessed Jane's vision ...

TIME FOR A CROSSWORD ?



EclipseCrossword.com

ANSWERS NEXT PAGE =>

ACROSS

1. Mother of St Dominic (4)
3. Order of Preachers (abbrev.) (2)
6. To praise, to bless, to ... (motto) (6)
7. Place of first Dominican nuns (8)
8. Dominic's mother's family name (3)
10. Dominic's father's family name (6)
11. Dominic was a at Osma (5)
12. English word meaning "brother". (5)
15. Major centre for heretics (4)
16. A Dominican's best friends?
17. Defender of the Indians (3-5)

DOWN

1. Immediate successor of St Dominic (6)
2. Black & white clothes worn by friars (5)
3. Traditional chant "O wonderful hope" (1-4, Latin)
4. English name for Dominicans (11)
5. City of St Dominic's tomb (7)
7. City where Dominic studied as a youth.
9. Dominic's birthplace (9)
13. Dominic's bishop in Osma
14. Dominic sold these to feed the poor.

FACTS AND TRIVIA

ALBIGENSIANS / CATHARS

Who were the heretics that Dominic sought so ardently to convert? In doctrine they were similar to the Manichees that St Augustine had encountered eight centuries or so earlier: they believed in a good, spiritual god and an evil, material god. This had a corrosive effect on marriage and the family, and on their attitude towards all earthly authority, which put them on a collision course with the civil as well as ecclesiastical authorities. But more than their doctrine, it was their personal demeanour that made them attractive in southern France, where conditions were tough. They called themselves “bons hommes” or “good men”, and their leaders – who were committed to freeing their spirit from the evil, material body by starvation – “Cathari” or “the Perfect”. They did indeed live ascetic life, in contrast with many self-indulgent Catholic clergy. Their enemies called them “Albigensians” after the town of Albi, something of a centre of heresy at the time.

DISPERSAL OF THE BRETHREN

Dominic’s infant Order at Toulouse obtained papal approval in 1216, but on Assumption Day the following year he took a decision which shocked his supporters: he dispersed them. They went to Spain, England, Italy and (a little later) Austria, but the biggest group was sent to Paris. From the beginning, then, Dominicans became involved in the incipient universities springing up in Paris, Oxford and elsewhere. Dominic wanted his preachers to know their stuff! This dispersal, and the involvement in the universities, would have a profound effect in moulding the nature of the Order, its universality and its intellectual mission.

THE DARK SIDE

Have all the last 800 years seen Dominicans in a favourable light? Of course not. One of the darker episodes often brought up against the Order is its involvement in the Holy Inquisition and the Spanish Inquisition. Even if it is true that the number of people condemned by the Inquisitions has often been exaggerated as a result of anti-Catholic polemic in past centuries, it remains true that the Inquisitions – and the involvement of Dominicans in them – is a stain upon the history of the Church as well as the Order. We can only adopt the attitude of Pope John Paul II, who wrote as the Church approached the year 2000, “I ask that the Church, ... should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters.”

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

ACROSS

1. Jane
3. OP
6. Preach
7. Prouille
8. Aza
10. Guzman
11. Canon

12. Friar

15. Albi

16. Dogs

17. Las Casas

DOWN

1. Jordan

2. Habit

3. O Spem

4. Blackfriars

5. Bologna

7. Palencia

9. Caleruega

13. Diego

14. Books