

## A Reflection on My Vocation as a Dominican Friar and Priest



In June of 1961, I graduated from Adrian Catholic Central High School in Adrian, Michigan. Up until the spring of that year I had never met a Dominican priest. I expressed my interest in the Dominicans to my senior home room and religion teacher, Sr. Margaret Urban, OP [Sr. Michael Elizabeth], and she arranged a meeting for me with the Dominican chaplain at the Dominican Sisters' Motherhouse in Adrian. After a couple of short meetings with him, I sent off the papers he had me fill out and was accepted to begin studies for the Order with the Eastern Province of St. Joseph. In September of 1961, with a mixture of anxiety and anticipation, I entered Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island, and there began the amazing journey of discovery that the Order of Preachers has provided me. At the age of 18, I could not have imagined the variety of experiences that awaited me. It has been a long, sometimes difficult, always challenging and frequently exhilarating process.

Among the more memorable blessings I've received through the Order was discovering in myself a deep hunger for a spiritual life which held a promise of communion with the Divine Mystery through Jesus Christ and led me to search out ways to pray. The tradition of prayer in the Order is profound and rich and deeply rooted in both quiet meditation and the liturgy and it has accompanied me for the 57 years of my Dominican life (counting from 1963, the year I entered the novitiate).

Study has always been a hallmark of the Order and though I can't claim to be much of a scholar, the blessing of study in my Dominican formation opened the door into the Sacred Scriptures which has been, and continues to be, a profound source of spiritual nourishment and a liberation from some very unhealthy concepts about God. The blessing of studying the holy Scriptures and praying with them continues to open my mind and heart to the Creator, the Maker of the Universe in all its wonder, to the liberating power of truth and to a life of Divine favor. Study has also provided me an entrance into the writings of many great souls, both living and deceased who, along with my eventual discovery and appreciation for iconography, have been source of illumination that continues to feed my spiritual hunger and delivers me to a deeper life in the Mystery of the Holy Trinity.

The particular blessing I'd like to elaborate on was my discovery of the call and the grace to be a preacher. While I was aware of the difference between a diocesan priest and a religious order priest, I certainly had no clear concept of just what that difference was. Discovering the distinction would eventually lead me to a vocation within a vocation – the call to be a preacher – somewhat accidental on my part, but most likely not on God's.

From early grade school on, the Dominican sisters who taught us informed us that the "OP" after their names meant "Order of Preachers." However, I experienced the Dominican women as teachers, very good teachers, certainly a noble calling in its own right and the Order has produced a good number of renowned teachers throughout its 800-year history. Only later, much later, did it occur to me that they were indeed preachers, fulfilling the command of Jesus to preach and teach. These sisters, along with my family, were the first witnesses to the importance of a life in Christ and of my formation in the Gospel, however ill prepared I was to receive it or grasp its importance.

Upon entering the Order, I was reintroduced to St. Dominic, the founder of the Order of Preachers. I discovered him to be a man filled with great joy and wisdom and passionate about preaching who identified himself with the Apostles and their call to preach the truth. He gloried in the call to be a preacher, even signing his letters, "Dominic, Preacher." Dominic answered with his whole heart the challenge voiced by St. Paul in Romans, 10;14: *"How can they call on him in who they have*

*not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach? And how can people preach unless they are sent?"* Responding to this challenge, he saw the importance of gathering a community which would lead an Apostolic life, one immersed in prayer and intense study with the freedom to move about and preach where needed. Never losing hope, facing many obstacles with patience and constant prayer and with zeal for the preaching, Dominic was finally able to form the Order of Preachers.

The Order opened to me the great treasure of my life, the living Word of God and the ministry of offering that Word to others, an exciting, humbling, terrifying and challenging privilege. I've never seen myself as a particularly charismatic preacher but I have found my identity as a priest in the call to be a minister of the Word, perhaps even more than being a minister of the Sacraments. I have experienced the living presence of God as much in the Word as I have in the sacraments, a mystery confirmed for me in the words proclaimed in the ***Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of Vatican Council II***: *"The Church has always venerated the divine Scripture as she venerated the body of the Lord in so far as she never ceases, particularly in the sacred liturgy, to partake of the bread of life and offer it to the faithful from the one table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ"*

In the St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, he reminds the Corinthians, who have divided themselves into camps – some for Paul, some for Kephaz (Peter), some for Apollos – that they were baptized in Christ and, noting a couple of exceptions, he's happy he didn't baptize any of them. He states: *"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with the wisdom of human eloquence, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its meaning."* In its ***Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*** the Vatican Council II emphasizes priest's primary ministry is preaching: *"The People of God is formed into one in the first place by the Word of the living God...it is the first task of priests as co-workers of the bishops to preach the Gospel of God to all"* [underlining mine].

I see the priesthood as a great privilege, not an honor that exalts me over others, but one that immerses me in, "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time..." as the Council's ***Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*** puts it. I hear in the call to be a priest and a preacher the mission to offer a word, and sometimes an assuring touch, of hope and healing, of comfort and encouragement and, on occasion, a word of correction or challenge, holding before those to whom I minister the living Word of God so they can see their lives in it.

After the Holy Trinity, the primary blessing with whom Divine Providence has anointed my life is you, my large extended family and numerous friends, my Dominican brothers and sisters and colleagues in ministry. You have ministered the living Word of God to me. Shortly after the close of my first assignment at St. Gertrude's Church in Madeira, OH it occurred to me that it is the folks to whom we have been sent who bless our lives, who challenge us and encourage us, calling out of us gifts we never realized we had, who continue to ordain us and bring to life the ordination initiated by the Bishop. This was especially true in my that first assignment and it continues to be true after 50 years of priestly ministry.

My heartfelt gratitude to you for your ministry to me, *Marty, OP*

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