

**LAY DOMINICAN FORMATION PROGRAM  
(PROVINCE OF SAINT JOSEPH USA)**

**SESSION I: SPIRIT AND AIMS OF ST. DOMINIC**

**Doris Stukes**

*LIFE OF ST. DOMINIC*

**A. *Beginnings***

Dominic was born in Calaruega, Spain in 1170 to the holy household of Blessed Jane of Aza and Felix Guzman. In a prophetic vision before his birth, Jane saw a black and white dog with a flaming torch in its jaws, setting the world on fire. His godmother had a dream in which the child appeared with his forehead lighted by a radiant star whose brilliance filled the world. The dog signified the preacher barking the message of salvation to the world. The star indicated that he would be a light of the world. He would light the way for those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. (In iconography, both the lighted torch and the brilliant star are used as symbols of St. Dominic.)

He began a priestly education under his uncle, a priest, at the age of seven. Later he went to the University of Palencia where the foundations for his life were laid. His studies were focused on art and theology, but his time was spent predominately with learning and studying Sacred Scripture.

Following his ordination to the priesthood (about 1195), he joined the chapter of Augustinian Canons at Osma. These were important years of formation for Dominic. They were his contemplative years. He experienced life in a religious community and dedicated himself to prayer and theological studies. (Dorcy 1-5)

**B. *Dominic and the Albigensians***

Dominic accompanied his bishop, Don Diego of Osma, on a diplomatic mission possibly to Denmark. They encountered the Albigensian heresy while passing through southern France. At Toulouse, he spent the night in argument with the heretic innkeeper and upon winning back his host for God, he realized the need for "some religious body consecrated to the

the Order has been able to persevere despite persecution and trouble. Dominic ignited a flame that still burns centuries later. (Dorcy, 1PY33-139)

*AIMS OF ST. DOMINIC*

- A. *To establish a group of preachers who would be well prepared through prayer and study to preach effectively in order to confront error and ignorance.*

"Dominic realized that only a religious order could give the church the continuous supply of trained preachers it needed". He had observed that the Albigensian leaders were educated men who were well versed in scriptures. This combined with their austere lifestyle made them convincing preachers. Dominic saw the necessity for the friars to systematically study the scriptures. He constantly urged them to study the Old and New Testaments. He always carried Matthew's Gospel and Paul's Epistles with him. To insure adequate theological training for his friars, he founded houses in the university cities. He also sought to enrol university students in the Order.

- B. *The salvation of all souls by preaching the word of God*

Dominic founded the Order of Preachers for the salvation of souls. This apostolate is the only aim of the order. He possessed an unquenchable thirst for souls. His inability at Languedoc to successfully convert the Albigensians back to God made him all the more determined to conquer the world for Him. When he sent the brethren out to preach, he used Jesus' own words "Go therefore into the whole world preach the Gospel to every creature." Christ had died on the cross to redeem man. This redemption being accomplished, Dominic burned like a flame to bring to God all for whom his Son had died. This apostolic work had its beginnings in Dominic's heart. It was nourished by his prayer, study and contemplation.

"To sum up: the two characteristics which mark St. Dominic's apostolate concern its quality and extension. Thanks to him, the apostolate has again become what it was to St. Paul; dogma quickened to life and action; divine truth, loved and taught for its own sake; contemplation and mystical life overflowing into wondrous activity; supernatural revelation ordering toward its end all branches of natural knowledge; the unity and happiness of mankind bound up with the unity of the church."

C. *Salvation of mankind while maintaining a strong unity with the established church.*

The apostolic form of preaching was not new with Dominic. It was the inspiration behind several reform movements. The poor Catholics and the Humiliate were two of these movements that found a place within the catholic church. Other groups- the cathars, Albigensians and the Waldensians - drifted into heresy. The apostolic ideal was also behind some developments in regular religious life. Dominic' s achievement was that he established apostolic mendicant preaching as an official mandate of the church, sanctioned and authorized by the pope. From the beginning, Dominic sought episcopal approval. Bishop Fulk of Toulouse established Dominic and his companions as a preaching brotherhood for his diocese.

When Dominic petitioned Pope Innocent III for papal confirmation, it was not granted immediately. The fourth Lateran Council ordained that no new foundations were to be established unless they were a part of an already approved rule. Dominic obediently followed the Pope' s suggestion that he gain the consent of his brethren to accept a common rule already in existence. They chose the rule of St. Augustine.

*DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*

1. If this is your first introduction to St. Dominic, what has impressed you most about him?
2. Why do you think St. Dominic founded the Order of Preachers?
3. Would you like to acquire the "spirit" of St. Dominic?

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## SESSION II: DOMINICANS: PEOPLE OF THE WORD

Doris Stukes

### NOTE:

Presenters, feel free to add your own favourite stories from Dominican traditions to explain the topics outlined here. People love to hear stories, and stories tell the message vividly. By adding your own stories, you "personalize" the talk. One Dominican wrote how important it is that we speak from our own experience as well as from the books we read, so that the message is personal. To our contemporaries, that kind of communication is often the only kind that reaches them. And bringing our own gifts to a task is itself a very Dominican goal mentioned in the presentation!

At the end of this session is a list of two books and a pamphlet for the postulants to read. You may want to read this material yourself as you prepare to give this presentation. In addition we recommend the book, *'Way of the Preacher'*, by Simon Tugwell, O.P. as an excellent source of information about Dominicans. All the books and pamphlets we recommend are available from the Dominican Laity Office in Washington, D.C.

To continue the introduction from the last session by building on the description of the spirit and aims of St. Dominic. Dominic was devoted to the Word of God, the Word he met in Liturgy and Scriptures, the Word he proclaimed in preaching and actions, the Word that guided his life with family, friends and community.

We will talk about the word of God as the source and focus of Dominican spirituality.

### *The Presentation*

1. As mentioned in the first session, Dominic is our model and spiritual father. In his life we can see he acted out the concepts and commitments we' ll be talking about. Dominic was committed to:

The Word of God, met in Prayer  
The Word of God, contemplated in Study  
The Word of God, expressed in Community  
The Word of God, shared in the Apostolate

2. Another important idea was mentioned in the last session: membership in the Dominican family is not something added on to

The Liturgy of the Hours was once just prayed by friars and nuns while lay-folk prayed the Little Office or the Rosary. But the Liturgy of the Hours - The Divine Office - is now available to all Christian people. This prayer, established by the Church to "sanctify the day" frames each day's separate time segments with prayer. Said in community, said with bodily gestures, said in alternating choirs, all aspects speak about Dominican characteristics:

- Said in community - for lay people, who usually pray alone at home, the community of the Divine Office is the whole Body of Christ, especially those who also pray the office. Lay Dominicans often use their Chapter meetings as opportunities when they can pray the Office together.
- Said with bodily gestures - to remind us of the dignity of the body and the basic goodness of all God's creation.
- Said in alternating choirs - to show how fundamental prayer is, how close to the rhythms of creation, night/day, ebb tide/high tide, planting/harvesting, contemplation/action.

But beyond even the majesty of the Liturgy of the Hours with its scriptural readings, hymns, prayers, and silences is the Eucharistic Liturgy. Here we celebrate the Word in Scripture and the Word made flesh, we meet Him, unite with Him in His life giving Sacrifice, we attend His banquet table that foreshadows the joys of heaven.

In all of these prayer experiences, we experience prayer as conversation - words in dialogue, prayer as an intimate exchange of that which is deepest within us. God expresses His deepest self, His Word, imaged in His Son Jesus, and we strive to be equally self revealing, self giving. In prayer we honour and experience the Trinity, but especially the Son, the Incarnate Word, the Word spoken in Scriptures, the Word broken as bread in the Eucharist.

- b) In study too, Dominicans encounter the Word. Dominic was a scholar, devoted to study. But Jordan of Saxony, the second Master General of the order, says of him: "When he felt that he had sufficiently learned the arts, he stopped studying them, as if he were reluctant to spend any longer time in these less fruitful studies, and turned to the study of theology." A recent Constitutions of the Friars said, "...our study ought to aim

the apostolate flow from and express our ideas, attitudes, insights (etc.!) acquired by the prayer, study, and community experiences that precede it. St Thomas' famous definition of our life applies here: "To contemplate and give to others the fruits of our contemplation."

In the apostolate also, our habits are tested, honed, perhaps reshaped in response to the needs we discover in others or in ourselves! We don't live in ivory towers, remote from the hurly-burly world. We stay in community, in solidarity, with our families, friends, co-workers - and with all people. Dominic used to pray often, "O Lord, what will become of sinners?" He translated that concern into an apostolate of the Word - bringing God's Truth to people, helping them discern His ways, so they could follow Him with informed choices and wholeheartedly.

Dominicans today show their love and concern in many other ways. Their apostolates are as varied as the needs of God's people. Dominican friars, sisters and lay people often are found in the teaching professions; many serve as missionaries in foreign lands; some Dominicans work with the sick. The friars have often been outstanding spiritual directors; some have contributed to the arts. Modern Dominicans, clerical and lay, make significant contributions to their communities, mostly without publicity.

In all this activity - prayer, study, community and apostolate - the centre and focus is the Word of God in all its multiform yet simple presence, infinitely engaging and attractive, opening infinite possibilities of new expressions in today's world.

Dominic and the Dominican way encourages you and every individual to unite with the Word in prayer, study, community and action so that each of you reaches your full potential in God. Whether you find that potential as a member of the Dominican family or not, it is our prayer that you continue to explore God's will for you, and that you can discern more and more clearly what God wants for you in your spiritual walk with Him. Our efforts in this series of talks is not to "sell" the Dominican way. It is to explain it so you can discern about it and see if you feel drawn to follow Jesus as a lay Dominican.

e) In closing this portion of our meeting/gathering, let me say again that this presentation shows what we strive for, not what we have achieved! As a postulant, you need to discern if

Jesus in their own lives. They act from within themselves, so they are creative and flexible in responding to "the signs of our times." The following of Jesus and Dominic remains a fresh adventure.

### *Closing Prayer*

To introduce the closing prayer, you may want to explain a bit about the prayer form itself. The prayer form is modelled on the Liturgy of the Hours. It incorporates a hymn, a reading of the Word, praying the psalms chorally, alternately listening and speaking, we both hear the Word and speak it; we experience it in community, where we give witness to our respect for the Word, and we see the respect others have for the Word; we experience what was talked about earlier in the session.

Begin with a hymn of your own selection, one that would have God as its focus(not ,for example Mary or the saints); perhaps the hymn could fit the Liturgical theme of the season. The reading can be read by any member of the Dominican Laity working in the program; the leader' s role might best be taken by the presenter or the Prior/Prioress unless circumstances dictate otherwise.

### *An Opening Hymn*

A reading from 1 John 1:1-3:

This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched - we speak of the word of life. (This life became visible; we have seen and bear witness to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life that was present with the Father and became visible to us.) What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share life with us. This fellowship of ours is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

(A time of silent reflection; from 2 to 5 minutes)

Section: Two: Formation Programmes.

Side: 1: And from pride preserve your servant never let it dominate me.

Side: 2: So shall I be above reproach, free from grave sin.

Side: 1: May the words of my mouth always find favour, and the whispering of my heart,

Side: 2: In your presence , Lord, my Rock, my Redeemer!

Side: 1: Glory be to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

Side: 2: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Leader: O God, creator of all things, you are our creator and our saviour and our sanctifier. You give us all good things. You love us and guide us so that we will come to the fullness of joy with you in heaven. We praise you and thank you for your goodness to us. We ask you to continue to bless us and guide us. Help us to know your will for us and help us to follow you always. We love you, Lord, help us love you more. We ask this in Jesus' name.

All: Amen.

Leader: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

**NOTE**

All that remains to prepare for the next meeting is to mention something about the topics that will be covered and the reading the postulants should do. Perhaps re-reading the closing prayers of the current meeting would be part of the "assignment".

**References**

As presenters, you know your group best and can suggest what the postulants should read from these excellent books. Since the theme for this presentation is broad, perhaps an assignment related to the theme might be



**SESSION III: "A WORKING PROPOSAL FOR A FORMATION  
PROGRAM FOR THE LAY DOMINICANS OF THE ST.  
JOSEPH' S PROVINCE"**

**Rev. Gabriel O' Donnell,O.P.**

**and**

**Paul Russell**

*TENTATIVE OUTLINE FOR MEETING NUMBER THREE OF INQUIRY-STAGE "*

*DOMINICAN PRAYER*

**I. *Opening Prayer Experience***

This opening prayer should be a celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. This is because such a celebration would accent the fact that we come before God as His community, as well as give an example of the liturgical prayer we are going to describe in this presentation.

**II. *Goal Statement - (cf. Sample Goal Statement)***

The moderator of this session should briefly call to mind the last two session highlights: The Spirit and Aims of St. Dominic and Dominicans as People of the Word. He or she should also include a brief overview of the current presentation in order that his or hers hearers might be alert for key words such as contemplation, personal private prayer, common liturgical prayer and Dominican study.

**III. *Formal Presentation Number One***

Audio visual aids such as Dominic' s Nine Ways of Prayer (illustrated) would be useful in this presentation. While the presentation is geared to a theoretical understanding, it should not lack practical means of doing what the theory proposes.

**IV. *Prepared Discussion Questions (possibly during coffee break)***

ordinary events of the day. This discovery necessitates that we undertake an active program of study. If prayer is truly a lifting up of one' s heart and mind to God, then study acquires a no less significant dimension insofar as it feeds our prayer and enables us to know Him better who has called us into a relationship of knowledge and love.

Therefore, in the first presentation we will glean an overview of prayer insofar as it is the main element in Dominican lifestyle. Following this presentation we will lead a question and answer period in which some prepared discussion questions will help us to focus on the topic of Dominican prayer as it relates to study.

In the second presentation this evening we are going to examine a particular type of prayer that has its traditional roots in the deep wells of ancient Christian spirituality, i.e., the tradition of *lectio divina*. Our purpose in looking at this tradition is to provide an example of the intimate relationship that exists in Dominican life between prayer and study. While study is not Dominican if it remains cold, academic and sterile, neither should it be understood as a ceaseless quest for an increase of one' s knowledge. It is properly understood in a Dominican sense when it is intimately related to our prayer lives in much the same way that the monks who studied Scripture flew on the wings of their study to the heights of contemplative union in prayer. It is this intimate relationship that the second presentation will explore.

As in the case of Presentation No.1 this second Presentation will also be followed with prepared discussion questions.

deeper in love with this Person. By expressing our own deepest feelings in our own words, in our own thoughts, we in turn make ourselves vulnerable to this perspective Friend. It is precisely this vulnerability which creates the atmosphere for trust and love in those special times of personal prayer.

Yet Our Lord doesn' t relate to us merely as individuals. He sees us also as part of His own larger Mystical Body, the Church. When we come before Him as Church, as opposed to individuals, we use the words and thoughts of the church to express our love, praise and thanksgiving to Him. This communal celebration of God' s mighty deeds is what we refer to as liturgical prayer. By meeting together at regular intervals during the day, we form a liturgy of the hours of the day. This is what we mean by common liturgical prayer.

### *III. Prayer as related to study in the Dominican life.*

In the next chapter meeting, the topic of study as crucial to Dominican life will be discussed. Therefore, in this presentation, we shall begin to build a bridge between Dominican prayer and Dominican study which you will be exploring in the next meeting.

As private and liturgical prayer are balanced in the Dominican lifestyle, they begin to form within each of us a deep contemplative dimension. This contemplative dimension is so deep and so radical that it is not enough to say that our prayer is contemplative. Contemplative should be an adjective that characterizes our whole way of being, our entire lifestyle. If during our prayer times we encounter the Divine Person of the Word as He is in Himself, then in our study times we need to mull over this same Word in all the different media in which that Word is manifest in the world, so that we might enter into the celebration of God' s Holy Word with a greater knowledge, a deeper reverence and humility. In this way we can see that our way of life of study must vitally inform our life of prayer and conversely, our prayer will begin to effect a mutuality between our intellectual effort and our affective needs.

God' s universal call to holiness was the undertaking of the spirituality of the preacher through his prayer, study and apostolate. Thomas knew that if Dominican spirituality is characterized by prayer, study and apostolate, that these could not be seen as separated activities. Rather he understood them to be drawn up in a higher unity under the single name of Veritas. That is to say that truth in all its sacred simplicity, is the common ground that gives birth to these diverse and yet delicately balanced elements which together constitute the Dominican response to God' s call to holiness. Because the inner dynamism of this Dominican response is: "to contemplate and share the fruits of contemplation with the brethren", it would stand to reason that any attempt to lead people in the way of Dominican spirituality must teach them how to become contemplative in their own particular styles of living. And further, it is not enough to say that they might develop contemplative prayer lives, for prayer, study and apostolate are radically interrelated in the common ground of Sacred Truth. It would be more precise to say that we must develop in Lay Dominicans a contemplative dimension to such a degree that their way of being at prayer, study and in the apostolate is precisely as a contemplative person. In saying this much, we are powerfully suggesting that our Formation program should be seen as the Holy Spirit' s personal invitation to each and every one of us to symbolically express our Dominican commitments by forming in us a radically contemplative dimension that permeates every aspect of our lives precisely as Lay Dominicans.

While this contemplative dimension should radically inform our study and apostolate, the dimension itself is formed and nurtured pre-eminently in ones own life of prayer. There is perhaps no better example of this than the life of our own Holy Father Dominic. Commenting on one of the beatification proceedings for Dominic in Bologna, Fr.Vicaire notices that many of the comments were directed not to Dominic' s fervour and generosity as preacher, but rather to the memories of the depth, extent and radiance of his prayer. Even Jordan of Saxony stressed:

"There was a continuity of contemplative prayer which from the Osma years onwards united the soul of Dominic inseparably to Christ Our Redeemer. In the state of union, he obtained a special grace of prayer for sinners, the poor and the oppressed, and he came to realize that he would not be a real member of Christ until he could dedicate himself totally with all the energies at his command, to the work of bringing back souls just as Our Lord Jesus, the Saviour of all, consecrated Himself wholly to our salvation. Thus the call to be a missionary took life from the union of his soul with God. The fervour of contemplative prayer gave that heroic call its precise direction and sanctified it."

For those who would seek to follow Dominic, contemplative prayer is the secret of synthesizing one's spiritual life. And so should we have any wonder that St. Thomas described the dynamism of the spirituality of the preacher as contemplation and sharing contemplation with our neighbours? For those who feel themselves called today to live out a spirituality in following our Father Dominic contemplation is not an option but a necessity. For who can dare to preach Truth, before he or she has contemplated such Truth in his or her own heart? Who can dare to preach the Truth if he or she has not laboured to seek out the various ways the Word of God has communicated Himself to us in all the various media of our lives?

Now having stated the necessity of contemplation in the Lay Dominican vocation, we need to discuss precisely what forms this contemplation takes in the prayer lives of individual persons. Traditionally, the church has demonstrated that this contemplation is expressed as both personal private prayer and common liturgical prayer. While these two types of prayer are necessary for proper balances in the Dominican vocation, each must be understood in its own integrity and on its own terms. If we are going to proclaim the Word of God effectively, that is to speak God's word as Isaiah and Paul, it is not enough to know about God; I must know God Himself. We may have the recall of the lengthiest of Scripture passages and be able to quote Aquinas from memory. But nothing short of personal knowledge of God will suffice for the person who is called to that special ministry of sharing God's Holy Word. Consider the words of Jesuit Father Walter Berghart:

"Can you say you've truly encountered the living and true God? Can you say that you truly know God himself, not simply human words that describe Him? If you cannot, I dare not conclude that you are an unproductive preacher; for the same God that is able from these stones to raise up children of Abraham can use the most serene of sermons to move the obdurate heart. But I do say that if you know only a theology of God, and not the God of Theology, you will not be the preacher that our world so desperately needs." (Berghart, 34)

Surely this is not hard to understand. Even in the human situation, when a man falls in love with a woman, each spend time with the other in order to increase their knowledge and love of the beloved. It is this interpersonal playful exchange that fosters the intimacy and devotion in loving relationships. If personal private inter-communion is the very stuff of friendship, should we be surprised that God calls us to be His friends by intimately sharing with us His own triune existence in moments of personal prayer?

forms and expressions of common prayer, in the Dominican context these words signify pre-eminently liturgical prayer in the name of the whole Christian community." Therefore even though we may be praying the Liturgy of the Hours in physical solitude, in a way that approximates our private personal prayer, it is radically different from private personal prayer because in liturgical prayer we do not present ourselves as individuals before the Lord, but rather we come as His Mystical Body and it is as such that we pray.

"This ecclesial vision of prayer was at the heart of the Mission of Dominic, one which he entrusted to his followers in the solemn celebration of the Divine Office, that prayer which we commonly name today the Liturgy of the Hours."

In praying the Liturgy of the Hours we pray as members of the Church who overcome their forgetfulness by remembering their rootedness in God and in the mystery of His Word, Jesus Christ. It is in overcoming this forgetfulness that: "the Christ event comes alive for us here and now." While the Eucharist is the centre and culmination of the whole life of the Christian community and functions as the primary action of remembering God' s saving work, "the Eucharist itself is continued and extended to the various parts and moments of our lives and the rhythms of our daily and hourly remembrance as we celebrate the Word of God in the Liturgy of the Hours. If our rule of life calls us to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, it is because central to the heart of the Dominican vocation is the celebration of God' s Holy Word made flesh.

"In the Liturgy of the Hours we are daily challenged by the Word made Flesh, the Word Incarnate among us. We assemble to hear that Word. Everything we do in our morning and evening prayer leads to a response to that proclamation. The Word of God is a two edged sword which calls us to remember who we are. It calls us to be who we are and demands our total conversion."

In celebrating the Word of God made flesh which is our heritage as Dominicans, we dynamically express our remembrance, our praise, our thanksgiving and our petition. Within these four dynamic moments of our common liturgical prayer, we tangibly express ourselves not only as the Mystical Body of Christ, but also as the family of our Holy Father Dominic.

By keeping this proper balance between private personal prayer and common liturgical prayer, we create within ourselves a tension through

understand how that is different from praying the Divine Office; and why this difference needs to be understood in Dominican life?

3. Given the fact that we are called to proclaim God's Holy Word wherever there is an opportunity, why do you think it is necessary for us to continue a program of study? And furthermore, how would you say this study is nurtured by your prayer life and conversely, how does your prayer life get affected through your study?

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by some ancient authors to explain **lectio divina** is that of the normal process of eating food. Just as you take a bite of your food and chew it so that it will come apart and make it possible for you to swallow it and thereby be nourished by it, so with the word of God: You must chew it so that you can swallow it and be sustained by it. As you chew, your mind thinks about it, ruminates on the text, not in any formal intellectual way, but simply by being open to the meaning of the text and being open to what God may wish to say to you in this particular word at this particular moment.

When one "does" **lectio divina** for 20 or 30 minutes (the early monks and nuns spent several hours each day "doing" lectio) and one goes about the ordinary demands of daily life, the conviction and hope of the one so praying is that these sacred words will come back to one from time to time and become the basis for a life of greater remembrance of God through the ordinary working day.

It was this idea of prayer which was the basis of St. Dominic' s training and which he communicated to his followers and which the laity learned at the instruction of the brethren in the early days of the order. The nuns too were thoroughly trained in this practice of prayer. Other forms of prayer: the divine office, devotions , mental prayer, were all related to **lectio**, in that concentration on the Word of God in the sacred text was the crucial element for all forms of Dominican prayer, for Dominicans have been from the beginning, a people of the Word. **Lectio Divina** is simply one form of praying that word.

*Questions:*

1. Do you ever, as a Dominican, ever try to "pray" the scriptures in a way similar to what has been described as **lectio divina**?
2. Do you think that St. Dominic' s ability to always speak "with God or of God" may have been connected with this ancient way of praying the scriptures? He was a busy man, often on the move. What are the other influences which you see in his life which may have formed his spirituality?
3. Do you think that **lectio divina** even in some modified form could be compatible with the active life of a modern person today? Discuss why or why not.