

## SESSION V: COMMUNITY

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### *STATEMENT OF LESSON GOALS:*

- I. To see the source and ultimate expression of community in the life of the Trinity, the life of Jesus with his apostles, and the life of the early Christian church.

To see how Dominic took this aspect of Gospel and made it an important and basic ingredient in the life of the Order.

- II. To study the various expressions of community as lived out by the diverse branches of the Order.

**Section: Two: Formation Programmes.**

***OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION***

- I. Introduction to Community
  - A. Basic Source - Life of the Trinity
    - 1. Man as Image of God
    - 2. Man' s Need for Community
  - B. Apostolic Community - Life of Jesus
    - 1. Family Life
    - 2. Apostolic Life
  - C. Early Christian Community
    - 1. Prayer, Praise, Instruction
    - 2. Apostolic Mission
  - D. Dominican Community
    - 1. Gospel Foundation
    - 2. Basic to Apostolic Mission
- II. Expressions of Dominican Community in Diverse Branches of Order\*
  - A. Elements Common to All
    - 1. Prayer, Study, Community, Apostolate
    - 2. Obedience
  - B. Means by Which Each Branch Expresses the Dominican Charism
    - 1. Nuns
    - 2. Friars
    - 3. Laity
    - 4. Sisters

*FORMAL PRESENTATION: COMMUNITY*

**I. INTRODUCTION TO COMMUNITY**

**A. Basic Source**

We should begin our study of community at its basic source, God. The life of the three Divine Persons is a communal one; a sharing in the same Divine Nature and Attributes. This life is a life of love.[1]

Made in God' s image and likeness, man reflects the need for community in his own life.

The Church tells us in the Decree on the Church in the Modern World: -"God did not create man in isolation, but for the formation of social unity. From the beginning of salvation history He has chosen men not just as individuals but as members of a certain community."[2]

And in the Decree on the Church we read"...it has pleased God to make men holy and save them, not merely as individuals, without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness."[3]

Jesus' prayer for us is for an intimate share in God' s communal life, which sharing is in itself witness to both Father and Son. "Father, may they be one in us, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that it was you who sent me" Jn. 17:21.

"With me in them and you in me, may they be so completely one that the world will realize that it was you who sent me and that I have loved them as much as you loved me" Jn. 17:1.3.

B. Apostolic Community

Jesus began his life on earth in the community of the Holy Family. Family-community is something each of us understands, for most of us, it is our mode of life, the way in which we fulfil our Christian commitment.[4]

At the beginning of His ministry, Christ drew to Himself men of his choice, inviting them to: "Come and follow me," their response was to "leave all things." Here we have the beginning of the apostolic community Mt. 4:18-20.

Many places in the Gospel allude to the communal life of Jesus and His followers, but none so specifically as those which refer to Judas as being in charge of their "common fund" Jr. 12:6, Jn. 13:29.

C. Christian Community

The first Christians understood the importance of community. For those who followed Jesus, the words: "Where two or three meet in My name, I shall be there with them" were a living reality, Mt. 18:20.[5]

They acknowledged their need to draw strength from one another in prayer, praise, study of the Word entrusted to them by the Apostles,[6] and in the "breaking of the bread" Acts 2:42-47. As Christ had predicted in His priestly prayer, the oneness of the community with Him and with one another led to the constant witnessing of the Father's love in the gift of the Son to men, a witnessing which bore fruit in conversions Acts 5:12-14.

"The primitive Church provided an example of community life when the multitude of believers were of one heart and one mind (cf. Acts 4:32), and found nourishment in the teaching of the gospel and in the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharist. Let such a life continue in prayerfulness and a sharing of the same spirit (cf. Acts 2:42). As Christ's members living

fraternally together, let them excel one another in showing respect (cf. Rom 12:10), and let each carry the other's burdens (cf. Gal. 6:2). For thanks to God's love poured into hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), a religious community is a true family gathered together in the Lord's name and rejoicing in His presence (cf. Mt. 18:20). For love is the fulfilment of the law (cf. Rom. 13:10) and the bond of perfection (cf. Col. 3:14); where it exists we know we have been taken from death to life (cf. 1-Jn. 3:14). In fact, brotherly unity shows that Christ has come, (cf. Jn. 13:35; 17:21); from it results great apostolic influence." [7]

D. *Dominican Community*

"Dominican life is an expression of Gospel lived in community." [8] St. Dominic based his Order on the apostolic life of the Gospel. It is not surprising therefore, that "from the very first days of the Order St. Dominic asked his brethren for promises of community and obedience to himself." [9] Neither is it surprising that he chose for it the Rule of St. Augustine which begins: "Before all things, most dear brothers, we must love God and after Him our neighbour, for these are the principal commands which have been given to us. The following things then, we direct you who live in the monastery to observe:

First, that you dwell together in unity in the house and be of one mind and one heart in God, remembering this is the end for which you have come here."

Fr. Hinnebusch says: "Dominic became an apostle by keeping the Rule of St. Augustine and the constitutions of the Canons of Osma. The Rule of St. Augustine patterned on the life of the apostles, powerfully develops the apostolic spirit of those who keep it. The community life prescribed by Augustine wonderfully prepares the soul to work for souls." [10]

Our apostolate flows naturally from our commitment to community. "The Dominican charism of preaching is continuously nourished by the Word shared in community. Thus, in the proclamation of the Word of God the Dominican Family expresses a unity centered on the Word of God and seeks to give common witness to the good news." [11]

Section: Two: Formation Programmes.

One of the ways our apostolate is a response to community is by the love we share with our fellow Dominicans, a love which overflows into the world. Love of God manifested in love of neighbor.

II. *EXPRESSIONS OF COMMUNITY IN DIVERSE BRANCHES OF DOMINICAN ORDER*

A. *Elements Common to All*

Perhaps the best expression of the elements common to all branches of the Order is to be found in the Preface of the Basic Constitutions for Lay Dominicans proposed by the National Council in 1982.

"The Dominican Order as St. Dominic founded it was a microcosm of the total Church of his time. It encompassed men and women of the several branches of the Order, according to the expectations of the medieval period. Governed creatively in a participative spirit, it nevertheless involved clearly defined roles.

Today, as in times past, the whole Dominican Family shares actively in its charism of Dominic, in his love of the Word of God understood in all of its radical originality. We face this Word together in our common life; we study it we celebrate it liturgically and bear witness to it."[12]

Prayer, study, common life and apostolate, all are elements shared in equally by the three branches of the Order while at the same time being expressed diversely according to the particular vocation of each.

Before exploring the diverse expressions of Dominican charism, we must first acknowledge that element of Dominican life and spirituality which is at the heart of our vocation and which highlights and binds together every facet of it, namely obedience.

Obedience is the soul of Dominican life, the keystone of Dominican existence.[13] As we pray, study, celebrate and preach the Word, we are drawn ever deeper into the mission of the Word: "Behold, I come to do your will, O God." [14]

Our brother Thomas Aquinas teaches us that the gift of our wills in obedience is the greatest gift we can offer God, for it is the gift of the whole person. Through obedience we are conformed to Christ.[15]

The Fathers' Constitution sums it up beautifully: "Since obedience binds us to Christ and to the Church, all the work and hardship that follows from it is like a continuation of Christ's self-giving and takes on a sacrificial meaning for our own benefit and that of the Church in whose fulfilment the whole work of creation will be completed.[16]

The Dominican Order has emphasized the importance of obedience from its very inception by the custom of mentioning in profession only the vow or promise of obedience, again echoing Thomas' teaching that the vow of obedience is inclusive of poverty and chastity but not visa versa.[17]

In the first part of this study we saw how Dominic linked together community and obedience.[18] Let's look briefly at how obedience touches communal prayer, study and apostolate.

"If a community is to remain faithful to its spirit and mission, it needs a principle of unity obtainable by obedience."

Coming together to pray the Office or celebrate the Eucharist can be truly a "sacrifice of praise." We may feel drawn to private prayer or long for quiet resting in the Lord, but obedience to the Rule calls us to make our prayer a "pure sacrifice," a true act of worship by our self-denial and unity with others.

**Section: Two: Formation Programmes.**

The sacrifice of obedience is often involved in putting aside other things to join in meetings, lessons, workshops, study days and also in the very personal sharing of our insights, thoughts and special graces for the benefit of others.

Since our apostolate, sharing of the Word praised, studied and lived, should begin within the community, there are many opportunities for the giving of ourselves in obedience. Acceptance of the responsibilities for the government of the chapter, the support of the chapter and individual apostolates and the general "bearing of each others burdens" will strengthen our spirit of obedience and indicate the depth of our commitment to Christ.

**B. Means by Which Each Branch Expresses Own Charism**

Having touched upon the elements common to the three branches of the Order, we will now see briefly how each expresses its own charism.

The cloistered nuns, traditionally referred to as Second Order, were established at Prouille by St. Dominic in 1206, to be followed in 1216 by the founding of the Friars Preachers, commonly called First Order. It was not until 1285 that the lay branch or Third Order was established with the promulgation of the Rule written by Munio de Zamora, Master of the Order, bringing together into a more solid and evangelical structure the many lay people (penitents) who had attached themselves to the Preachers.

The many Congregations of Dominican Sisters we see today were founded - much later by individuals who adopted the Rule and Spirituality of the, Order as their own while remaining outside its scope of government.

Each Congregation of Sisters makes its vow of obedience to their particular Superior or Mother General whereas the Friars, Nuns and Laity promise obedience to the Master of the Dominican Order.

Nuns )  
Friars )      Obedience to: Master of Order



Laity )  
Sisters      Obedience to: Superior of Particular Congregation

The Order, studying the concept of "Dominican Family" and striving to bring about its realization, discourages the designation of First, Second and Third Orders, preferring us to remember that even as we are one in Christ, so by the special grace of our calling, we are one in Dominic.

Each branch expresses its living of and obedience to the Word in a different way.

According to their Constitution, it is the mission of the Friars Preachers in the service of the Church to preach Jesus Christ to all peoples. They do this by the spoken and written word, by teaching and other forms of ministry.

The Nuns "... strive after Christian perfection; and by means of that perfection implore for the labors of their brethren abundant fruit in holiness." [21] By prayer, sacrifice and witness to the Death and Resurrection of Christ in their own lives, their fulfill the same dual purpose of the Order, personal sanctification and the salvation of souls.

Congregations of Dominican Sisters share the special charism of preaching and accomplish it through the apostolates of Teaching, Nursing, Counselling, giving retreats and other ministries.

For Lay Dominicans, the Order' s charism is expressed and fulfilled within the fabric of society. Our Dominican vocation is not an adding onto but an intensifying of our baptismal commitment.

We promise to live the spirit of the evangelical counsels; listening and being responsive to the Word in Scripture, in every event of our lives and by joyfully obeying the directives of Church and Order. We live chastely within the framework of our state in life, reflecting the great love of Christ for His

**Section: Two: Formation Programmes.**

Church, and we are ever mindful of the Order' s apostolic poverty which we express in the simplicity and generosity of our lives.[22]

By our fidelity to prayer, especially Eucharistic and liturgical prayer, we continually bring the world to Christ, and through our apostolates and the witness of daily living, we bring Christ to the world.

"To be a Dominican is to preach prophetically, to speak God' s word in season and out of season.

To be a Dominican is to share this vision and this ministry with brothers and sisters, priests, religious and lay who have chosen this particular way of being Christ." [23]

**REFERENCES**

(Supplemental material to be used by both postulant and formation personnel in conjunction with the lesson.)

1. W. Hinnebusch, O.P., Dominican Spirituality, ch. vii, pp- 127-128
2. Vatic. II Decree on the Church in the Modern World (De Ecclesia in Mundo) n. 32
3. Vatic. II Decree on the Church (Lumen Gentium) n. 9
4. Cf. Malatesta, O.P., Purpose of Dominican Laity p. 14
5. Vatic. II Intro. to Renewal of Religious Life: "In the incandescent light of the New Testament we clearly observe the first christian community, its life, its light, and its charity - Christ and His disciples." p. 463
6. Cf. Jerusalem Bible, Acts 2-:42, footnote dd: "Not the proclamation of the Good News to non-christians, cf. 15:35, but instructions for the newly converted in which the scriptures were explained in the light of the Christian Event."
7. Vatic. II Decree on Renewal of Religious Life (Perfectae Caritatis) n. 15
8. Cf. General Principles of Lay Dominican Life, National Council, T.D.I. March - April 1984, n. 1-2

9. Primitive Constitutions, Dist. I, c. 14
10. W. Hinnebusch, O.P., Dominican Spirituality, pp. 58-59
11. Bologna Document, 1983, n. 4.2
12. Cf. Preface to Basic Constitutions for Lay Dominicans
13. W. Hinnebusch, O.P., Dominican Spirituality, p. 123
14. Heb. 10:7
15. Summa Theologica, Q. 186, Art. 5
16. Constitutions and Ordinations of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers, Ch. I, Art. 2, No. 19
17. Summa Theologica, Q. 186, Art. 8
18. Primitive Constitutions, Dist. T, C. 14 ".....from the very first days of the Order St. Dominic asked his brethren for promises of community and obedience to himself."
19. Constitutions and Ordinations of the Brethren of the Order of Preachers, Ch. I, Art. 2, No. 17
20. Jordan of Saxony, Letter of Easter 1233 "Dear brethren, have a constant mutual charity among yourselves, for it cannot be that Jesus will appear to those who have cut themselves off from community: Thomas, for not being with the others when Jesus came, did not merit to see Him. Do you think you are better than Thomas?"
21. W. Hinnebusch, O.P., Dominican Spirituality, pp. 2-3
22. Cf. General Principles of Lay Dominican Life, National Council, I.D.I. March - April 1984, n. 4
23. S. Landregan, T.O.P., A Layman' s Share in Dominican Life and Mission, Parable 1977

#### *DISCUSSION QUESTIONS*

##### *I. Introduction to Community*

- A. What are some of the ways we feel the need for community in our lives?
- B. What elements express St. Dominic' s building of the Order' s community life upon the foundation of Gospel or Apostolic community?

## II. *Expressions of Dominican Community*

- A. In what ways are community and obedience basic to the fulfilment of the Order' s mission?
- B. As Laity we share the same charism and goals of the Order with Dominican Friars, Nuns and Sisters. Should we feel a family identity, a certain oneness with them?

### *OPENING PRAYER*

If the lesson is not preceded by Eucharistic or liturgical prayer, a brief opening prayer is to be desired.

#### Example:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love. Send forth your spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Intercessory prayer may be addressed to the Mother of God to whose special protection Jesus gave the Order of Preachers, to our holy father, St. Dominic and to Mary Magdalene, patroness of the Order.

### *CLOSING PRAYER*

Closing prayer should reflect the subject matter of this lesson.

Example: Lord God, eternal shepherd, you so tend the vineyard you planted that now it extends its branches even to the farthest coast. Look down on your Church and come to us. Help us remain in your Son as branches on the vine, that, planted firmly in your love, we may testify before the whole world to your great power working everywhere.

Psalm-prayer  
Liturgy of the Hours

Loving father, Dominic, be mindful of your works. Plead before the supreme Judge for your band of poor ones.

Pie Pater (Office of St. Dominic)

OR

A wonderful hope, which you gave to those who wept for you at the hour of your death, promising that after your death you would be helpful to your brethren! Fulfil, Father, what you have said, and help us by your prayers.

O Spem (Office of St. Dominic)