

## IN OUR KEEPING

June 27, 2012

### THE HOLY PREACHING FROM A NUN'S PERSPECTIVE

Sr. Mary Thomas, Michalek, OP, Farmington Hills, Michigan

*Good Morning. It is so good to be here. Being in your midst seems to be a dream and a good one at that! During my flight from Michigan I found myself asking, "What in the world are you doing, going to this Conference?" Loud and clear came the answer: "for the sake of the Preaching!" of course, which is why we are all here.*

I want to thank Janet, most of all, for her persistence in getting me here and for all the work she has done to make this gathering a reality. Thank you, Janet. Some of you I know, most I do not but I hope that none of you are among those who know nothing of their sisters in the cloistered branch of the family. I would also like to thank and acknowledge Sr. Mary Magdalen of the Newark Monastery, who gave me invaluable historical information, which you will hear at the end of this talk. She, like Nona McGreal is an icon of Dominican Life, well lived. Thank you, Sister.

When I entered the Monastery some 50 odd years ago, we were classified as the "Second Order" of the Dominicans but that terminology is no longer used. We are the Nuns of the Order of Preachers, with you, part of the Dominican Family.

I'd like to capitalize on the notion of "family." One of the definitions given for family is "people descended from a common ancestor." We, nuns, are that common ancestor! And since this is a group of historians and archivists, let's go back to the history we're all familiar with. Around the year 1203 we find Dominic, only 33 years of age, sub prior of the church of Osma, asked to accompany his Bishop, Diego, as chaplain and companion on a mission to northern France to arrange a marriage, no less, between the son of King Alphonsus of Castile to a Danish Princess. The agreement being concluded, they return to give the news to the king who sends them again, this time to bring the young lady back. Upon arrival they are dismayed to learn that in the meantime she had died.

Dominic, by this time, is mesmerized by the great need he saw of catechizing the heretical sects who were rampant throughout central Europe. He was energized and saddened to see the great number of people who were adhering to their teachings of austerity and false doctrine and he longed to bring them back to the tenets of the true faith. He doesn't return to his position as a Canon at the Church of Osma but instead goes with Diego to Rome to ask the Pope to send both of them to the Cumins, that is, the pagans scattered throughout Europe.

errors of their ways? He couldn't very well abandon them to the antagonism of their families. They had become fervent lovers of the Lord and thirsted, along with Dominic and the few male companions who remained with him to bring others to the truth. He prayed and he pondered.

So intense was his prayer that Our Lady herself intervened with a vision of a great ball of fire hovering in the sky right over the Church of St. Mary in Prouille. This happened three nights in a row. The "Seignadou," Sign of God. What did it mean? To Dominic there were no doubts: here he was to build a convent to house these women converts who had become silent partners in his work of evangelization. Bishop Fulk, the bishop of Toulouse, gladly ceded the Church and adjoining property to Brother Dominic as he was thereafter called. It was on November 22, 1206 that these ladies, now totally converted to the Lord, moved into the newly erected convent. A month later on December 27<sup>th</sup>, Dominic himself gave them the religious garb which to this day is worn by the Dominican Nuns throughout the world: a white tunic, black veil and cappa. Later to be added was the white Scapular given by Our Lady to Blessed Reginald to be worn by Friars and Nuns alike.

From the very beginning St. Mary's of Prouille came to be known as the "House of Holy Preaching". It became the headquarters of the men who had joined Dominic in his preaching efforts: the women doing their part, the men theirs, both sharing in the great Mission envisioned by Dominic: to bring back to Christ the thousands caught in the errors of the time. The salvation of souls was paramount and Dominic knew that

divine grace -2.9 (r) 3.9 (o) (t) 6-6.10.3 ( ) 5.6 (w) -6.7 (a) 4 (s)-10.3 ( )45 683 -th(r) 3 4 0 0 0.24 (t) 6-6.11 ET -11.-4 (r) -1.3 ( )

whose center we remain and whose pain we hold up to the Lord for mercy and relief. As Evagrius said: "A nun/monk is one who is separated from all and united to all."

The Constitutions of the Nuns (LCM) quite succinctly captures the whole concept of our role in the Mission of the Order. LCM 96.I. states: "The brethren of the Order, 'commissioned entirely for spreading abroad the word of God,' fulfill their vocation primarily by preaching. The nuns, while commissioned by God primarily for prayer, are not for that reason excluded from the ministry of the word (cf. Venite Seorsum, V). For they listen to the word, celebrate it and keep it in their hearts (cf. Lk. 2:18,), and in this way proclaim the Gospel of God by the example of their life."

temporary dwelling and cradle of their practice of Perpetual Adoration. Within four years they were able to build a large, permanent Monastery on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue. April 3, 1884 saw the little band, now grown to fourteen

with some mitigation of the more austere monastic observances. These were replaced by their obligation to the perpetual recitation of the Rosary.

However, in the years between 1920 and 1960, all but one of the monasteries of the Perpetual Rosary Branch in the USA took the necessary steps toward canonical incorporation as “Nuns of the Order” in the full canonical sense. Today, while there are a few monasteries of the “Sisters of the Third Order–Enclosed” scattered throughout the world, the Monastery of the Rosary in Milwaukee, WI is the only remaining one in the USA.

Now I would like to share briefly something of the development of the relationship of the Monasteries of Dominican Nuns in the United States among themselves. Historically, the Dominican Nuns of the USA have cherished their “autonomy”, seen as a means of insuring the solitude and privacy felt to be so essential to a life of contemplation. But with Vatican II and its beautiful document *Perfectae Caritatis*, followed by *Venite Seorsum* in 1969 things began to change.

The first occasion for the nuns’ “coming together” was at the invitation of the Provincial Promoter of the Nuns of Saint Joseph’s Province, Fr. William B. Ryan, OP. He had been requested by Master General Aniceto Fernandez to provide a nun from the USA to serve on the Commission of Friars and Nuns to sit in Rome for the revision of the Constitutions of the Nuns in April 1970. The gathering was held at the convent of the Elkins Park Dominican Sisters in Alexandria, Virginia. The group

It was comprised of 15 Monasteries in the States and 2 affiliates: one in Berthierville PQ, Canada and the other in the Port of Spain, Trinidad. Its purpose was to foster the monastic, contemplative life of the nuns by means of sisterly sharing that would foster study and intercommunication through various exchanges and programs to facilitate the spiritual, intellectual and cultural development of the nuns. It would also serve as an outreach and means of communication with the Friars and Sisters of the Order who were often called upon to give us lectures and courses.

The Conference had rounded out 25 years of its existence when in the year 2000 in response to a routine letter requesting a permission called for by *Venite Seorsum*, the Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life wrote back to the President advising that the members consider changing either to a Federation or an Association, both needing approval of the said Congregation. Up to this time we functioned under the auspices of the Master General. All said and done, the Nuns did not favor Federation, so opted for an "Association." New By-laws were drawn up and the member monastery Chapters were again asked to vote if they wished to join this new entity. Most opted to join; some did not. However, this did not dampen the unity among us and we continue to collaborate as we shall most certainly do in our coming Second General Assembly of the Association in September, when all of the Monasteries will be represented. Our new Master General, Fr. Bruno Cadore, OP will honor us with his presence. Do pray for its success in terms of an overflowing of the spirit of Dominic upon us all as we venture on into the beginnings of this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Thank you.