



# OPFAM

**Dominican Family Matters: 13.02.2018**

*Contemplate the Gospel of Humanity  
then preach the Humanity of the Gospel*

A Newsletter for the Dominican Family in Australia, New Zealand, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

## Why does the Pope celebrate Mass at Santa Sabina on Ash Wednesday?

In a tradition dating back to the fourth century, the Pope will spend Ash Wednesday at the Basilica of Santa Sabina, currently the worldwide headquarters of the Order of Preachers.

After the legalization of Christianity in 313, the faithful began a custom of processing through the streets of Rome to visit various churches and to honour the holy martyrs who were often buried there. Singing hymns and praying a litany of the saints, they would often be joined by the Bishop of Rome. During his pontificate, St Gregory the Great established the order of churches to be visited and decided the custom should be a Lenten practice — a spiritual pilgrimage with Jesus and the saints.

Why Santa Sabina was chosen as the first church to be visited is not entirely known. Some say it's because St Gregory fell in love with the church when he found refuge there during the plague. Others believe it is because of Santa Sabina's location on Aventine Hill. Any wishing to visit the church must make a steep climb, symbolic of the climb Christ made to Golgotha and his crucifixion. Still others think it is because of the church's historical significance.

Santa Sabina is one of the "house churches" in Rome. During the early persecutions of the Church, Christians would secretly gather in the homes of the faithful to worship. One of these homes belonged to a woman named Sabina, who was martyred in 125. Between

422-432, a basilica was built on the site of Saint Sabina's home and named in her honour. Her relics remain there to this day, along with those of Saint Alexander, Saint Eventius and Saint Theodulus.

Although it has undergone a number of renovations over the years, Santa Sabina takes great pride in the fact that it still uses the original doors of the church, which are made of Cyprus wood and carved with scenes from the Old and New Testaments, including one of the earliest depictions of Christ's crucifixion.

In 1218, Santa Sabina was given to the Dominicans by Pope Honorius III, two years after he approved the foundation of the Order of Preachers. Since then, it has served as the generalate and headquarters of the Master of the Order of Preachers and the Dominican curia.

For nearly 100 years the Pope joined the Dominicans at Santa Sabina for Mass on Ash Wednesday, until the papacy moved to Avignon in 1309. Thankfully, Pope Leo XIII revived the tradition of starting Lent at Santa Sabina, and it has been the normal custom ever since.

Today that custom begins with a short prayer at the Basilica of Sant' Anselmo, the international headquarters of the Benedictines. From there, the Pope, the Benedictines, the Dominicans and all present process up the hill while chanting the Litany of the Saints. Once they arrive at Santa Sabina, the Pope offers Mass. After the homily, he blesses the ashes, which are then sprinkled on his head by the Titular Cardinal of Santa Sabina. The Pope then distributes

ashes to the cardinals, Dominicans, Benedictines and members of the faithful. Since the Dominicans were founded to reconcile those who had fallen away from the faith, the custom is an important one. It

reminds all of us that we are to be preachers of mercy, especially during the season of Lent. (10 February 2018)

## Letter from the Master of the Order to the Dominican Laity – with a message for all members of the Dominican Family.

FRATRES ORDINIS PRÆDICATORUM CURIA GENERALITIA Rome, 2510III8,  
Feast of the Conversion of St Paul the Apostle  
*To the laity of the Order of Preachers Prot. 73/17/810ICLDF*

Dear lay sisters and brothers of the Order of preachers,

It is in the momentum of the celebration of the Jubilee of the Order that I address you who, during these coming months, will prepare the International Assembly of the Dominican Laity. In all regions, this Assembly will be without doubt a very important event for the celebration of the grace that is given to the Order, to have lay brothers and sisters as active members of its mission. According to the specifics of each region, this will also be the opportunity to consider again the way in which today the lay vocation is more essential than ever if the Order is to inculturate better the proclamation of the good news of the coming of the Kingdom.

For the entire Order, and in the perspective opened during the congress on the Mission of the Order that ended the celebration of the Jubilee in January 2017, I express the wish that this Assembly might be the occasion for a demanding call to an apostolic creativity that truly integrates the specific participation of the Laity of the Order. This is how the latter can best serve the world and the Church by preaching. Eight hundred years after the determination of Dominic to send his brothers to the four corners of the world, it seems to me that this sending must today find its actualization, not only keeping in mind the concerns of a geographical dispersion, but also in seeking to establish the preaching of the Order by making it rich from a diversity of cultures and of states of life. And discovering that it is through the richness of this diversity that the Order is today called to manifest its

identity of being a single preaching body, rooted in communion in one and the same call to be totally devoted to the evangelization of the Word of God.

We all know that the reality of the lay fraternities of the Order is very diverse according to the regions, their dynamism is very different here and there, and their full integration in the life of the Order is variable. We also know how we can take too much time and spend too much energy asking ourselves about the Dominican identity of the fraternities, without it always bringing the fruits of life for which we hope. But with many of you, I am convinced that the life of the Laity of the Order will not come from a focus on the formalities and structures, but from the audacity to hear the call made to the Order, because it is the Order of Preachers, to serve the mission of the Church which, People of God on pilgrimage in history (Lumen Gentium), continuously becomes what it is called to be in proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom. Is not this the path on which we are guided by so many lay Dominicans such as Pier Giorgio Frassati and Giorgio La Pira? Following the Second Vatican Council, it is essential to recall that the laity, by their Baptism, are made participants in the sacerdotal, prophetic and royal functions of Christ and perform for their part, in the Church and in the world, the mission which is that of all the people of God (Lumen Gentium,31).

## The sign of fraternity

The decision to designate the lay Members of the Order without mentioning anymore the 'Third Order' but speaking instead of 'Dominican Lay Fraternities', highlights a central aspect of the proclamation of the Kingdom that, with the Order as a whole, you are called to deploy. For Dominic, who from the beginning of his mission in Languedoc wanted to be called brother Dominic, the Fraternity is intrinsically linked to the proclamation of the Kingdom. Brothers and sisters who do not come together after choosing one another, but who receive each other as friends of God, learning from each other how to become members and actors of a family of sons and daughters of the same Father. To be a sign of fraternity, in the heart of secular life, is to be a sign that humans carry within them this ability to live as brothers, that is to say to establish relations which, even with all their diversity, they are united in the same sonship, and in the same desire to be sent to this world as witnesses of the Word and of the life of the grace of God. In my visits throughout the Order, I am more and more convinced that this is, for the whole Order, each branch in its own way, a means of responding to the call of Paul VI when, in *Evangelium Nuntiandi*, he wrote: "Modern (woman or) man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if (she or) he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (8N,41). As preachers of grace, we are called to be such witnesses, parables of communion, awakens in the world of all our human capacities for becoming brothers and sisters, at the heart of the concrete history of humanity which is thereby transformed.

Writing this, I would also like to expand my remarks beyond a single branch of the Order to emphasize that, considered in this light, the Order's own charism of evangelization cannot be defined by the sum of the different functions of evangelists. but rather falls within this almost sacramental reality of the incessant becoming of human fraternity. It is also often the living experience of the fraternity which, in return, leads us to deepen

our desire for the . It is also from the point of view of this sign of fraternity that, it seems to me, we can consider the diversity of the secular ways of being linked to the Order: not only as allies in the realization of a function, project or task, nor only as a bond of friendship with this or that individual or community, but as engaged in the adventure of a fraternity that aspires to speak in the world about that of which this world is, essentially, capable. In this sense, I think that we must, more than ever, consider together all the various ways in which the Laity wish to be linked to the Order of Dominic, that is to say both to make the experience of the Church that the Spirit establishes as a fraternity, and to invite others to find their joy in this same experience.

It is in this horizon that I would like to highlight some of the challenges that the Laity of the Order must help the Order to welcome and to highlight, for the good of the mission of preaching of all.

## The gospel of the family

Like any Dominican reality, the lay fraternities and groups of the international movement of the Dominican Youth - according to their own way (that is to say in essence for a limited time, since youth passes!) - inscribe in the heart of their project conversion by, and to, the fraternity. In a certain way, these fraternal realities complement what the fraternal communities of consecrated persons are, precisely because they have made a choice that places them in a new way in relation to their own family, while the laity, by choosing to belong to the Order as lay, make the choice to bring this new belonging, this new way of realizing the charism of their baptism, as a fruitful gift in the very heart of their family life.

It seems to me that we have not yet, collectively, gathered all the richness of this choice. If the Church, in its desire to renew in depth and radically its mission of evangelization, now affirms the requirement of the Gospel of the family (*Amoris Laetitia*, 03), stressing that the family, as such (and, in

saying this, it means the normal not the ideal, family, with its joys and sorrows, its beautiful and joyful achievements as well as its painful (but sometimes fruitful dysfunctions), must be fully an actor of evangelization, what does that mean for the preaching of the Word of truth? How, moreover, can we help to discover at the very heart of the history of the world that the family is, in itself, an evangelizer, a witness of the grace of Christ which is the grace of fraternity (EN 14,2 ad 4)

It is within families, and in the course of the history of each one marked by success and chaos, that the human learns what it means to become a father or mother, brother or sister, a son or daughter. These fundamental realities of human life are not first of all moral or virtuous categories about which the Church would have to make a theological and moral discourse that guides behaviour. They are the realities of human life through which each human being is called to recognize the grace of the revelation of the Name of God. Like many of you, I can attest to the fact that many fraternities are places where one and all can freely and confidently (and, of course, with measure and discretion) share their family experience, and find the support they expect. It seems to me that the religious men and women of the Order, who of course have their own personal experience of family life but lead an atypical life in this regard, need to be educated by these experiences of their lay brothers and sisters. Thus the preaching of all benefits from the real diversity of believing experiences, which are places for understanding the work of grace. In this way I call the laity of the Order to contribute to the definition in the Order of the most appropriate way to integrate the Gospel of the family at the heart of their preaching and pastoral ministries.

### **At the heart of the Church**

As for all the other branches of the Order, the community reality - parable of communion -to recall again this beautiful expression of brother Roger de Taizé - is an integral part of the evangelization of the Word of God by

which the Church is built. It obviously has specific forms in lay Dominican life, but is none the less essential. Its testimony is more powerful today when the Church, so it seems to me, is particularly sensitive to the community dimension of shared faith and of the search for truth. It is often said, among the laity of the Order, that the fraternity is a place of support and enrichment, from which each of the members of the fraternity draws to invigorate the commitments that many have in their own parish but also, more broadly, from their own experience and skills working at the borders and in those fractured places where justice, dignity and the right of individuals and peoples are challenged, where the proclamation of the Gospel is so important. It is a reason for thanksgiving to see realized, by the conjugation of various forms of belonging to the Order, the broad guidelines for the preaching of the Order so often recalled by our chapters.

But, in addition, at the heart of the ecclesial communities, the testimony and the experience of the fraternities must find their own role in the service of the deployment of the missionary dimension of the Church. This is the case in the parish communities, beyond a simple pastoral functionalism, and without confusion with the many apostolic or spiritual movements that compose them.

But it is also the testimony of many of the laity of the Order committed outside the usual ecclesial structures in many social and cultural realities, thereby demonstrating the aspiration of the Church continually to expand its tent to the dimensions of the worlds, which today are increasingly intertwined.

I add here that the demographic reality of the laity of the Order in some regions invites us to pay attention to the way in which we welcome, integrate and take care of the older people among us: every human group, I believe, shows something of its own humanity in the manner in which it cares for the oldest, with gratitude, responsibility and solidarity.

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Some of you might have expected that this letter would address points that are more related to structural problems in our fraternities: necessary adaptations of the regional assemblies ... all of this is important and I encourage the regions which have addressed these points to share them before the Assembly, so that the latter can, where appropriate, discuss them and propose directions. Nevertheless, these issues must be addressed calmly and without tension, in order not to consider the fraternities as an end in themselves, but to consider them according to their proper end: to be at the service of the proclamation of the Word. That is why I insist that these necessary adjustments to our structures must always keep as their primary horizon, because that is the horizon of life, the challenges of evangelization that the Order would like to meet by reinforcing fraternal communion

Rule, modalities of formation, structure of government, modalities of the life of the laity in the Province, the status and role of

among all its branches. It is when they have as a source and as a horizon such a determination for evangelization that the structures really bear full fruit. It is also when this determination for evangelization is simple and robust that one can find how to adapt the structures in order to respond to new needs, new calls from the laity who want the charism of their baptism to unfold in the light of the evangelical and apostolic intuition of Dominic. Did Dominic himself not gradually deploy his desire to give the Church an Order of Preachers by welcoming those who, recognizing the pertinence of his intuition, asked him to welcome them?

Very fraternally, brother Bruno Cadoré, op  
Master of the Order of Preachers