



OPFAM

Dominican Family Matters

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

Woe to us if we do not preach the Gospel!

Motto for the years leading up to 800th celebration in 2016;

29th March 2011

**“We hear them speaking in our own tongues of the marvellous acts of God” (Acts 2:11):
Preaching and Culture / Community Preaching**

We continue to remember in prayer our Dominican brothers and sisters in Japan, in New Zealand, in flood affected areas in Australia, in Egypt, in Lybia and other North African countries.....

Dominican Thought For the Week

Penance and fasting sound grim and world-denying. But in the Catholic liturgy it is called ‘this joyful season’. The word ‘Lent’ just meant ‘Spring’ until the thirteenth century. It was a time of renewal and rejuvenation, as we prepared for the explosion of new life at Easter. By abstaining from things that we want – alcohol, chocolate or whatever – we are brought back to our deepest desires, for peace and justice, for the fullness of life, and ultimately for God.
T. Radcliffe OP in ‘Just One Year’.

New Socius for the Asia Pacific Region

On February 28, 2011, Bro Bruno Cadoré op, Master of the Order appointed Bro. Vincent Ha Vien Lu op Socius for the Asia-Pacific Region. Bro. Vincent Lu belongs to the Province of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs, Vietnam. He was born on March 20, 1943. He made his first profession on September 5, 1961 and was ordained priest on April 30, 1969. Bro. Vincent Lu is a member of the Queen of Martyrs Vietnamese Province, having spent the past many years in the Vicariate of St. Vincent Liem located in Calgary, Canada. Bro. Vincent was twice the Vicar Provincial, and over the past several years served as Superintendent of Catholic Schools for the Diocese of Calgary. Bro. Vincent will join the other members of the General Council at the plenary session at the beginning of March.

Preparations for the WYD –

During the week of the WYD Madrid 2011, the Dominican Family will be hosting more than 800 young people coming from Norway, Portugal, England, Chile, Croatia, El Salvador, Philippines, Italy, Latvia, Taiwan, Venezuela, Argentina, Germany, France, Japan and Spain. **[And 30 from Sydney/Melbourne]** About 50 youths form the Spanish group. During the week from the 16th to the 21st of August, besides the main celebrations, there will be a “Dominican way” in Madrid which will be a meeting place for many young people coming from around the world. Groups formed by young and adult volunteers from different parishes are doing all the preparations. Dominican institutions inside and outside of Spain are also collaborating. During the WYD week a new film about St. Dominic will be screened, and a play about St. Catherine will be featured. We will have an OP Fiesta (with games, music, etc.), activities by the Mosaico-Forum (with testimonies, art and a seminar for youth titled “To live and not just get by”), and a celebration about Dominic held around his baptismal font in the Monastery of Sto. Domingo el Real. *IDI*

You can find more information and register in: <http://jmimadrid.dominicos.org/>.

The Dominican Students from Australia – Santa Sabina College and Siena College - will take the opportunity to continue on and visit Caleruega and Prouilhe.

An Extraordinary Woman Celebrates 80 years of Profession as a Dominican Nun

The nuns from the monastery in Krakow, Poland with the encouragement of the Polish provincial, fr Henryk Jakubiec (who told them that they were too many and that it was time for a new foundation), made the decision to found a new monastery in the city of Vilnius (or Vilna, which was then part of Poland, and today the capital of Lithuania). On July 11, 1938 the eight nuns (two of whom were originally from Vilnius) moved into their new convent, dedicated to St. Joseph. The new foundation was blessed the following day by Archbishop Romuald Jalbrzykowski.

The nuns quickly began to draw up architectural plans for their new monastery and church, but the beginning of WWII stopped everything. On September 17, 1939 The Red Army occupied Vilnius, annexing it to the Soviet Union less than a year later. For a time the nuns were still able to live a fairly normal religious life, even after the monastery was nationalized. But things got worse. In June 1941 Vilnius was occupied by the Nazis. Becoming aware of the danger that many citizens of the Jewish ghetto were facing, the sisters began to reach out to help them. It was Sr. Bertranda (Anna Borkowska), the prioress of the monastery at the time, who first proposed the idea of hiding Jews in the monastery. Though it seems that not all of the sisters were in agreement with the plan, once the killing of the Jews began, the community decided to open the monastery to a group of 17 members of illegal Jewish underground movements. Despite the enormous difference between the two groups, very close bonds were formed between the contemplative Dominican nuns and the secular Jews. The Jews found a safe haven behind the convent's walls, while helping the nuns with the work in the fields. They even called the prioress of the monastery "Ima" ("Mother" in Hebrew).

It was during this time in the monastery that Abba Kovner, a leader of the Hashomer Hazair Zionist movement in Vilnius, wrote the famous call to resistance. Aware that the Nazis were implementing a systematic plan to murder all the Jews of Europe, Kovner began to organize a resistance movement. Years later he stated that the ideas for the ghetto rebellion were formed during his time in the monastery: "Hitler is scheming to annihilate all of European Jewry... Let us not go like sheep to the slaughter!" The manifesto that Kovner read out to his friends on 31 December 1941 had been printed in the monastery.

By the end of December 1941 the Jewish refugees decided to leave the safety of the monastery and return to the ghetto, in order to establish the resistance movement. Sr. Bertranda tried to dissuade them from leaving, but was not successful. A few weeks after his return to the ghetto, Abba Kovner was called to the ghetto's gate one day, only to find Sr. Bertranda waiting for him. She told Kovner that she wanted to join the Jews – in the ghetto: "God is in the ghetto," she said. Kovner, however, dissuaded her, telling her that there were other ways that the nuns could help.

On March 23, 1942 three of the Sisters, returning from the city, where they had gone to confession with the Carmelite friars, suddenly noticed that some priests were being arrested. They quickly made their way back to the monastery and began to hide their things at the neighbors' houses. They did not stay at home that night. Each sister remained at the home of friends, while keeping in close contact with one another. In September 1943, as Nazi suspicions of her mounted, the Germans arrested Sr. Bertranda. Says Sr. Cecylia, "Sr. Bertranda paid a great price for her activism. She was imprisoned and tortured in the Nazi labor camp in Kowno." The convent was closed soon after, and the sisters dispersed. Most went into hiding, and after a time, a few returned to the monastery in Krakow.

In 2009 I had the privilege of visiting our nuns in both Vilnius and Krakow. The Vilnius monastery survived clandestinely for fifty years, only being reestablished in 1991, after the fall of the iron curtain. While in Vilnius I was blessed to have a long conversation with Sr Teresa Mindziukiewicz, who entered the monastery secretly in the 1970's. It was Sr. Teresa who told me what it was like to be a Dominican nun clandestinely during the years of Communism. During those years, one of the nuns, Sr. Barnadetta Michrowska, was taken in by a Mrs. Krywko and her daughter. After both of them had died, the house was left as a gift to the nuns. This house (which came to be known among the nuns as "the house in the forest") was for many years the secret meeting place for the nuns. Says Sr. Teresa, "We came together every month or two in a house hidden deep in the forest. It was in that house that we gathered – secretly – to celebrate mass (whenever one of the Polish friars could visit us). It was in that same house that we made our professions, received our spiritual training and had our community meetings. And then she added, smiling shyly, "I was even elected prioress in that

house!" Sr. Teresa lived more than twenty years as a Dominican nun before ever living formally in a monastery!

After Vilnius, I was able to visit the monastery of Gródek, in Krakow for two days. One of the highlights of those two days was meeting Sr. Cecylia Roszak, the only living member of the original Vilnius foundation. At age 103 she is an icon of faithfulness and contemplative joy! It was she that first told me about hiding the Jews in the monastery in Vilnius. She told me that in order to protect their Jewish guests from being discovered by the Nazis, the nuns assigned each of them a communal chore and a Christian name! Though she did not say this, it is clear that the nuns risked their very own lives by opening the doors of their monastery as a sanctuary for their persecuted neighbors.

After a while (and my many questions!), Sr. Cecylia began to tell me a most incredible story. After the Nazis closed the monastery in Vilnius, thus scattering the nuns to the four directions, Sr. Cecylia eventually returned to her monastery in Krakow. One day, several years later (she does not remember the exact year), the telephone rang in the monastery of Krakow. Sr. Cecylia was near the phone and picked it up. A man began to ask very vague questions about "some nuns who lived in Vilnius in the 1930's". He was very careful not to reveal anything personal (this was, of course, during the years of communist rule). He had called the monastery by chance, simply because the phrase "Klasztor SS Dominikanek" reminded him of the convent that he had taken refuge in some years before. He had no idea that the monastery in Krakow had any relationship to the nuns who lived in Vilnius.

The more questions the man asked, the more curious Sr. Cecylia became. Finally, at one point, Sr. Cecylia asked, "Excuse me, could you tell me your name?" The man hesitated, and then said, "My name is Abba Kovner." Sr. Cecylia asked, "When you met those nuns in Vilnius, were you with your girlfriend?" She told me that there was a long pause on the phone, and finally the man answered, "Yes," to which Sr. Cecylia replied, "Abba, this is Sr. Cecylia; I was living in the monastery in Vilnius when you lived with us!"

"He became very emotional," Sr. Cecylia recounted, and then he said to her: "Sister, I have been looking for a long time to make contact with someone from your community to say 'Thank You' for saving my life!" He went on to tell her that he was calling from Israel, where he had managed to emigrate after the uprising in Vilnius. They spoke for a while, and before hanging up, Abba asked for the address of the monastery. Some weeks later a small box arrived from Israel, addressed to Sr. Cecylia. In it was a small crucifix, with "Jerusalem" inscribed at the base. Abba, who went on to become a very famous poet in Israel, later emigrated to the United States, where he died in 1987.

But in 1984, thanks to the efforts of Abba Kovner, Anna Borkowska (formerly Sister Bertranda, who left religious life in 1944) and the founding community of the Dominican monastery in Vilnius received a very great honor for their courageous witness of faith. Borkowska, who was 84 years old and living in Warsaw at the time, accepted, on behalf of the nuns, the medal and title of "Righteous among the Nations," the highest honor given by Israel and the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem to non-Jews

In gratitude, and as attribute to his friend, Sr. Bertranda (Anna Borkowska), Abba Kovner planted a tree in her honor on the Avenue of the Righteous on the Mount of Remembrance. Kovner traveled to Warsaw to present Anna Borkowska with the medal. "Why do I deserve this honor?" asked Borkowska, to which Kovner answered: "You are Anna of the angels". And then he went on to explain: "During the days when angels hid their faces from us, this woman was for us Anna of the Angels. Not of angels that we invent in our hearts, but of angels that create our lives forever."

On my second day with the nuns in Krakow in August 2009, Sr. Cecylia showed me her two treasures: the medal from Israel, recognizing her as one of "the righteous of the nations", and the small bronze crucifix given to her from Kovner, "to thank you for saving my life". I must say that as I bring this reflection to a close, my eyes fill with tears of gratitude. What a grace it has been for me to meet these seemingly unimportant nuns – my sisters in St. Dominic – who, though choosing to live a hidden life of prayer, knew that the gospel sometimes asks of us something that we do not expect. These sisters, in a way similar to our nuns in Burundi, in Africa, were asked to preach the gospel by opening their monastery to the poor and oppressed. They responded wholeheartedly, and the echo of their holy preaching resounds in our world today.

fr Brian J. Pierce, OP Promoter General of the Nuns of the Order

On February 6, 2011 Sr. Cecylia Roszak, OP, a nun from the Monastery of Grodek in Krakow, Poland, celebrated 80 years of profession as a Dominican Nun. Sister Cecylia was one of the foundresses of the Monastery in Vilnius (today in Lithuania) - a monastery that was closed by the Nazis, but survived clandestinely during the many years of Communist rule. On the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, Sister Cecylia will celebrate her 103rd birthday

Dominican Calendar

There are usually no Dominican Feasts celebrated during Lenten days.

Please send contributions – short paragraphs – about Dominican Life in your area to archives5@bigpond.com.au – OFTEN!