

## Saint Dominic

As the Middle Ages were approaching their peak, the pope grew in prominence beyond any king in Christendom. The spiritual life of the Church was in the process of renewal, but there was still ignorance and division that threatened to get worse. In the year 1170, the same year in which Saint Thomas Becket was martyred in England, Dominic de Guzman was born in Calarogo, now Caleruega, Spain, about 20 miles from the Cathedral in Osma.

Before his mother conceived him, she saw in a vision that a dog with a burning torch in its mouth would come forth from her womb and set the world aflame. Later, she saw the moon on his forehead, yet at his Baptism, his godmother perceived it as a star. The boy was christened probably after Saint Dominic of Silas whose nearby shrine was a favorite of his mother.

His parents were Blessed Jane or Joan of Aza, renown for her charity to the poor and her miracles, and a nobleman named Felix de Guzman. They lived in a tower in the little village of which they were the royal wardens. Their eldest son Anthony would become a Canon of Saint James, and their second, Mannes, would eventually follow his younger brother in the Order of Preachers. Mannes was later beatified. Two nephews of Dominic would also join the Order, sons most likely of his sister. As a boy, Dominic was sent to his mother's brother to receive instruction for seven years. His uncle was a parish priest in Gumiel d'Izan. Even as a child, Dominic avoided games and denied himself the comfort of a bed to sleep on the floor.

At the age of 14, he went to the university in Palencia, in the kingdom of Leon. Around that time, there was a terrible famine. To give alms to the poor, he sold his possessions, even his precious annotated books, thinking that the living skins of the famished were more important than the dead skins of his books. Music was studied in the quadrivium. Consequently Dominic loved to sing, particularly the Ave Maris Stella and the Veni Creator. His study of the arts lasted six years.

Then in 1190, he was appointed to the canonry at Osma, while pursuing theological studies. Around five years later, he was ordained to the priesthood. The Canons Regular were essentially clerics who customarily followed the Rule of Saint Augustine. He continued with this life for another nine years. During his nightly vigils, Father Dominic grew in holiness as he wept for sinners. Of the many books he read, he was particularly fond of the Conferences of the Desert Fathers by Cassian. When Dominic was 31 years old and the subprior of his community, his prior, Diego d'Azevedo, succeeded the Bishop of Osma.

Dominic accompanied his holy bishop in 1203 to the Marches of France, in the Languedoc region, because of a royal wedding. It was there that they were struck by the spread of falsehood. People were adopting Albigensianism which considered all material things to be evil. While at Toulouse, Dominic stayed up all night until he had persuaded the innkeeper to accept the true faith. About that time, the pope had called upon the Cistercian abbots to preach against this heresy. At Montpellier, Bishop Diego convinced them to abandon their ostentatious retinues. He himself put on the Cistercian habit and joined the mission, taking Dominic with him. From then on, the subprior was called "Brother Dominic."

The preachers held disputations from town to town, attended by the lowly and the noble alike. At Fanjeaux, arbiters held a trial by fire for the manuscripts written by Dominic and his

adversaries. The one written by Saint Dominic flew out of the flames three times. A similar miracle took place at Montreal.

The Albigensians were extremely austere, but Dominic surpassed them all by his charitable sacrifices. He might eat a bit of dried fish or a little bread and soup. Women who often fed him testified that he never ate more than two eggs, and his wine was about two-thirds water. Dominic wore an abrasive hairshirt, and had an iron chain forged around his waist. He slept very little, and when he did, it was always on the floor, preferably in the chapel. There, the fire of the Holy Spirit even dried his rain-soaked habit better than those of his companions who spent the night by the fireplace. Exhausted from his vigils, he sometimes napped on the side of the road. It was his practice to carry his shoes until he got to town. Once when he needed directions, people maliciously sent him along a path of briars, but he was always happy to bear a little more for the love of God.

Dominic once told a pompous bishop, "... heretics are more easily won over by examples of humility and virtue than by external display or a hail of words. Should we not rather arm ourselves with devout prayers and, carrying before us the standard of true humility, proceed in our bare feet against Goliath?" As hard as he was on himself, nevertheless, Dominic was easy on others.

On the night of July 22, 1206, the feast of Saint Mary Magdalen, on a hill of Fanjeaux overlooking the little town of Prouille on the plain, Saint Dominic saw what appeared to be a globe of fire descending upon a shrine of Our Lady. The sign from Our Lady (or sign of God, "Seignadou" in the local dialect) occurred again the next two nights. From this, he understood that he was to establish a monastery of nuns at Prouille. In the months that followed, Dominic converted nine young women. Consequently, the first "Dominican" convent opened on the 27th of December. Saint Mary Magdalen, the penitent Apostle to the Apostles, therefore, would become the patroness and mother not only of the converted nuns of Prouille but of the Order of Preachers about to be born.

Bishop Diego returned to his diocese in 1207, but died soon after. Saint Dominic then took charge of the small band of preachers. Already at Prouille, there was a double monastery or priory next to the monastery, but the brothers were not yet bound to Dominic canonically. Unfortunately in 1208, servants of an Albigensian count murdered a papal legate, giving the heresy more political significance. As a result, the mission turned into a bloody crusade in the hands of aristocrats and their armies. In the course of the war, Churches were burned, and the preachers disbanded. Dominic, often alone, continued at the task for years, all the while serving the victims of violence.

Brother Dominic always hoped to be martyred but thought himself unworthy. So, he fled places of honor and drew near to mistreatment, to where people would spit and throw filth at him. Aware of looming ambush, he approached singing in plain view. His courage and faith, however, intimidated assassins.

At Muret, the Catholic force was vastly outnumbered, but they broke through the enemy line, killed the heretical King of Aragon and won a great victory, just as Dominic had foretold.

In 1211, while the war continued, a group of English pilgrims were on their way to Saint James of Compostela in Spain. While crossing the River Garonne, the overloaded boat capsized. Dominic, in a nearby church, heard the cries of bystanders and soldiers. Many of the pilgrims

were already underwater. Dominic prostrated himself, prayed and loudly commanded their safety in the Name of Jesus Christ. Immediately, the pilgrims emerged near the shore and were pulled to the riverbank. One of the pilgrims, named Lawrence, would be one of the first members of the Order of Preachers. In another incident, a ferryman demanded payment from Dominic, who then prayed and picked up a coin at his feet. Later, eyewitnesses would testify to these and many other miracles at his canonization process.

At Castres, Dominic was praying in the church. The prior sent one of the canons to fetch him for dinner. Seeing Dominic floating in the air, he returned to tell the prior who went to see for himself. So moved was he by the phenomenon, the prior, Matthew of France, became another of Dominic's first followers. Eventually, a new group of preachers gathered to support his mission.

Peter of Seila gave Dominic large stone buildings at Toulouse, and became his follower. While in this city, the small fraternity attended lectures in theology. Toulouse was the see of Bishop Foulques, who greatly supported the preachers. In 1215, Dominic accompanied Foulques to Rome for the Lateran Council.

While in Rome for the Council, it is believed that Saint Dominic met Saint Francis of Assisi. Both of them would establish a new kind of religious life, which is mendicant and apostolic. At a later time, one or the other founder got angry at his sons for extravagant buildings and held up the other Order as an example of simplicity. Members of both Orders call both saints "Holy Father." For centuries, it has also been the custom for Friars Preachers to invite a Friar Minor to preach on the feast of Saint Dominic, and vice versa. Pope Innocent III was inspired to approve these new Orders because he saw in a dream one or the other of these saints reaching up to support the tottering Church, lest it fall to ruins. Today in Saint Peter's Basilica, colossal statues of Saints Francis and Dominic flank both sides of the Chair of Saint Peter.

In Rome, Bishop Foulques and Saint Dominic petitioned Pope Innocent III for the right to establish a new Order of Preachers. Until that time, preaching was the proper function of bishops. The bold prospect of having an order whose priests cross diocesan boundaries to preach as needed would be a great privilege, yet clearly the time had come for such a development, and Dominic was worthy of the responsibility. So, the pope told him to return to his brethren, and with them, to choose an existing rule. Hence, after the council, Dominic and his companions chose the Rule of Saint Augustine. To this short monastic rule, constitutions were added. Therefore, the preachers would be generically monastic, yet specifically "friars" not always bound to a particular cloister nor to manual labor. For the friars, even the monastic elements of their life acquired an apostolic thrust; for instance, the Liturgy of the Hours was celebrated more succinctly so they could get on with study and the preaching of truth. Bishop Foulques then gave them charge of three Churches, to each of which priories were added. The first was Saint Romain in the cathedral city of Toulouse, and its priory was a model of simplicity. It was the summer of 1216 and the friars had grown in number to sixteen.

At the same time, Pope Honorius III succeeded Innocent III. Dominic set out, nevertheless, for Rome to complete the foundation. He arrived in September, but did not receive the papal bull of confirmation until December 22, 1216. In a second bull issued the same day, Honorius said, "We, considering that the brethren of the Order will be the champions of the faith and true lights of the world, do confirm the Order in all its lands and possessions present and to

come and we take under our protection and government the Order itself, with all its goods and rights."

The pope wanted Dominic to stay at the Lateran for awhile, so Honorius appointed him to be the Master of the Sacred Palace, that is, a theological advisor to the pope, a teacher of the papal court and a censor of books. Since then, the position has traditionally been held by a Friar Preacher. While in the Eternal City, Dominic made pilgrimages to the great Christian shrines.

Once, while praying in the old Saint Peter's Basilica, Saint Dominic saw a vision. The Apostle Peter handed him a staff, and the Apostle Paul handed him a book. Together, they spoke to him, saying, "Go and preach, because you have been chosen by God for this work." Immediately, it seemed to Dominic that he saw all his children preaching two by two throughout the world. From then on, Saint Dominic was often seen on the road carrying a walking stick and the Epistles of Saint Paul. He also carried the Gospel of Saint Matthew, and could recite these Scriptures by heart.

The Founder was allowed to return to Toulouse in May of 1217, but the reunion was short. By August, our Holy Father planned to send his sons far and wide on the feast of the Assumption. They protested because it seemed that their small number would be too diffuse, but Dominic replied, "Do not oppose me, for I know very well what I am doing. The seed will molder if it is hoarded up; it will fructify if it is sown." In time, his prophecy proved true. Instead of dissipating, the Order grew rapidly, and its fruit likewise multiplied.

Consequently, before the great dispersion, the whole Order gathered for the last time at Our Lady of Prouille. The congregation was stunned by the unusual severity of his sermon, for on that day, he had inspired fear in them all. It was probably on that occasion that the brothers professed their vows in his hands; hence the custom of making profession on the Assumption is still common. Coincidentally, Saint Dominic appears today in the painting of the Assumption in Saint John Lateran. When the time had come, he sent most of the friars to the universities at Paris and Bologna. This emphasis on study has always been an integral component of Dominican formation. In fact, many professors soon entered the Order. Dominic, the first "Master" of the Order, sent other friars to Rome and to Spain, while the remainder continued the mission in southern France. About this time, our Father let his beard grow in hopes that he would be allowed to preach among the Tartars and receive martyrdom, but the opportunity never came.

To his brethren, Dominic was exemplary in mortification, doctrine and contemplation. Three times each night, he would whip himself to blood, once for his own salvation, a second time for sinners, and a third for departed souls. Later, other Dominican saints would do the same. Dominic habitually wept for sinners, in the towns he passed, while celebrating Mass, and during his vigils. He was heard crying: O Lord, what will become of sinners? Often on the road, he would either instruct his companions or wander off to pray. His most evident characteristic was that he always spoke to God in prayer or about God to others.

By January 1218, Dominic had walked back to Rome. Around that time, an important canon lawyer, Blessed Reginald of Orleans, wanted to follow Dominic but became bedridden with sickness. Our Lady came to anoint him and to show him the full habit of the Order of Preachers. Reginald recovered and the Order soon adopted the addition to its habit, which was probably the scapular. Saint Dominic too had seen visions of Our Lady. Once he saw Her in the dormitory sprinkling the brethren with holy water as they slept. Therefore, today, the prior or

prioress in every Dominican convent sprinkles the community at night prayers (Compline) during the Hail, Holy Queen (Salve Regina).

Due to the generosity of Pope Honorius, a Dominican priory was established at San Sisto (Pope Saint Sixtus II, Martyr) on the Appian Way. Dominic, having received a revelation from God, called the brethren to the chapter room to announce the proximate deaths of four friars, two physically and two spiritually. Soon thereafter, his prediction proved true, for two men died, and two others left the Order for worldliness.

The community at San Sisto had grown very numerous. One day, Dominic was informed by the procurator that their begging had produced almost no food. He ordered the brethren, nevertheless, to gather at table for their meal. He then prayed and suddenly two young men or angels, looking mysteriously alike, came into the refectory to dispense a portion of bread and wine to each friar. The same procurator told of a similar miracle on another occasion.

Dominic then traveled through France to his Spanish homeland, and then as far as Paris by June of 1219. For a few days, German pilgrims, who traveled on the same road, fed him, so he prayed for the ability to speak their language, and the gift was given to him. Neither language nor locked doors could obstruct him. More than one porter wondered how he got beyond their gates. After establishing houses along the way, Dominic returned to Italy, stopping at Milan, Bologna, Florence and Viterbo. He was in Rome for Christmas.

The pope then asked Dominic to reform and organize the more or less independent nuns of the city. By February of 1220, he gathered many at San Sisto. The diplomacy he exercised to overcome protests and achieve this unfavorable organization must have been inspired. He called Mother Blanche from Prouille to take charge of the monastery. The friars meanwhile moved to the ancient Basilica of Santa Sabina, another donation from the pope. For centuries, the Masters of the Order have managed the Order from there.

Dominic is a saint because of his great charity, not because of his miracles, yet the greatness of his miracles is a sign of his love. Of all his well attested prodigies, the most remarkable are the resuscitations of the dead. Our saintly Father once rescued a workman who was crushed by a fallen wall at San Sisto. Another time, the nephew of a cardinal fell from his horse and suffered mortal injuries. Almost immediately, Dominic celebrated Mass. Hours passed before he raised the man to life, with all his wounds healed. In another case, a woman went to hear Dominic preach at San Marco in Rome, but later she returned home and found her little boy dead. She rushed the child to Dominic who brought him back to life. When the pope expressed his desire to publicize the miracle, Dominic threatened to leave town. People were already clipping bits of his habit for relics.

The first General Chapter of the Order was held in Bologna around Pentecost, 1220. Centuries later, the democratic principles of the Constitutions of the Order of Preachers would influence nations. The Founder recommended that all economic matters be handled by the lay brothers, but the Chapter Fathers voted against him. Dominic preached throughout Italy for a year until the second General Chapter, once again in Bologna. By then, his health was declining, yet he continued to walk from town to town preaching. By mid summer, he had spent his strength. Heaven had warned the "Athlete of Christ" that his life was about to end. His work was bearing fruit. Already the Order had grown to eight provinces: Spain, Provence, France, Lombardy, Rome, Germany, Hungary, and England. By the time he reached Bologna in August, it was very hot and humid.

The heat compounded his fever. He could no longer stand, but refused to be put on a bed. He lay on the floor of a borrowed cell, in a borrowed habit, for he had none of his own. He had bequeathed to his children this testimony: "Have charity one for another; guard humility; make your treasure out of voluntary poverty." He then emphasized poverty, saying, "May my malediction and that of God fall upon him who shall bring possessions into this Order." When asked about burial, he expressed his wish to be "under the feet of the brethren," that is, under the feet of those who bring Good News. He assured them, "Do not weep, my children; I shall be more useful to you where I am now going, than I have ever been in this life."

Near the end, he told the elders, "Till this day, God, in His mercy, has kept my virginity pure and unstained. If you desire this blessed gift of God, hold yourselves apart from everything that can conjure up evil, for it is by watchful care in this that a man is loved by God and revered by man. Be eager in your service of God; strengthen and widen this newborn Order; increase your love of God and your keen observance of the Rule; grow in holiness." Only a few more words were exchanged. After his confession, he directed his sons to begin the Commendation of the Dying. During its recitation, he stretched his arms upward and died. It was Friday, August 6, 1221, about 6 o'clock in the evening: fittingly the Transfiguration, a feast regarding prophets and apostles. Saint Dominic had lived 51 years.

Miracles followed and devotion to the saint grew, so the church building needed to be expanded and Dominic's body moved. Hundreds of people of every rank attended the Translation on May 24, 1233. When the stone covering his remains was lifted, a gentle aroma, like a sweet perfume, filled the air to the delight of all. The sacred relics have since been revered in a sepulcher befitting his glory. Within a year after the Translation of the Body, after collecting depositions and testimonies, Dominic was canonized a saint. His feast is celebrated on the eighth of August.