

Quo vadis? Dominikanske fremtidsperspektiv

A talk by sr Agnes David Lalu, Katarinahjemmet

We are here as a Dominican family to celebrate together the ending of the 800th anniversary of the foundation of our Order. (In varied and creative ways, Dominicans world-wide have been celebrating the jubilee.) Looking back at the past year, which Dominican value do you experience most alive and real in your heart/life today?

Our half-day seminar is entitled: **Quo vadis? Dominikanske fremtidsperspektiv.**

Quo vadis? Where are you going? In the Christian tradition, this phrase is attributed to Saint Peter who, apparently fleeing from a likely crucifixion in Rome, met the Risen Jesus on the way. He asked the Lord, "Quo vadis?" Where are you going? Jesus replied, "I am going to Rome to be crucified again." This encounter with the Risen Jesus led Peter to a change of heart. He returned to the city with a renewed courage, continued his ministry and eventually was martyred by being crucified upside down.

Where are we going? This is a timely and valuable question that is worth reflecting together as a Dominican family. Yet before we dare answer this, I believe that it is essential for us to turn back our gaze on the person of Saint Dominic. Who is St. Dominic and what was his vision of "founding" the Order of Preachers? Maybe then, just like St. Peter, we too may be renewed and inspired to fully embrace and live our common vocation as Dominicans...

There are very few biographies written on St. Dominic, unlike his contemporary, St. Francis who is the subject of endless biographies. Does this mean that St. Dominic is boring and deserves less attention? Timothy Radcliffe made a reasonable distinction for this: St. Francis wished to imitate the life of Christ (he bore the stigmata of Christ's wounds in his body) and it is appropriate that we look at him and the ways in which he was Christ-like. Saint Dominic was a preacher and so he invites us to focus on the gospel rather than to himself.

In his book, *St. Dominic: The Story of a Preaching Friar*, Donald Goergen maintains that the Order of Preachers was born of multiple conversations! (I find this interesting and thought-provoking.) The foundation of the Order of Preachers was not the project of a single man, imposed on his followers. It was a fruit of consultation and collaboration. St. Dominic first discovered his mission when he was the companion of Diego, his bishop. Most likely, the idea of a band of preachers emerged from Diego and Dominic's conversations on the road. It is also said that when Dominic was required to choose an existing approved rule to establish the Order, he consulted his brethren and their choice was the Rule of Saint Augustine. The idea of an Order of Preachers with a universal mission was probably a result of collaborative venture between bishop Fulk, Dominic and pope Innocent III.

Dominic was the focal point of conversations with the pope, with Diego his bishop, with the nuns at Prouilhe, and with the early brethren. He listened attentively to other people's ideas. His gift was to be the midwife of a new way of religious life by being open to the ideas and intuitions of others. (T. Radcliffe)

The Dominican historian, MH Vicaire described that the founding of the Order was conditioned by circumstances and Dominic's response to those circumstances. *Dominic's whole life was molded by response to situations he never anticipated. This merciful man was at the mercy of others, vulnerable to their needs. His most striking gift was this very compassion: his vulnerability to the suffering of others. It is this vulnerability and sensitivity to the needs of others that determined the very structure of the Order he founded.* Dominic wept and spent his nights pleading for God's mercy for the sinners. "What will become of sinners?" Dominic had asked in his prayer. It is for the sake of preaching and the salvation of souls that the Order was established. Preaching and salvation are closely linked together. Preaching had and has to do with the life of the soul. *Dominicans are called to proclaim a word that would rescue the soul from isolation, from loneliness, from embitterment, from self-destruction.*

*The preaching of the gospel is rooted in our fraternal/communitarian life. Dominicans are formed to speak the Word of God by the **discipline** of living with, loving and forgiving one another.* (TR)

At the center of Dominic's life was the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ! Saint Dominic devoted his whole life preaching the story of Jesus Christ: preacher, teacher, and healer. As a family of preachers, we are called to do the same...

Called to be contemplative itinerant preachers:

In the invitation for this seminar, we were posed with some challenging questions. *Hva er vårt kall og våre oppgaver i tiden framover? Hvilke utfordringer står vi ovenfor i møte med vårt samfunn?* And we are encouraged to speak up and share our thoughts and visions during the public forum...

For this reason, I wish to allot five minutes of my sharing by inviting all of us to preach together in silence. After all, "Silence is the first language of the preacher..."