



Inquiry Formation

Meeting Seven

The Dominican Soul (a mystical, poetic reflection on being Dominican)

by M.M. Philipon, OP; translated by Cajetan Kelly, OP

A Dominican Soul is a soul of light whose rapt gaze dwells in the inaccessible splendor wherein God conceals Himself. It lives with Him by faith, is in the company of the Three Divine Persons, a true child of God, adopted through grace into the very Family of the Trinity. The invisible world becomes familiar to it; it pursues its way on earth in intimacy with Christ, the Blessed Mother and the saints. It perceives everything in the radiance of God.

But it does not jealously guard its faith for itself. It longs to bear the torch of faith everywhere on land and sea, in every country, to the ends of the earth. This soul belongs to that race of apostles who have been prophetically designated by the Church from their earliest days as champions of the faith and true lights of the world: “*pugiles fidei et vera mundi lumina.*” We have here the key to the whole Dominican vocation: to live, defend and propagate the faith in the atmosphere of the Church. The Dominican soul, looking beyond the activity of secondary causes, judges men and things only in the light of God.

To realize this sublime mission, the Dominican soul must be a soul of silence. According to the traditional axiom, the word of the Preacher must flow from a soul of silence: *Silentium, pater Praedicatorum.* A Dominican soul which does not love long hours of solitude and recollection deceives itself about the spiritual fruits of its action. It must mix with the crowd to act, but it must know how to separate itself from it for thought and prayer. St. Dominic was a man of tremendous silence. St. Thomas Aquinas’ fellow-pupils called him the “dumb ox of Sicily.” Piere Lacordaire prepared his brilliant conferences for Notre Dame in Paris with long vigils of reflection and intimate union with God. The spiritual depth of a soul is measured by its capacity for silence.

A Dominican soul is a virginal soul, detached from all evil. It dwells in complete union with God. All our Dominican saints carry a lily in their hands. They are virgins, pure, free from inordinate affections. They walk in the midst of people in accord with St. Dominic’s deathbed admonition—in the conquering raiment of their translucent purity. Purity is a characteristic note of the Order of light and truth.

A Dominican soul in its sublimest activity is a contemplative soul. It dwells on the heights in the unalloyed splendor of God. Its gaze becomes identified through the light of the Word with the wisdom of God. Solitude, penance, prayer, a life of study, of silence, of action, all contribute to the formation of a sense of the divine reality, of the “one thing necessary” from which nothing, absolutely nothing, should distract it, much less deter it. Its purpose is to direct everything straight to God as quickly and as completely as possible. Its existence among men should be



Southern Dominican Laity
PROVINCE OF ST. MARTIN DE PORRES
laydomsouth.org

Updated May 2025

nothing else than a prolonged gaze of love toward God alone. It is in contemplative silence that a Dominican soul finds the fullness of God.

The Dominican soul is a soul of prayer and praise. The spirit of prayer is the normal climate, the completely divine atmosphere in which the contemplative soul breathes. It sees nothing but God. No matter how distracting surrounding creatures become, it rises above them, invulnerable to their empty fascination, impervious to their tempting and seductive appeal. But it does hear their cries of distress, their desperate pleas; then, silent with profound compassion, it turns, suppliant, toward the God of all light and goodness, to obtain the truth which sets men free and the pardon which brings salvation. Following the example of St. Dominic, whose loud cries used to startle the brethren at night, the ardent and apostolic prayer of the Dominican soul must become a redemptive cry, accompanied, as was that of Jesus at Gethsemani, by tears and a sweat of blood. Here lies hidden the real secret of the many fruitful lives of our missionaries, of our contemplative nuns, of the many Dominican vocations in the cloister and in the world, silent and crucified, but infinitely powerful in behalf of Christ's Mystical Body. Dominican prayer, the daughter of redemptive charity, is lifted toward the God of the Order night and day. O, Lord, what is to become of these poor sinners? Following the example of Christ Crucified, a Dominican soul saves more souls by its contemplative and co-redeeming prayer than by words or by dint of action. All our saints were people of continual prayer and immolation. Prayer was the allpowerful lever which helped them lift the universe to God.

But in Dominican prayer, the first place belongs to praise. "Praise God, exalt Him, bless Him and preach Him everywhere,"—*this is the purpose of the Order and its unique ambition*: laudare, benedicere, praedicare. The Dominican soul is theocentric; in everything it aims at the primacy of God:

- the primacy of the First Cause in all the attainments of our spiritual lives
- the primacy of honor and of effective direction for theological wisdom over the study of profane sciences
- the primacy of choral life, of the Opus Dei, in the hierarchy of monastic observances and among our means of sanctification
- the primacy of the Word of God over human rhetoric in an office of preaching which must always be essentially evangelical and supernatural
- the primacy of God in all things

The Dominican soul finds its joy in proclaiming and singing the supreme grandeur of Him alone Who is.

A Dominican soul is an apostolic soul which is hindered by nothing when the glory of God and the spiritual good of souls is at stake. The vows of religion, monastic observances, study, prayer and community life all converge to give the Dominican life the maximum of apostolic efficacy. Setting aside secondary tasks and material preoccupations, the Friar Preacher dedicates himself wholly and directly to the salvation of souls, following the example of the first Apostles who left behind absorbing economic cares to consecrate themselves to "prayer and the Word of God." Whatever

is doctrinal is ours; when the faith is endangered, the Dominican soul is aroused and enters the fray for Christ. Not without reason did St. Peter and St. Paul appear to St. Dominic. In the history of the Church, the redemptive mission of the Order is a prolongation of the vocation of those two great Apostles of Christ: announcing to all men the Gospel of salvation. All the means of spreading divine Truth must become ours: press, radio, films, television. The Order is present in full vigor at these command posts of the human universe, to pursue its mission of truth. A Dominican soul is not regimented, it is not disturbed by progress, nor does it find new techniques disconcerting; rather, it marshals these into the service of the liberating truth which is Love. So it is that the Order through the centuries has preserved its youth and its creative spirit, ready to answer redemption's every appeal.

The Dominican soul is strong, with the very power of God. Because it is certain of the redemptive power of the Cross, it has the initiative in the midst of a confused and despairing world to undertake great enterprises, the genius to create institutions capable of adapting themselves to meet the demands of an ecclesiastical apostolate which is constantly being renewed and adjusted. With faith and tenacity, it relentlessly perseveres in its works of salvation. "The desperate hours are the hours of God," and often, in a moment, Providence miraculously intervenes and saves all. The Dominican soul advances in the midst of the difficulties of life, serene and confident, buoyed up by the Immutable Force of God.

While engaged in the difficult combats of the Church Militant, the Dominican soul remains joyful. "The religion of thy Father Dominic," said God to St. Catherine of Siena, "is joyful and lightsome." Above the trials of redemption, joy pervades the Dominican soul, the inadmissible joy of God. The secret of this Dominican joy lies in the peaceful certitude that God is infinitely happy in the society of the Three Divine Persons, even if men refuse to know Him and receive Him. At the summit of the souls of the saints, joy always flourished together with an unalterable peace. God is God, and what possible difference can anything else make? The joy of a soul is measured by its love. The Apostles went away joyful because they had been judged worthy to suffer for Christ, Whom they loved above everything else. On the roads of Languedoc, the sharper the rocks became, the more St. Dominic sang. Raised up by the same spirit of heroic strength fortified with love, the Dominican soul remains fixed in an ever-singing joy.

The Dominican soul is a daughter of the Church, always ready to obey the Pope and the directives of the hierarchy and to place itself at the service of the Mystical Body of Christ. It cherishes the memory of the symbolic vision of Pope Innocent III, who perceived St. Dominic supporting the columns of the Church of the Lateran, the mother-church of Catholicism. "Thou art Peter and upon this rock, I will build my Church." "Whoever hears you, hears me; whoever spurns you, spurns me," the Lord Jesus had forcefully asserted. The Dominican soul does not hesitate. He who hears the Pope, hears Christ; the authority of God speaks through the bishops and all religious superiors. St. Catherine of Siena called the Pope the "gentle Christ of this earth." Her filial docility toward the hierarchy made her to an eminent degree a true daughter of the Church and defender of the Papacy. Thus she became after her death the secondary patron of Rome and by her protection shelters Catholic Action throughout the world. A Dominican soul lives and dies for the Church of Christ.

The Dominican soul is an imitator of the Word, singularly solicitous for the glory of the Father, eager to work for the redemption of the world, for the “consummation of all men in the unity” of the Trinity. It is modeled, in all its interior acts, on the intimate sentiments of the Soul of Christ, the adorer of the Father and the Savior of souls. Now the Word fulfills a twofold function:

- within the Trinity, He is the divine light, *‘Lumen de Lumine,’* the Image and Splendor of the Father
- outside, as the Incarnate Word, He lives as the Revealer par excellence of the Father and of all the mysteries of God. Similarly, the Dominican soul which receives by reason of its vocation the “office of the Word,” dwells within itself, in a profound, living contemplation of the pure Light of God, keeping itself continually before the face of the Father, while by its apostolic activity, it becomes manifestive of the Divine Truth; it walks on earth among men like a mirror of God.

A Dominican soul is divine with no desire but God: to know Him, love Him, serve Him and to spend eternity with Him in order to exalt Him ceaselessly. Everything is simple in the life of a Dominican soul faithful to its divine vocation. It is not overcome by pitiful sights, nor by complicating details; it clearly sees:

- only one horizon: God
- only one motive power: Love
- only one end: forming the whole Christ as ordained to the City of God

Everything else fades from its sight. Nothing, apart from God, is worthy of its attention. It realizes the ideal of St. Dominic: ‘To speak only with God or about God,’ cum *Deo vel de Deo*. Dominican saints have hewed to this line of divine conduct: “My daughter, think of Me,” God commanded St. Catherine of Siena, “and for My part, I shall think of thee.” And at the twilight of his life of immense labor for Christ, St. Thomas Aquinas wished for no other reward but God: Nothing save THEE. *Nisi TE*. This is the fundamental attitude of every Dominican soul. GOD, GOD, GOD.

Finally, the Dominican soul is a Marian soul. The Preface of the feast of St. Dominic places in high relief the wonders of the spiritual fecundity attained through this intimate friendship with Mary. Under the constant guidance of Mary, our holy Father renewed the apostolic form of life in the Church, launched intrepid champions of the faith into the world, and won thousands of souls for Christ. When dying, he left as his legacy to the Church, the Rosary wherein his religious family might find the proper form for its devotion to Mary. Where is the Dominican who does not dream of living and dying with the Rosary in his or her hand? It is a universal law of the economy of salvation: the more devoted a soul is to Mary, the more Christian it is. It is equally true to say that the more devoted a soul is to Mary, the more Dominican it is.

Thus the Dominican life is a harmonious synthesis which the great light of God illumines. Everything proceeds from faith and is ordered to His glory. Fixed in God by love, the Dominican soul lives for this alone: united with Christ in each of its acts, through Him, with Him and in Him, it thinks only of glorifying the Father by continual adoration and of saving souls who will glorify

Him eternally. It lives in the Church, through the Church, for the Church, in a spirit of brotherhood with all men, eager to communicate to them the Truth which is achieved in Love. Everything is light in a Dominican soul, but a light which revolves on love. It meditates frequently on the memorable words of St. Dominic to a cleric who was astonished at the power of his apostolic preaching: My son, I have studied in the book of charity more than in any other; love teaches all. Redeeming and illuminating charity is the key to Dominican life. Not the love of knowledge, but the knowledge of love. The Dominican soul is another Word which spirates love. Its favorite book is the Gospel, in which the Eternal Word speaks. From that divine Light, under the gentle influence of the same Spirit of Love, all the virtues diffuse themselves in the Dominican soul. Among these virtues, three shine forth brilliantly in the luminous raiment of faith: the cross, purity, love; the cross which raises us above the earth, purity which frees us from all that is not God, love which fixes us in Him. This is the harmonious synthesis of the ideal Dominican: the purity of a virgin, the light of a doctor, and the soul of a martyr.

When evening comes, the Virgin of the “Salve” is there to gather the soul of the faithful servant under her mantle. Initiated for all eternity into the splendors of the beatific vision, which supplant the obscurities of faith, with Him, through Him, and in Him, together with all the angels and saints, the Dominican soul in unison with the Spirit of Love, chants the glory of the Father unto eternity. Used with permission of the Dominican Province of St. Joseph.

On the Disputatio

by Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P. (1945-) former Master of the Order of Preachers

In the "disputatio" the aim was not so much to demonstrate that your opponent was utterly and in every way wrong, and to be derided and dismissed as a fool. Instead you had to show the limited sense in which he was right. If someone were to assert that "Yale Department of Religious Studies is better than the Theology Faculty of Oxford", I might reply in making a distinction: "That Yale is better as far as sociological analysis I accept; that it is better in every way I deny." The aim was, through disagreement and mutual criticism, to arrive at a common truth, that was able to accommodate what was true in each position.

Perhaps even in universities we have been seduced by a competitive form of debate, which is as blind and violent as the struggle of the species to survive in the Darwinian jungle, or as senseless as the struggle for mastery between Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola. But we are called to be a place of counter-culture, of a different way of relating, through which one believes that one may learn something from those with whom one disagrees. This requires of us compassion and vulnerability. Iris Murdock said that when we disagree with someone else, we must ask of what they are afraid. How can we enter their perception of things, and rescue what is right and true from what is wrong and misguided?

*Taken from "Talking to Strangers," Address to Yale University, Oct. 8, 1996
1996 Yale Woodward Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies*

Additional Reading List

Dominicana

- Ch 12 (Formation Ahead)
- Ch 13 (Preaching the Word)

Questions

Dominicana: A Guidebook for Inquirers

Ch. 12 (Formation Ahead)

1. What does it mean to discern a Dominican vocation?
2. Why is it important to be up-to-date with current issues?
3. What is the importance of the relationship between study and preaching?
4. Describe the four levels of formation.

Ch. 13 (Preaching the Word)

1. How does laity preaching differ from clerical preaching?
2. The General Chapter of Bologna (1998) states "Lay men and women offer a unique vision of preaching." What does this mean to you?
3. Write a short paragraph beginning with *Your name is a Dominican Soul because...*