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Inquiry Formation

Meeting Two

The Pillars of Dominican Life: Community Life

Community life is of key importance to all Dominicans. It is in fact, one of the pillars of Dominican life. For the members of the First, Second and Third Order Religious it means a group of men or women leading a common life according to a rule. It can be difficult when personalities clash, irritations and frustrations can create friction and tension, human failings and individualities can cause hurt, disappointments and heartaches. But, on the other hand, a community can also provide an immense source of strength.

Living in community demands sacrifice, the ability to ignore one's own personal desires, concessions to others, maintaining quiet and calm when one desires emoting, but there are rewards – the inspiration provided by one's brothers and sisters in St. Dominic, companionship, help and concern and, most of all, love, greatly outweigh the disadvantages.

You, as lay Dominicans, will not live in such close quarters as those who belong to the Friars, Nuns and Sisters communities, and yet a chapter is a very real community. We are members of the same family, brothers and sisters in St. Dominic, and we have a common goal, purpose and mission. The chapter is our community, the place to which we have been called to be members. In a very real sense, we are similar to the early Christian communities to whom St. Paul wrote his letters. They did not live under the same roof either. They met occasionally – once a week as rule for the Eucharist when conditions permitted. Persecution, lack of priests and barbarian invasions would often hinder them. It might be helpful to recall some of his exhortations to those communities and apply them to ourselves.

To the Romans he wrote:

“Love one another in mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality. (Rom. 12: 10-13)”

He told the Galatians:

“Bear one another's burdens and so you will fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal. 6: 2)”

He urged the Philippians:



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“Complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but also everyone for those of others. (Phil. 2: 2 & 3)”

One of the more beautiful passages is to be found in the Letter to the Colossians:

“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, which binds the rest together and makes them perfect. (Col. 3: 12-14)”

When we analyze these passages, we can see that love should be the hallmark of a Christian community, a love which expresses itself in affection, giving honor, acting with humility, compassion, kindness, gentleness and patience. If conflicts arise, all should be quick to forgive. It is the kind of community that requires concessions, the giving up of personal likes and dislikes, having no axes to grind and hanging in when things do not go as the individual would like. The great reward is that it is a school of love.

St. Paul based these exhortations on the fact that all Christians were bound together as members of the one body of Christ. In our communities, our chapters, you are not only bound in that way, you are also bound together as brothers and sisters in St. Dominic, so that everything St. Paul said about those communities holds doubly true for you.

Our Rule and Particular Directory list ways, such as uniting in our common love of God and sharing it in the Eucharist and prayer in common, study, giving service to others, mutual support, tenderness toward those in pain or sorrow and a special concern for our deceased members.

This brings out the idea that the chapter, our Dominican community, should be something more than just a meeting to attend. Attendance at the meetings is tremendously important for us to develop these qualities. Another aspect is that without each member’s presence we are less than we should be or could be. We are deprived of that important element only you have to share with us. In other words, you need us, but we also need you; we need one another.

Any chapter that has been established for a number of years will have members who, because of age or infirmity, cannot come any longer to the regular meetings. They become what we call *prayer members*. They are important to the chapter because they pray for its growth, vitality and development. As St. Dominic recognized when he founded the cloistered nuns, their prayer was essential if the work of those out on the lines was to be fruitful. Each chapter should have some way of keeping in contact with those people who in past years contributed so much to it, whether it is an individual or a group that telephones or visits these prayer members on a regular basis.

But a sense of community means more than a concern for those who cannot come to the meetings. It also means a care and concern for those who attend. One-way of doing that is to have a portion of our meetings devoted to a sharing of the chapter's individual's needs, concerns, problems and sorrows and requests for prayer. Members should also share joys and special blessings and ask that all join in thanking God.

This helps members to get to know one another as brothers and sisters. Another way is community recreation which the Friars have found to be essential to their lives in community. One simple thing the Laity can do is to share coffee and cookies (or more) at the meetings and, occasionally, a dinner to help to foster a sense of community and togetherness. All this is just as essential for community life for the Laity as it is with the Friars.

Over and above the individual chapters, there is the larger, Provincial, unit with a Provincial Promoter and a Provincial Council that meets at least once a year to bring a sense of cohesiveness to all the chapters – a sense that each chapter is part of a larger family. It is a means of sharing ideas, programs and activities. There are also national or regional meetings and the Laity, like the Friars, are a global organization, and periodically there are world meetings of Lay Dominicans. These gatherings help to make the point that all us are part of the same family, the Dominican Family – all of us, Friars, nuns, sisters and laity, are brothers and sisters in St. Dominic.

DE PROFUNDIS

Psalm 130 (129)

It is a long-standing Dominican custom to pray for our deceased brothers and sisters each evening. Derived from an ancient practice of burying the dead beneath the cloister walkway, the friars pray in the cloister, at the refectory (dining hall) entrance. The Prior normally leads the prayer.

V: Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord: ,
R: Lord, hear my voice!

V: Let Your ears be attentive to my voice in supplication:
R: If you, O Lord, mark iniquities, Lord, who can stand?

V: But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered.
R: I trust in the Lord; my soul trusts in his word.

V: My soul waits for the Lord; more than sentinels wait for the dawn.
R: More than sentinels wait for the dawn, let Israel wait for the Lord,

V: For with the Lord is kindness and with Him is plenteous redemption
R: And he will redeem Israel * from all their iniquities.

R: Let us pray:

O God, creator and redeemer of all the faithful, grant to the souls of your servants and handmaidens the remission of their sins, that they may obtain by our loving prayers the forgiveness which they have always desired. You who live and reign forever.

R. Amen.

We also bind ourselves to our community, to the Order, and to Christians around the world when we pray the Liturgy of the Hours (aka Divine Office). To understand the role of the Divine Office, it is important to understand its history and purpose, shown in the following excerpt from the Second Vatican Council.

SACROSANCTUM CONCILIUM
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
Second Vatican Council
SOLEMNLY PROMULGATED BY HIS HOLINESS
POPE PAUL VI
ON DECEMBER 4, 1963

CHAPTER IV: THE DIVINE OFFICE

83. Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.

For he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office.

84. By tradition going back to early Christian times, the divine office is devised so that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God. Therefore, when this wonderful song of praise is rightly performed by priests and others who are deputed for this purpose by the Church's ordinance, or by the faithful praying together with the priest in the approved form, then it is truly the voice of the bride addressed to her bridegroom; It is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His body, addresses to the Father.

85. Hence all who render this service are not only fulfilling a duty of the Church, but also are sharing in the greatest honor of Christ's spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the Church their Mother.

86. Priests who are engaged in the sacred pastoral ministry will offer the praises of the hours with greater fervor the more vividly they realize that they must heed St. Paul's exhortation: "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:11). For the work in which they labor will effect nothing and bring forth no fruit except by the power of the Lord who said: "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15: 5). That is why the apostles, instituting deacons, said: "We will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

87. In order that the divine office may be better and more perfectly prayed in existing circumstances, whether by priests or by other members of the Church, the sacred Council, carrying further the restoration already so happily begun by the Apostolic See, has seen fit to decree as follows concerning the office of the Roman rite.

88. Because the purpose of the office is to sanctify the day, the traditional sequence of the hours is to be restored so that once again they may be genuinely related to the time of the day when they are prayed, as far as this may be possible. Moreover, it will be necessary to take into account the modern conditions in which daily life has to be lived, especially by those who are called to labor in apostolic works.

89. Therefore, when the office is revised, these norms are to be observed:

- a) By the venerable tradition of the universal Church, Lauds as morning prayer and Vespers as evening prayer are the two hinges on which the daily office turns; hence they are to be considered as the chief hours and are to be celebrated as such.
- b) Compline is to be drawn up so that it will be a suitable prayer for the end of the day.
- c) The hour known as Matins, although it should retain the character of nocturnal praise when celebrated in choir, shall be adapted so that it may be recited at any hour of the day; it shall be made up of fewer psalms and longer readings.
- d) The hour of Prime is to be suppressed.
- e) In choir the hours of Terce, Sext, and None are to be observed. But outside choir it will be lawful to select any one of these three, according to the respective time of the day.

90. The divine office, because it is the public prayer of the Church, is a source of piety, and nourishment for personal prayer. And therefore priests and all others who take part in the divine office are earnestly exhorted in the Lord to attune their minds to their voices when praying it. The better to achieve this, let them take steps to improve their understanding of the liturgy and of the bible, especially of the psalms.

In revising the Roman office, its ancient and venerable treasures are to be so adapted that all those to whom they are handed on may more extensively and easily draw profit from them.

91. So that it may really be possible in practice to observe the course of the hours proposed in Art. 89, the psalms are no longer to be distributed throughout one week, but through some longer period of time.

The work of revising the Psalter, already happily begun, is to be finished as soon as possible, and is to take into account the style of Christian Latin, the liturgical use of psalms, also when sung, and the entire tradition of the Latin Church.

92. As regards the readings, the following shall be observed:

- a) Readings from sacred scripture shall be arranged so that the riches of God's word may be easily accessible in more abundant measure.
- b) Readings excerpted from the works of the fathers, doctors, and ecclesiastical writers shall be better selected.
- c) The accounts of martyrdom or the lives of the saints are to accord with the facts of history.

93. To whatever extent may seem desirable, the hymns are to be restored to their original form, and whatever smacks of mythology or ill accords with Christian piety is to be removed or changed. Also, as occasion may arise, let other selections from the treasury of hymns be incorporated.

94. That the day may be truly sanctified, and that the hours themselves may be recited with spiritual advantage, it is best that each of them be prayed at a time, which most closely corresponds with its true canonical time.

95. Communities obliged to choral office are bound to celebrate the office in choir every day in addition to the conventual Mass. In particular:

- a) Orders of canons, of monks and of nuns, and of other regulars bound by law or constitutions to choral office must celebrate the entire office.
- b) Cathedral or collegiate chapters are bound to recite those parts of the office imposed on them by general or particular law.
- c) All members of the above communities who are in major orders or who are solemnly professed, except for lay brothers, are bound to recite individually those canonical hours, which they do not pray in choir.

96. Clerics not bound to office in choir, if they are in major orders, are bound to pray the entire office every day, either in common or individually, as laid down in Art. 89.

97. Appropriate instances are to be defined by the rubrics in which a liturgical service may be substituted for the divine office.

In particular cases, and for a just reason, ordinaries can dispense their subjects wholly or in part from the obligation of reciting the divine office, or may commute the obligation.

98. Members of any institute dedicated to acquiring perfection who, according to their constitutions, are to recite any parts of the divine office are thereby performing the public prayer

of the Church. They too perform the public prayer of the Church who, in virtue of their constitutions, recite any short office, provided this is drawn up after the pattern of the divine office and is duly approved.

99. Since the divine office is the voice of the Church, that is of the whole mystical body publicly praising God, those clerics who are not obliged to office in choir, especially priests who live together or who assemble for any purpose, are urged to pray at least some part of the divine office in common.

All who pray the divine office, whether in choir or in common, should fulfill the task entrusted to them as perfectly as possible: this refers not only to the internal devotion of their minds but also to their external manner of celebration. It is, moreover, fitting that the office, both in choir and in common, be sung when possible.

100. Pastors of souls should see to it that the chief hours, especially Vespers, are celebrated in common in church on Sundays and the more solemn feasts. And the laity, too, are encouraged to recite the divine office, either with the priests, or among themselves, or even individually.

101. In accordance with the centuries-old tradition of the Latin rite, the Latin language is to be retained by clerics in the divine office. But in individual cases the ordinary has the power of granting the use of a vernacular translation to those clerics for whom the use of Latin constitutes a grave obstacle to their praying the office properly. The vernacular version, however, must be one that is drawn up according to the provision of Art. 36.

102. The competent superior has the power to grant the use of the vernacular in the celebration of the divine office, even in choir, to nuns and to members of institutes dedicated to acquiring perfection, both men who are not clerics and women. The version, however, must be one that is approved.

103. Any cleric bound to the divine office fulfills his obligation if he prays the office in the vernacular together with a group of the faithful or with those mentioned in 52 above provided that the text of the translation is approved.

Additional Reading List

Dominicana

- Ch 11 (Liturgy of the Hours and the Rosary)

St. Dominic

- Ch 2-3

Further Information

Online Liturgy of the Hours can be found at ibreviary.org and divineoffice.org. Look for lauds (morning prayer), vespers (evening prayer), and compline (night prayer).

Questions

1. Considering the readings, what are some challenges in living community life that you think our chapter might face this year?
2. Share a solution to one of these challenges?
3. What is your opinion about the first full paragraph on page 3 of this module, starting with: "But a sense of community means ..."
4. How does praying The Divine Office lend itself to building community in our Chapter? How does praying The De Profundis lend itself to building community in our Chapter?