



**The Way of the Dominican Preacher: Go and Do Likewise!
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“DOMINICAN PREACHING TODAY: A RENEWED MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION”

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Video at www.ai.edu/goanddo

*As the Church is called to a renewal of her mission of evangelization,
what are and could be the specific answers from the Order of Preachers?*

1/ Go and do likewise (Lk 10:37)

As part of my contribution to this colloquium, I would like to be guided by the quotation that serves as its theme, “Go and do likewise.”

The reality of being sent is an essential element of our Dominican preaching. In the Gospel of St. Luke, this command of Jesus, “Go and do likewise” follows both the appointment of the seventy-two who are sent to every town and place that Our Lord intended to visit and the story of the Good Samaritan. The phrase itself is placed between two central teachings of Christ. The first which introduces the story of the Good Samaritan, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your strength, and your neighbor as yourself.” and the second which concludes the story of the busy Martha who protested that her sister Mary sat quietly at the feet of Jesus, “One thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better portion and it will not be taken from her.”

In a certain way, this contextualization of the phrase, “Go and do likewise,” helps us to understand an essential element of our vocation in the Order of Preachers, one which recent General Chapters of the brothers have continually insisted upon. These chapters have emphasized that our preaching must rely upon the synergy that exists between our life and our mission. It is insufficient to say that we as preachers of the Gospel have to choose between the two poles of life and mission, or that we have to do a kind of “balancing-act” like acrobats. Rather these chapters make clear that there is only a single movement in the being and purpose of a preacher, a unique orientation in the commitment of his or her life. “To speak about God or to God” said the witnesses of Dominic. In Spanish, “*Hablar con Dios de los demas, y a los demas, hablar de Dios.*” Why would St. Dominic have spoken in this way, except for the fact that preaching is based upon the grace of charity, where mercy and truth are joined together?

There are those, especially the poor, who can seem to lead us away from our path and at the same time open for us the real path on which we must walk. It is they who lead us to better grasp the force of God’s mercy, when we try to stammer with our human words and gestures to express it,



and by expressing it, to offer this compassion in our turn. It is the immediate response of the Samaritan, who does not hesitate in allowing himself to be led from his path and, even more, goes immediately to involve others in helping him care for the injured man he finds abandoned along the road. His deeply-felt response is shaped and brought forward by the compassion which touches him, which is demanded of him, a response stronger than all the rules and customs that could have led him to ignore the wounded traveler. For Dominic this compassion for the other—or rather with the other, with the poor, with sinners, with those on the fringe—is the key for understanding the link between the two loves that Jesus emphasizes, the love of God and the love of neighbor. From our contemplating the love of God, let the Spirit configure in ourselves the compassion of God for the world, which takes visible shape in the person of the “Son of Man” sent into the world so that the world may have life in abundance and be saved. Now let us remember Mary, the sister of Martha—her love and compassion for the Lord was the same as that which led Dominic to learn in the book of charity his task as a preacher. Meditating at the foot of the Cross, Dominic experienced compassion for the Son who, in his compassion for the world, gave his own life. The compassion of Christ also will be lived by Catherine of Siena, and so many others with her. The compassion of Christ and our compassion with Christ.

“Go and do likewise.” It is clear that it is not about simply a command to do something, a kind of job description, nor a functionalist understanding of the work of evangelization. If we view the Samaritan as a kind of figure for Christ, this invitation “to go and do likewise” provides directions for receiving the grace of “con-figuration” to Christ.

2/This configuration in compassion can be described as a configuration to Christ the Preacher

Let us stay a little longer with the Gospel of Saint Luke. I know that our tradition says that Dominic always used to carry with him, not the Gospel of Luke, but the Gospel of Matthew and the letters of Paul. However, over the course of my “pilgrimage” in the Order, in meeting our brothers and our communities, I have come increasingly to the belief that at the heart of Dominic’s intuition is the following passage from Luke, one that is essential to our understanding of what it means to evangelize. “After this Jesus journeyed through towns and villages proclaiming the good news of the reign of God. The Twelve accompanied him and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities” (Luke 8:1-2).

Why does this passage seem so important to me? It is because in this time when there is an urgent call for a renewal of evangelization in the Church, this text allows us to grasp what it means for the Church to become a preaching Church. In referring to Luke’s Gospel—in which, we know, the word “evangelization” is usual—I would like to emphasize some points which shed light especially on Dominican preaching. First, it involves the movement of itinerancy which is so important in the dynamic of our preaching. “Going from one town and village to another” is a summons for everyone who follows Jesus, and then will be called to “go to the other towns” (Luke 4:43). We follow Jesus as an itinerant, not simply by going places but by being constantly born anew in our accompaniment of Jesus the Preacher, a community which is always being founded to the extent that it accompanies the Lord. Second, our Dominican preaching is the work of a truly diverse community that accompanies Jesus, those whom he has called, those whom he has freed, those who wish to serve by him by their ability to do what is good. As a community we gradually emerge and are formed into a veritable family of preaching, one where together we are given the challenge to learn what it means “to evangelize” so that together we may become what we have been called to be. Third, Dominican preaching calls for a community whose very identity is intrinsically linked to the content of what it proclaims: the Good News of the Kingdom must be proclaimed



(evangelized), and as in the parable of the mustard seed, it spreads out and expands, as does the community that preaches (compare Luke 9:6). This community finds an echo in the announcement of the Angel to Mary and the shepherds (Luke 1:19; 2:10). It takes up the announcement of the Precursor, John the Baptist, who points to the One who is coming (Luke 3:18; 16:16), John who so often is identified with Dominic. Formed in the very image of Jesus the Preacher (Luke 20:1), this community proclaims that the words of the prophets have now been fulfilled (Luke 7:22). Always, without ceasing, it reaches out to those who have not heard the good news (Luke 4:18).

This configuration to Jesus the preacher places the community of preachers at the heart of the economy of evangelization. “In this way it was suitable, that by living intimately with human beings, he inspired in all the confidence to go to him,” wrote St. Thomas Aquinas in the section of the Summa on the Life of Christ (ST III, q 40, a. 1, resp. 3). This text finds an echo in a sermon of Blessed Jean-Joseph Lataste who said: “Such was St. Dominic. It was this ardent love which made him a saint and which led him to make contemplation the basis of the Order of Preachers, which in his genius he was planning. He wanted to found an Order that would be a friend of God, or rather a lover of God, therefore, one that would be essentially contemplative. At the same time by an alliance with what was deemed up to then impossible, he consecrated his contemplative Order to a most active apostolate” (Sermon 189). Friends of God, friends to all human beings, brothers and sisters.

As often in the Gospel of Luke, the larger narrative context gives the sense to a particular text. Certainly it is the case for this passage where the first community of preaching is described. This account of evangelization is immediately followed by the parable of the seed (which has to be connected to the mission of the seventy-two and the image evoked there of the rich harvest for which laborers must be sent). The Word, which like the light and revelation of truth cannot be kept hidden, is what constitutes the fabric of the true family of Jesus, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and act upon it” (Luke 8:21).

The narrative context also allows us to propose an interpretation of what it means to be configured to Christ the preacher. Inspired by the way Jesus evangelized, he who continues to go before us and completes what we do, the mission of a community of preachers arises. In as much as it is a servant of the mystery of the covenant, it seeks to be of service to the broader community, to make still larger the “true family of Jesus”. In this way the dream of Jane of Aza takes concrete form when she sees her son support and build the Church. Moreover, one could say that in the Church, the community of preachers calls to mind an essential dimension of the Church’s life: the Church becomes itself by preaching. When we say that the common life is an essential part of our preaching, it is not so much about seeing it as a moral example, but rather about recognizing that our shared life opens for us a path to become who we are. We all too often have a functionalist approach to our communities (I recall one brother who referred to our communities as aircraft carriers) where each can “go preach,” making us people who would be brothers so that we can go preach. I think the truth of the matter is quite the opposite. We have to say that preachers are brothers, not so that they can go preach, but precisely because they do preach.

In this same perspective, we can understand more the reality of diversity and complementarity which are fundamental for a “family of preachers”: diversity is essential to preaching because it echoes the first community of preaching in the Gospel. Is not the richness of this diversity particularly notable in our own time in the experience of the *Lectio Divina* that has been taking place during this Jubilee of the Order? At the heart of our Church as family, which becomes what it is by preaching, the Order is a kind of “little family” that brings to mind in an evangelical and apostolic way our identity, even as we ceaselessly become even more who we are.



It is helpful therefore to speak about Dominican preaching less as an “activity” or a “function” and more as an experience of a community “arising from the life” of preaching, a community born from to this preaching to what it is committed.

3/Community of preaching

Moreover, at this moment when the Church is called to a renewal of its mission of evangelization, there is the question of how we as an Order of Preachers can and should respond, I would like to propose the following answer. Dominican preaching is not an activity that can be described in terms of its “function”. Rather, it is the life of a community that is presented to its members as a veritable “school of the evangelical and apostolic life”. It is this view that I would like to now illustrate, based upon the numerous ways that brothers and sisters have responded to the specific challenges that they encounter in their diverse cultures.

I will try as well to be faithful to the spirit that was present at the time of our foundation, when people liked to talk about our communities as “holy preachings”. It is certainly not about making preaching something sacred in itself, but rather like the idea of holy obedience, emphasizing that preaching always is preceded, carried out and accomplished by grace, which alone gives strength to the fabric of our brotherhood and sisterhood, to the community that preaches as well as to the community that receives the announcement of the good news of the arrival of God’s mercy. Preacher of grace, that is to say, preacher of the Gospel of fraternal communion.

What would be the principle characteristics of such a community of preaching?

A Community of Encounter

We can illustrate the first characteristic by calling to mind some of the great moments in the history of the Order. Being sent to study, to preach, and to found convents, indicates well that at the beginning of the Order, Dominic had the intuition that the first communities were going to be established by the process of encounter. This was the dynamic of the initial expansion in Europe, which constantly reminds us of the missionary fire that underlies the tradition of our Order. Last summer I made a pilgrimage in the footsteps of Dominic with the young student brothers and sisters from around the world. I was particularly moved to see how much the memory of this first expansion that made the Order a fraternal communion arising from diversity also animated them. Certainly, this movement was about enlarging the territory for proclaiming the Word of life, up to the ends of the known world, in order to reach the farthest peoples, of which the Cumans were the symbol for Dominic. But it was also about extending the communion of fraternity, being nourished by the encounter with different human and cultural realities. And because diversity is not always so easy to integrate into unity, as the liturgical book, known as the “Prototype” suggests (whatever may be the uncertainties, we leave to the liturgists and historians to resolve), it seems to me magnificent, that the unity of the Order was to be founded upon contemplation and intercession. In a joint compassion for the world and for the Savior of the world that has been learned in the book of charity!

When later the brothers, the laity, and the nuns, joined next by the apostolic sisters, settled in the new worlds of America and Asia, it was still this reality of communities of encounter that marked their evangelization. In this, the preaching of Montesinos and his brothers serves as the paradigm. Their community was in some way the place or locus for encountering the Word of God, both for the colonists whom they accompanied in their faith as brothers, and for the Indians whom they met and whose dignity as children of God they wanted to make heard and recognized. This encounter opened paths for communion, and preaching became the proclamation of the good news that this communion to which all people were called was now being accomplished. It is this that our



sisters and brothers continue to speak to us when they bring their concern for evangelizing native people to the heart of the Order.

It seems to me that there is an analogous dynamic which has guided other missionary experiences, like the magnificent work of evangelization that so many apostolic sisters undertake in inner cities throughout the world, or those brothers who got involved in the worker priests movement, or those women and men who have pitched their tents where there are efforts to form ecclesial base communities. Always for them, the Church is not first an existing community in which one tries to make new members, it is itself a house of the “Word”, whose breadth and scope one tries constantly to extend, knowing perfectly and desiring with all one’s heart, that that this broadening through encounter with the other is going to transform one’s own tent. What’s more, there is the intuition that Pope Benedict XVI expressed one day when he was speaking of a “new continent” that is the digital world, new territory for encounter, where the Church can learn and use a new language, serve new human realities, and dialogue in new social networks—in brief, learn to hope for a new way of achieving human communion!

At the service of the conversation about God

A second characteristic of communities of preaching is that the encounter is foundational for a community to be a “conversation”, a conversation that places itself at the service of God’s conversation with humanity. Encounter transforms a community and makes of it, in some way, an experience of inculturation of the Gospel. Inculturation is not a way of being attentive to “other cultures” starting from what we easily thought that we already possessed. Inculturation is rather the experience of becoming the Church itself, as a community of faith transformed by the encounters which make it up. In any case, it is the interpretation that I offer about the initial intuition of Dominic—to found convents, one had to go study and preach. Two ways of serving the conversation of God with humanity.

One has to go evangelize with the firm belief that it is about the experience of the “grace of preaching”, of the encounter between the preacher’s understanding of the Word of life and the mystery of the grace of the harvest to which he is sent. Our communities must not be places where the formalism of regular life tries to find itself balanced with apostolic activism. No, our communities must be, properly speaking, contemplative realities. By this I mean, fraternal communions that grow in wisdom and in the “simplicity of the children of God,” to the extent that they are nourished by the marvelous work of the grace of the Word, in the world and in the heart of humanity. That is why going to preach is about first going to listen: listening to how grace makes the harvest mature, listening to our brothers and sisters express their experience and excitement of the encounter, listening how others hear, receive, and understand the Word.

Listening to the mystery of faith at work among us and in the hearts of the women and men whom we are sent to meet. Our communities are sometimes very prudish when it comes to faith, or very formal. But, as we well know, preaching is born out of the disruption of a faith that is felt and encountered, a disruption that seizes one’s entire life and transforms it, that makes it burn with the zeal to evangelize. We have to go evangelize, to return bearing the fruit of these disruptions even as we nourish our brothers and sisters, in a way that the community of preaching begins to be truly a school of grace, where the grace of Word is at work in the heart of the world.

But we must also go and study. To go, this means already leaving behind our well established certainties about God, what we know of him, what we believe we can say reasonably about him, what we know about the history of doctrine concerning the things of God. All of this is essential, without a doubt. But what the heart and reason know together about faith finds its strength, less in an assurance that protects itself from every confrontation, and more in the boldness of dialogue with



other kinds of knowledge, other kinds of wisdom and other religious beliefs through which we seek an ultimate truth of the world that we receive by sharing together, or even by other systems of knowing by which we learn to live, to master and to transform the realities of the world. Study, it is said in the Order, is one of our main observances, in the sense that it is a form of asceticism. Asceticism is a way for us to seek perfection, holiness, and conformity to the ultimate truth that we confess in Christianity, to enter into the mystery of the Word. “Consequently, the brothers should learn to recognize the spirit working in the midst of God’s people, and to discern the treasures hidden in the various forms of human culture, by which human nature is more fully manifested and new paths to truth (*ad veritatem*) are opened” (LCO 99 § II). As such, study is an integral part of the mission, not because it is something that involves our “doing” something, but because this asceticism of study fosters and enlivens our zeal to seek the truth. This truth that requires careful and patient listening to the world, seeking to perceive its aspirations and longings, to understand its beliefs and indifference. It is a way of being that can make my existence be a « mission », to use an expression of Pope Francis.

In search of the Kingdom

A third characteristic of Dominican preaching is that it is a community of preaching in search of the Kingdom. What strikes me very often, during my visits to the communities of the Order, is to see how fruitful the anxiety for the Kingdom can be. The “joy of evangelization” arises from two strong desires that we have, for friendship and for preaching. It comes from the heart that wants to love in order that it may know, and from the mind that wants to know and understand in order that it may love. It seems to me that each of these two threads have at their heart the passion to see accomplished what remains yet unfinished. There are, unfortunately, some communities of preaching that remain sad, because everything is already too established, complete, secure. They are sad, because nothing of the world, nothing of feeling or experience or study, nothing of the preaching of the brothers or sisters succeeds in surprising them or in disrupting their way of seeing the world. But, thank God, there are many other communities where they rejoice in these surprises and disruptions. Where, in fact, each is really recognized by all the others as a « watchman » for his own vocation, to the extent that he accepts, with gratitude, that others make him discover what is incomplete or lacking in his response to his vocation.

I would like to mention here a few ways in which another can in some way affect “my” vocation.

It is first by the chaos caused to “my” world by compassion. Compassion felt during my own encounters with the other. But also, especially, the compassion of the brother or the sister who shares with me their experiences and feelings for a world so vulnerable, injured, mistreated, exploited, made dependent. Actually, our communities can only begin to truly preach when they allow themselves to reach this vast “brotherhood of the shell-shocked” (cf. J. Patocka), not to do something for them, but to become what we are out of our friendship with them. When this experience of the world is truly felt and shared together, it becomes the opportunity for each of us to ground our preaching in the world in a way that is common with what we shares with our community. And for all of us, with all of the Order. How to succeed in carrying out the preaching of the Order, in every place, never indifferent to the experiences of our brothers and sisters around the world? How to become their echo? How to become their brothers and sisters?

It is again by the profound disruption which happens when, meeting a community of faith, we begin to dare to hope that the world will be built, one day, just like this. That the Church will be built from encounter, from listening, from friendship with the “living flesh of Christ”, as Pope Francis said at the General Chapter of Bologna. Here, I would like to express my strong belief that



the fundamental intuition of Dominic was brought about by a certain “mystique of the Church”, the ecclesial communion being a kind of “horizon of hope” against which all of his anxiety for the poor, for sinners, for those on the margins was placed. How an “evangelizing” community would be able to be leaven for this communion, a rallying point for the Church to leave behind the obstacles and tensions of the moment, in order to be placed at the service of the world as a source of communion? How it might learn to travel the road to Emmaus, without giving in to the temptations of power, strength, or compromise with factions that divide and oppose? Our communities of preaching will be genuine schools of life to the extent that they teach us how “to desire that the fire may be finally lit” in this world. That is to say that the Gospel may be in a living conversation with the different worlds of the present, with cultures and religions, with various kinds of knowledge and new types of creativity. And, still more, that it may promote the conversation between these worlds that are so easily indifferent to each other. Our communities of preaching must be able to engender in us this desire to go constantly beyond the borders of our “own worlds”, in order to contribute, according to our gifts, to the enlarging, to the broadening of the tent of promise, accomplished mysteriously in the “living flesh of Christ” which is humanity itself.

Dominic knew how to form gradually a community of preaching by responding to the needs of his world and of the Church in his time, as well as by welcoming the generosity and initiative of the women and men who offered to join him. This community therefore became what we could call today a “Dominican constellation” within which collaboration, complementarity, and mutual esteem and recognition allow us to gradually build a “family”. I use the expression “constellation” to evoke the image of the star, so much associated with Dominic. This family makes known, within the Church, what the Church is called to become. Clearly, the Dominican Family is not established once and for all. But all of us are called to know that we have to become a family by preaching the Gospel, so that we could give to the Church the desire to do the same. To become a family given to the world, by preaching the Gospel. By preaching. That is to say by daring human words, having the boldness of human gestures that seek to listen and to make heard a Word of communion. By daring to desire to become a “parable of communion”, a word which announces peace and, by saying it, gives it. And then, by stepping aside, so that the Word may address every person, so that each may hear the Good News of the coming of the Kingdom.

Go then and do likewise!