

## Ministry of Preaching

### (ACG Rome 2010)

#### **Preaching and the Order's identifying sign**

**50.** There are many Dominican symbols: the habit, the shield, the dog with the torch at the feet of St. Dominic. There is only one identifying sign, a type of genetic code if you will, for the members of the Order and the Dominican family; that is the preaching for the salvation of humanity (Fundamental Constitution V), the ministry of the Word (*officium verbi*), the mission of evangelization. The General Chapter, celebrated in Rome wished to remind the entire Dominican family, nuns, friars, apostolic sisters, and Dominican laity, of this identifying sign as we approach the Jubilee Year of 2016. The nuns, specifically dedicated to prayer, participate in the ministry of preaching, listening to the Word, celebrating it and proclaiming the Gospel through the example of their lives. Equally, the co-operator brothers join in the preaching through their faithful living out of their Profession in the Order.

The Fourth Lateran Council lamented, “no one is giving the bread of the Word to the faithful.” Dominic understood that herein lay the root of the problems of the Church in his time. He then decided that this would be his mission and that of his followers. This was a prophetic intuition because the preaching of the Good News is the beginning of the process that leads to faith, to the conversion of a life that is lived centered in the Gospel, the building up of the Christian community, the humanizing of life in the style of Jesus.

This was the specific mission of the Order in a Church that was also in need of evangelization and in a world filled with opportunities but also with foolishness and much suffering. The importance of our mission demands that we make good use of the Word and of words. (In the prayers for preachers in the old Dominican Missal, the first prayer was to ask for the grace of preaching, the second was to ask for an elegant use of speech.)

There are many varieties of preaching in the Dominican tradition, the homily and teaching, the oral and written word, artistic expression, virtual communication, interpersonal dialogue, living testimony, etc. This is to understand that preaching is not reduced to the sermon or homily. Humbert of Romans spoke of “preaching outside of the preaching.” In stating this, however, we wish to remember that the explicit announcing of the Gospel should be the fundamental aspiration in all of the varieties of preaching. In all of the apostolic ministries of the Order we ought to arrive at this explicit proclamation of the Gospel. This necessitates that the preacher himself believes in the Gospel, as did Mary, “the hearer of the Word.” It also requires that we be open to dialogue and to sharing the Word with others.

#### **Preaching and Dominican life**

**51.** Preaching is not simply a function to be performed, a work or a mission; for the Dominican family preaching is a way of life, a style of life. It is living in imitation of the apostles that Dominic wanted for both himself and his followers. Our commitment

as Dominicans is not only to preach, but also to live a life which is in itself a preaching, a way of life which preaches.

Dominic conceived his foundation as a preaching project. He presented this *propositum vitae* to both Popes Innocent III and Honorius III for their approval. This project was presented in such a way that all of the elements of Dominican life would be inspired by the ministry of the Word and oriented in that direction.

This inspiration permits us to speak of Dominican prayer and liturgy, Dominican contemplation and study, Dominican regular observance and the Dominican Profession of the Evangelical Counsels. Preaching forms the whole of our lives. This explains the close-knit relationship between the vitality of Dominican life and the vitality of the ministry of the Word in the Order. When the evangelical mission is living, all of the elements of our life are also vibrant: prayer, contemplation, study, communitarian dialogue and fraternal life; when all of these elements are vibrant, so too is the evangelical mission.

### **Preaching and the Community**

**52.** Because the ministry of preaching is so important, Dominic entrusted it to a community. 1) It is the community that guarantees the permanence and continuity of preaching, not leaving it to the whims of certain individuals. 2) It is the community that supports those brothers and sisters in their apostolic works and initiatives, especially in those times when they are tired, in low spirits and tempted to abandon their work. 3) It is the community that bolsters the truth and the transforming power of the Gospel that is preached through its evangelical life (prayer, poverty, sharing of goods, fraternal life, and solidarity with the poor and victims...). 4) It is the community that helps each one to be mutually attentive to the cries of humanity.

In this respect, the members of the Dominican community are morally obliged to live a manner that discredits neither the Gospel nor our preaching ministry. In fact, in the earliest days of the Order, visitators were asked to remove from the preaching ministry those brothers whose conduct did not live up to the Gospel that was preached. The “Hispaniola” community and the sermon of Antón de Montesinos, whose 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary we are celebrating, is an excellent example of this essential relation between the community and preaching. This prophetic force of Dominican preaching has not always been realized with the same evangelical vigour.

Our preaching, arising from a fraternal pluralistic community in dialogue with itself, should be a healthy sign in a Church and society affected by constant divisions, confrontations and polarization.

### **Preaching and Dominican formation**

**53.** Humbert of Romans said repeatedly “The only teacher of the preacher is the Holy Spirit.” However, a preacher is not born, but made. Precisely the fundamental

work of Dominican formation is “to form a Dominican preacher.” For this reason, zeal for preaching should already be present from the beginning of the discernment of a vocation. Naturally, vocational motivations are not clearly defined at the beginning. They go through many phases throughout life. However if zeal for preaching is not apparent already in the initial formation of the candidate, one could question his vocational option for the Order of Preachers. Call to mind that at the beginning of the Order the best and most efficacious vocational promotion came through the preaching of the brothers. The preaching in the Dominican churches attracted the largest number of new candidates. The examples of Jordan of Saxony and Reginald of Orleans remain paradigmatic.

Preaching should be the criteria, reference and purpose throughout the period of initial formation and in programs of permanent formation. The challenges of formation differ enormously in the diverse entities of the Order given the diverse cultural, social, political and economic conditions of the peoples and continents. This must be taken into account in the formation of Dominican preachers. However, we are conscious that we are forming Dominicans for an international mission, for the universal Church and for a globalized world. Despite feeling at ease first in Osma, then Fanjeaux and then in Toulouse, Dominic did not hesitate in his efforts to gain the approval for a new Order of Preachers which would span dioceses and indeed the world. Dominican preaching is for the Church (*In medio Ecclesiae*). Dominic did not want the preaching to be limited to a diocese, a monastery or a canonical cloister. He wanted it to be universal.

### **Preaching and study**

**54.** As with the other elements of Dominican life, study has had an essentially apostolic character from the very beginning of the Order. Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Catherine of Siena, Francisco de Vitoria, Bartolomeo de las Casas are good examples of those who studied in the context of listening to the clamour of the world in their passionate search for truth. Their contact with suffering humanity allowed them to break the barriers of narrow thought.

The human heart is desirous of God. There is a certain freedom to be found in the search for truth. The one who contemplates desires to give the fruits of his contemplation. In this sense, study is not simply an academic exercise in dialectics or rhetoric, neither is it an end in itself, destined purely for the accumulation of erudition and knowledge. Dominican study is directed toward preaching. The “House of Studies” is also the “House of Preaching.”

The man of the Gospel (**vir evangelicus**) that Dominic had clearly in mind for himself and his brothers recognized that the purpose of study was intended to foster the preaching. The scope of his studies was limitless. Dominic listened and scrutinized with faith the Word of God. He was attentive to the guidance of the Church as well as paying special attention to the nascent cultures of his times. In relation to these three arenas, study gives us the knowledge of scripture, it reinforces contemplation which makes us friends of God and awakens our concerns for all of the disputed questions which challenge us today, questions about justice, peace, human rights, the suffering of

the poor, the excluded, for victims, etc. As a result, study and the search for truth become an exercise in mercy and compassion.

Saint Dominic and the first friars studied in order to enter into contact, debate and dialogue with the heretics using as a base the philosophical arguments of their time. Study continues to be necessary in our own time in the Order, not only for teaching but also and above all for the ministry of evangelization, to be able to enter into dialogue with current culture. Given that the world is the field in which the Word of God is sown (Mt 13:18), our study should be carried out in dialogue with contemporary culture, with other religions, and always with attention to the needs of the poorest and excluded members of society. We cannot be partners and evangelizers today without a careful study of the world as it is.

As the Commission on Preaching told us in their letter to the Order in 2008, we have to listen to the world before we can preach. Probably St. Vincent Ferrer wanted to say the same thing when he spoke of “preaching after being silent.” We live in a complex world in which the sources of meaning are drying up. For this reason, the preacher must listen attentively to the cultures of our world to be able to discern the signs of the times.

Today human beings are becoming more and more preoccupied about the future. In spite of the advances taking place in science and technology and their subsequent contributions to the economy and overall progress, the human family is unable to achieve a comprehensive development. Massive poverty, unjust inequalities, exclusions and discrimination, bloody conflicts, a multiplication of innocent victims, ecological tragedies, major bioethical questions continue to plague our modern society. The economic crisis has affected even rich countries, highlighting the weakness of the global economic system. Cultures have become more secularized with the transcendent aspect of people’s lives being neglected, especially the young who risk losing the meaning of life. Our consumer materialistic society seeks pleasure while lacking in sense; it is abundant in resources while lacking in purpose and meaning. It is political in orientation while missing a sense of the mystical. This societal model unfortunately serves as the model communicated to other societies. Our evangelization is a call to expose these idolatries.

However, there are also hopeful signs of the times: a growing sensitivity to ecological and economic problems, the commitment of many people to the causes of justice and peace, human rights, and a spirit of solidarity. There are strong volunteer movements as well as a resurgence of a desire for mysticism, religious experience, a spirit of dialogue between cultures and religions as well as a strengthening of a desire for democratic ideals. All of these are signs that lead to hope and help people trust again in the culture of life. These signs encourage us to continue making of our Dominican preaching, a “grace filled moment” (*predicator gratiae*).

Dominican study must not ignore the important questions and debates in our contemporary society. In the face of these situations, the Order has to meet the

challenge of renewing its zeal for preaching with vigour and confidence in the Gospel message of hope. For this to happen we must return courageously to our apostolic priorities.

### **Preaching and the following of Jesus**

**55.** Just as Jesus was an itinerant preacher so too Dominic followed Jesus in this same style of life. Dominic left Osma and in the face of the new realities he encountered. He decided not to return to Osma but instead to seek new responses. This engaged him in a long personal journey that led to the founding of the Order of Preachers. This new foundation was to have as its project preaching which arose from the community. It was absolutely essential for Dominic that the brothers give living testimony to the Gospel in their lives, faithfully following Jesus (*sequela Christi*). This evangelical style of life that Dominic adopted for himself and his followers would be in continuity with the usual style of life in the Church as practiced in his day. Through this evangelical life, Dominic aligned himself with the little ones and the poor who are the first recipients of the Gospel.

Dominic observed that those preachers who had the capacity to live the evangelical life convinced and moved the faithful. He decided to enter into his preaching ministry with the credential of living a life in imitation of the apostles. Imitating and following Christ he proclaimed the Gospel with grace-filled words full of mercy and compassion. The first Dominican community in the Americas lived faithfully this model of itinerant preaching, preaching from the depths of their own evangelical life.

To preach effectively requires that one cultivate all of the elements that are essential in following Jesus. The constituent elements of our common life, such as prayer, study, community life, the living out of the evangelical counsels, regular observance—correctly balanced—are vital and indispensable in order to help us remain faithful and fruitful in our ministry of preaching.

Humbert of Romans said that preaching is not the same thing as creating a sermon. A sermon can be committed to memory and repeated. It can also be prepared from good biblical theology. However, preaching is only possible when done from a foundation of faith, from the experience of a believer, from a believer's perspective of reality. So in order to be a preacher one is required to live one's life in the style of Jesus—a true *sequela Christi*—living all of the elements that motivate and nourish faith and contemplation.

### **Preaching and government**

**56.** The ministry of preaching is the specific purpose of our Order, our life and our mission. It is also the purpose of our government and of the exercise of authority and obedience. Apostolic criteria are foundational in the exercise of government, when it comes to encouraging both brothers and communities in the setting of their priorities, even the opening and closing of missions. Preaching should also be the definitive

motive and criterion in the performance of the mission. Similarly, obedience in the Order is above all obedience to the mission entrusted to us by the community. We promised this obedience when we made Profession in the Order of Preachers.

When the exercise of authority and government is neglected, Dominican life and mission are weakened. Responsible government is accountable to the preaching mission. However, in a culture which prizes autonomy and democracy we must rethink and find new means of exercising authority and obedience. The exercise of authority and the practice of obedience in Dominican life, since the time of Dominic, are to be seen in the light of community dialogue. This is the foundation of the law of the Order that Dominic wanted for his followers.

Since the time of St. Dominic, the brethren have lived in convents or houses, have organized themselves into Provinces and have elected a Master as a sign and instrument of the unity of the Order (LCO 396). These three institutions have a special significance and a firm foundation in order to sustain common life and the mission of preaching. In view of the demands and changing circumstances of the mission, we consider it necessary to review the structures that sustain our apostolate: to simplify and clarify them and to define the process of government.

### **Preaching and economic affairs**

**57.** Dominic de Guzman left us the legacy of poverty and anathematized any brother who defiled the virtue of evangelical poverty. It was not a moral concern that inspired this word of St. Dominic; rather it arose from his zeal for preaching. Evangelical poverty was and still is the principle credential of the Order in its evangelical ministry. However, realism tells us that our life, our formation, our mission, our institutions need money in order to be sustained. This requires that we think and rethink the challenge to evangelical poverty. We are obliged to seek new and meaningful forms of poverty. Fundraising today has become a new form of mendicancy.

The memory of our origins can be helpful in our search. “All they had, they held in common” (Acts 4:32). In founding the Order of Preachers Dominic wished to renew the ideal of apostolic life. He designed this life as a model of preaching, in which not only the Word, but also the witness of personal and common apostolic life were the means of preaching. An essential element of this witness was the common holding of goods and services, a common economy, and a sharing of all things: talents, cultural heritage, human and material resources, all in the function of advancing the preaching mission. Everything was held in common in order that a witness is given to the world of a new humanity intended by the Father and fulfilled in Christ by the Spirit.

Today we are called to manage our financial affairs keeping in mind our commitment to evangelical poverty. We must constantly re-examine our understanding of poverty and our practices regarding the use of material and cultural goods. Today new forms of mendicancy and sharing of goods are to be examined so that we do not run the risk of the privatization of our religious life. We are invited to adopt new habits

of sobriety and austerity in a world that is paradoxically filled with shameful waste and inhuman poverty. The growing awareness that the planet's resources are limited has a special significance for us Dominicans in the way we vow poverty and live religious life. In this context, we are called to be witnesses to the Gospel, which liberates us from so many false idols, and invites us to make good use of our material goods and our spiritual and cultural heritage. We must make use of the criteria of the Reign of God and not those of earthly kingdoms.

In our use of our material, cultural and spiritual heritage, evangelical poverty invites us to live to work like most people and to cultivate our own personal habits of sobriety and austerity. We are to share our goods without giving a place to our private finances, to put all of our resources in solidarity with the excluded and the impoverished, to put all our human and financial resources at the service of the preaching.

### **Profesion, Constitutions and our lives**

58. The Book of Constitutions represents the best of Dominican life. It is not an instrument disconnected from our own lives. It both expresses the heart of Dominican life and mission as well as mediates this life and our mission. The Book of Constitutions clearly expresses our vocation as preachers of truth, grace and mercy, following in the footsteps of Dominic. This General Chapter wishes to emphasize certain criteria designed to promote the full realization of our life and mission in the different regions of the Order and above all offer some criteria concerning the collaboration between the distinct entities of the Order and the Dominican Family.

The Constitutions, which we hold in our hands when we make Profession, designates the implications of our Profession in the Order of Preachers. We are preachers by vocation and Profession. For those who have made Profession preaching is not a simple obligation. It is our identity, our reason to be, our vocation. We preach, not as an obligation or because of an external mandate and discipline, but rather because of apostolic zeal, because we cannot, not preach. "Woe to me, if I do not preach the Gospel." (I Cor. 9:16)

In all of this, two things are at stake. First, we are called to be consistent with what we have professed. Our Profession is both a public and solemn statement that is pronounced in the name of the Church and to the world. Secondly, we are called to remain faithful to our professed mission as preachers. A life without a fulfilled mission is both empty and a failure. It is therefore important that we attend to the warning given by Humbert of Romans in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. "Some brothers never preach because they are always preparing to preach." We recall with gratitude our old and sick brothers who remain faithful to preaching through the valuable testimony of their evangelical life.

When most of our life is behind us and we look back, we realize then that our life has been genuinely Dominican if it has been centered in preaching and the apostolic life.

