

THE MISSION OF PREACHING

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As Dominicans celebrate Jubilee Year 2010, we are invited to reflect on the “Mission of Preaching.” This brings to mind a retreat I made three decades ago, directed by a priest from India. The event left an indelible mark on my mind. The director emphasized that the coming of the Spirit is constitutive of the church in mission. The Spirit comes in many different forms – as dove, as fire and wind, as whisper and hurricane. Participants were given three questions to ponder and consider daily to focus our mission and ministry engagement. The questions are these:

1. By whom are we sent?
2. To whom are we sent?
3. For what are we sent?

BY WHOM ARE WE SENT?

This question reminds us that our engagement in mission and ministry is ultimately the work of the Spirit. It re-enforces the words in Luke’s Gospel, 24:49: “Remain here in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” Our Dominican call to prayer, contemplation and study and the fruits derived from our Dominican way of life come to us as recipients of the gifts of the Spirit. Sharpening this awareness will allow us to be living witnesses to the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus in our daily lives. We will be empowered to preach the Word without fear and bring challenge and hope to the hearers in our day.

TO WHOM ARE WE SENT?

If we believe and live in the power of the Spirit, there is no area of life that is beyond the power and action of the Spirit. Jesus and Dominic addressed the heresies of their time. They wanted all people to know and experience the justice, mercy and compassion of God, especially in the midst of life’s confusions, wars, scandals, a sense of hopelessness and homelessness in both a physical and spiritual sense. They wanted people to live in right relationship to the Divine, to other people and to their environment. They also addressed people with power and influence and urged them to create systems and structures according to God’s design. We are invited to do the same in our time and place, to speak and live the full Gospel message wherever we find ourselves – in the classroom, on the pulpit, in the halls of

government, in office or factory, at board meetings or simply interacting with people in their daily lives. We can bring Gospel values into every situation in everyday life. The Gospel message is not just to comfort. It is also to challenge. We can ask ourselves “Who are the untouchables today, the despairing we need to reach out to as Jesus did? Who are the despairing in need of a word of hope and help? Who are the left out, the forgotten, the disenfranchised of this time?”

FOR WHAT ARE WE SENT?

In pulpit preaching, do we offer the full Gospel message, or do we withhold some of it or water it down to avoid conflict or loss of membership in the church? Do we urge people and ourselves to be more concerned about being morally correct and less concerned about being politically correct? We are sent to walk with the struggling poor, to listen to their call for help and empower them find their own voice and express it. Our daily reflection on the Word will disturb any sense of self-importance that may slip into our minds or disrupt our need for our own comfort and convenience. Albert Nolan, OP, once reminded participants at a meeting of Dominicans in the US that a change of lifestyle is needed to live more like the poor and be more effective preachers of the Word. We need to read the contemporary signs of the times and bring a moral perspective to issues such as Immigration, care for the earth, war and violence as a means of solving problems.

We must follow up and call on the Spirit of God to help us individually and communally to live and act the Gospel message in our time. We preach not just by our words but also by the witness of our lives. The church has told us in recent times that action for justice has been confirmed as a constitutive element of Gospel living and preaching. Then we will clearly be an Order of Preachers as Dominic had in mind. Our motto is “Veritas” which calls us to preach the truth of the Gospel and take a prophetic stance as Jesus and Dominic did. It is not enough to preach abstract truth or offer a message that pleases the majority present. We have many heresies to address: militarism, materialism, consumerism and many more. We need to be prepared through prayer, contemplation, study and community support. Then we will truly be sent in Spirit power to light the world with hope.

I believe we are living in a privileged moment, a time of breakthrough as well as breakdown. Something new is about to be born. The Spirit of God is

alive and well, operating within my life and your life, and inviting us to make secure connections with the Divine that will never let us down. Let us begin today to take up this challenge with courage, conviction and hope.