

DOES THE CHARISM OF PREACHING BELONG TO ALL DOMINICANS?

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In what way can all Dominicans be said to belong to an Order of Preachers? Does the charism of preaching belong to all Dominicans? It would seem hard to give an affirmative answer, since relatively few Dominicans preach. Among the brethren some are involved in teaching; others are involved in various kinds of administration. Most cooperator brothers are not ordained to the diaconate and therefore are limited in their opportunity to preach.

Among Dominican women the question is even more pressing. Historically few Dominican women have been allowed to preach. Teaching, hospital ministry and other social ministries have captured most of the time of Dominican women. Moreover, Canon Law has limited the involvement of women in the preaching ministry. In what sense, then can the charism of preaching be claimed by all those who have Q.P. after their names?

Vatican II has encouraged religious to return to their roots and examine the charism of their founders. Here we find the sources for a solution to our dilemma. Dominic did intend to found an order of preachers. Hence, all who claim to be members of this family of preachers must somehow be able to lay claim to his charism.

Reflecting on the life of Dominic we find that his notion of an order of preachers took many years to mature. Even before he gathered the first band of preachers he provided shelter for women whose conversion from heresy had made them unwelcome to their families and former associates. When he gathered a band of brethren around himself to be preachers his own experience of study, taught him to study along with them. His own life of personal prayer made him aware of the preacher's need for conversation with God. Years of contact with the heretical movements of southern France heightened his awareness of his audience. All of these experiences prepared Dominic for the moment when he would gather his first band of preachers. When he did so, Dominic's band of preachers incorporated all of these experiences of his own life into their lives. His followers found it necessary to study scripture, philosophy and theology in order to prepare to preach. Not every companion of Dominic did each and every one of these tasks, but the whole community depended on the sum of the accomplishments of its members to carry out the preaching task. Thus the entire community could be called the "holy preaching."

In the course of time Dominicans have lost sight of the boldness of Dominic's plan. At his time the task of preaching belonged to the bishops. Dominic claimed the privilege and tasks of the episcopal rank for members of his community. True, Dominic may not have envisaged a time when women could preach, but his claim that all his brethren had the right to preach was in an analogous fashion as bold as the contemporary Dominican claim that all Dominicans, women as well as men, should

be allowed to preach at all occasions, the homily at the Eucharist included.

The Dominican model of the preaching charism is the community that is the “holy preaching.” Individual Dominicans are not involved in preaching every moment their lives. Much time is spent in preparation. Years of study, not only of the sacred sciences but also of the contemporary scene, prepare the preacher. A community that offers an atmosphere of quiet, prayer together, and common support is the seed bed from which good preaching will sprout.

A powerful example of the Dominican community as the “holy preaching” is found in the example of the early Dominicans on the island of Hispaniola. In obedience to the vicar of the Dominicans in the New World, Anton Montesino preached against all the Spaniards who enslaved the natives: the Spaniards must free the enslaved natives or the slave holders would have no hope of salvation. In the face of opposition the entire Dominican community backed the preaching. Not only does this incident illustrate the role of the entire Dominican community in preaching; it also forcefully demonstrates that preaching for justice is a part of the Dominican charism.

Furthermore, the preaching mission demands material resources. Someone must make the Dominican community the “holy preaching” by caring for the material needs of the community: the stewardship of the community resources, household tasks, care for the communities physical and spiritual needs.

Finally, preaching needs to be grounded in activities which demonstrate that Dominicans are not mere hearers of the word but doers of the word. Without translation into action preaching remains sterile and ineffective. The classroom, the hospital ward, the market place and the street are the opportunities to translate the word into action.

Now it begins to become clearer that every Dominican is, or at least should be, involved in (the preaching mission. Those who teach are preparing hearts and minds to receive and live upon the Word of God. They are aware of the needs of contemporary hearers to whom the preachers proclaim the Gospel. Dominicans who are involved in health care ministries are demonstrating the power of the Gospel in action. They have insights into human pain, suffering and hope that cannot be gained merely by standing in the pulpit or lecturing in the classroom. Those who care for the physical and economic needs of the community offer the physical foundation of the “holy preaching.”

Moreover, at the present time more Dominicans, especially women, are claiming the right to exercise the charism of preaching in the most intense sense. Recent canonical legislation has facilitated some advances, since women may now preach at retreats, days of recollection, in fact, on every occasion except the homily at the Eucharist. Nevertheless, the task is not complete. Only when every

member of. the Order of Preachers can preach on any occasion will the Order of Preachers truly be in possession of its charism.

Suggested reading:

In the Company of Preachers. edited by Regina Siegfried and Edward Ruane. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press. pp. x-227. \$13.95

Suggested Questions for Reflection

1. In what ways are we communities of preachers in our day?
2. Dominic steeped himself in study and committed himself to prayer in preparation for preaching. What kind of study and prayer do we do today? What is essential for us in this area?
3. Dominic had a “bold” plan for his day and for his brothers and sisters. What “bold” plans do we have: what ones must we develop as contemporary Dominicans?
4. How can we understand and promote our identity as preachers in collaboration with one another? How can we use our charism to confront injustice with Gospel values?
5. Did this reflection paper surface ideas, feelings, questions in you or invoke new insights into the Dominican charism?