

ARTICLES

The Living Message of the Dominican Missionaries

On this day* 400 years ago, the eve of the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, the patroness of the Dominican Order, the first bishop of Manila Domingo de Salazar who had been bishop then for six years, welcomed the first group of Dominicans to what is now the Rosary Province of the Order, to the Philippines. He himself, Bishop Domingo de Salazar, had set out from Spain with 18 companions to come to the Philippines; but only himself and one other, Cristobal de Salvatierra, reached here. So today we commemorate the coming of Juan de Castro and his 14 companions as the first Dominican community to reach the Philippines and Manila. We commemorate also the 400 years of missionary service of the Province in the Philippines.

We do so in gratitude to Almighty God, but also in looking forward to the future so that we can learn from their example. In the words of Pope Paul VI in the introduction to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

“So that we can ensure that the Church of the 20th century may emerge better equipped to proclaim the Gospel to the people of this century”.

This is the challenge to each of us: our fidelity to those who came before us in the faith, to preserve that faith and to hand it on to others. We do so in fidelity to the Holy Father who has

* Sermon delivered in Santo Domingo Church, Quezon City, Philippines, on July 21, 1987 to commemorate the IVth Centennial of the arrival of the Dominicans to the Philippines and the Far East (Editor's Note = E.N.)

asked us on countless occasions to prepare for the third millenium of christianity and in Latin America to prepare for the anniversary in 1992 of the fifth centenary since the discovery and foundation of that great continent. So all of us have gathered here this evening in the presence of the successor of Bishop Domingo de Salazar, Jaime Cardinal Sin, the Apostolic Nuncio, Cardinal Vidal and the other Bishops, to thank God for these 400 years, to examine the lessons that are to be learned from these four centuries of evangelization, and to pledge ourselves to continue to answer the call of the Church to the evangelization of the world and, in a particular way, the evangelization of the East.

1. THE MISSION OF THE ORDER AND MISSIONARIES TO THE EAST

The Gospel that has just been read for us¹ is a reminder that the Church is missionary by its very nature. She must answer the command of Christ to go and preach the Gospel to all the nations. And the Order, as part of the Church, must also be faithful to that mandate. In fact, Pope Honorius III, who approved the Order in the first place, said that the brothers of this Order are totally deputed to evangelization. And so it is not surprising that from the very beginning, St. Dominic himself wished to go to the ends of the earth to preach the Gospel when he sent a dear friend of his, William of Monferrato, to the University of Paris to study. He said to William: "Upon your return, we will go together to the Cumans," that is, to the people at the Eastern frontiers of the then known world. So it is not surprising that immediately after his death or perhaps another 25 years later, we had the first great missionary period in the Order's history, spreading itself to the Slavic nations and to what is now the area of the Holy Land which was at that time the known frontiers of the world.

The second great period in our missionary history perhaps begins in the year 1500 with the first missionaries who went to the New World, to the world discovered by Columbus in 1492. We Dominicans were a little bit slow in coming to the East. On the 14th of July 1582, just after the arrival of Bishop Salazar, the

¹ Mt. 28:16-20 (E.N.).

then Master of the Order, wrote saying that we had fallen behind in our missionary activity. And so the Order looked to fulfilling its role in the Church, in the Eastern part of the Church. And who better could it look to, than to the figure of Bishop Salazar? Bishop Salazar spent many years in Mexico. There he was prior in one of our priories in Oaxaca which has, perhaps, one of the most beautiful churches in the whole world.

In the state of Oaxaca at that time there were 800 Dominicans. And south of Oaxaca is the state of Chiapas and there in Chiapas at that time, there was as bishop, Bartolomé de las Casas, one of the greatest figures in the history of the Church and of the Dominican Order. The then Fr. Salazar was very greatly influenced by Bartolomé de las Casas, by his ideas, by his methods of evangelization. So it is not surprising then that as soon as Bishop Salazar came here in 1581, he immediately began the process of inviting more Dominicans to join him.

And so in the following year he was trying to interest his brothers in the Province of Mexico to come to the East. And he appointed a representative in Europe who interested King Philip of Spain and Pope Gregory XIII in this great venture. And so in 1586, 40 Spanish Dominicans gathered in Sevilla under Juan de Castro and set out to the Philippines. Some got discouraged and stayed in Mexico; some died, and the first 14 arrived here on this day² 400 years ago.

2. THE LANGUAGE OF THE PEOPLE AND EVANGELIZATION

It was not only the idea of a new Province that would evangelize the East, nor the sole purpose of evangelization of the East, that Bishop Salazar had in his mind. He also had in mind the methods of evangelization that he had learned from people like Bartolomé de las Casas and from the other missionaries in the New World. The first thing that comes to mind is their great insistence on learning the native languages. The missionaries in the New World in Mexico and these places were given six months to learn the language and if they did not learn it within six months, then they were sent back to Spain.

² July 21, 1587 (E.N.).

We find a similar thing here—a realization of the need of language, the language of the people in order to be able to preach to them. And so, too, they were given six months here in the original Sto. Domingo. After that, they submitted themselves to exams at the end of that term. They were not allowed to preach in Spanish because that would be a distraction from the main work which was to prepare themselves to go and preach in the various languages. Each day those who were going to China spent an hour studying Chinese, between 1 and 2, even though they were already somewhat proficient in the language. Still they had to spend one hour perfecting their knowledge of the language.

How far we in our time have come away from those standards. When the bishops of Latin America met in Medellin, one of the Mexican bishops, the successor of Bishop Bartolomé de las Casas in Chiapas, gave a very interesting talk on the evangelization of the Indians in Latin America and said: "We have failed our brother Indians. We have not evangelized them in their own language, nor according to their own thought patterns." These were things that the first missionaries here and in the New World understood perfectly well.

The second idea that these missionaries had in evangelization was the use of drama, music, and songs in evangelization. I remember being fascinated on the Feast of our Lady of Guadalupe the 12th of December, one day in Mexico City, watching a group of Indians enact for a whole day the history of salvation, going back to the Old Testament, coming down to the conquest of their own country by the Spaniards, and then their evangelization. They understood the place of drama, the place of music, the place of song in evangelization.

3. THE WORD OF GOD AND EVANGELIZATION

Perhaps the idea, above all, that Bishop Salazar brought from the New World was the insistence on depending solely on the Gospel, on the Word of God for the evangelization of the people. It is interesting that now as we prepare in Europe—our scholars that is—for the anniversary of the founding of the Americas, one of the things that many of our historians have said to me is that our record in Latin America is extraordinary in that we tried to avoid the use of the civil power in evangelization. That was a

lesson that Bishop Salazar brought here and our first missionaries wanted to depend on the Word of God solely and on no civil power.

It was a lesson that the bishops of the Vatican Council have given, us, that we Christians must learn to live under all forms of government but independent of all of them. So these are tremendous lessons that we learn from these heroic missionaries of ours.

4. THE MISSIONARY ORDER AND THE MISSIONARY PROVINCE

The Order is missionary; individuals within the Order are missionaries. The first reading³ reminds us of the call of Abraham by God. God calls individuals, like Abraham, like Bishop Salazar, like two of the martyrs soon to be canonized who, hearing about the work here in the East, left their own countries and their own Provinces in Sicily and in Toulouse to join the band of evangelizers here. There will always be individuals who will answer the call. Sometimes these individuals will cause trouble for their superiors, their superiors in their congregation or in the Order or their superiors, the bishops.

There is an example of that in the history of the Province of the Rosary. Within 50 years there was a great missionary named Diego Collado, who had a great insistence on the need to go out to China, Formosa and Japan. And he caused trouble in the good sense, because he was not a trouble maker, but he was obsessed with the idea of bringing the Gospel to people who had not heard it, and that is the only purpose of missionary activity in the Church. It is to go forth, and to bring the Gospel to all people.

Thus we have a very interesting number in our Constitutions which reminds us of our missionary vocation. It tells us that we are not to be interested in territory: we are only to be interested in preaching the Word of God and in founding local communities. So we find that our missionaries here did that.

The Rosary Province gave something like a hundred bishops to the Church. They have given three local Provinces to the Order here in the East — Vietnam, the Province of the Philippines and

³ Gen. 12:1-9 (E.N.).

the Vicariate of Formosa. So they have been faithful to that mandate to go out and to establish churches and to found the Order. If they had not been faithful, then the words of Paul VI would ring out very loudly against them, because he said: "The Dominican Order would undoubtedly sin against itself if it turns aside from its missionary duty". So the Rosary Province has been faithful to that missionary duty.

The second thing that the Constitutions speak about is that we are to be missionaries according to the charism of the Order and in that, too, we find the Dominicans to have been faithful.

5. DOMINICAN WOMEN AND LAY PERSONS

St. Dominic, when he founded the Order, first founded a monastery of nuns who, by their prayers would sustain the preachers. That was the only apostolate open to them. But as the present Holy Father has said with regard to prayer, prayer is the most fruitful apostolic thing that we can do. So these nuns over the centuries have supported the preaching of the brethren, and in their prayer — life have been truly apostolic themselves.

The present role of women in the Church was not open to the women of St. Dominic's day. But how he would rejoice now; how he does rejoice in heaven. And Bishop Salazar must rejoice at seeing so many of their sisters who have joined this work over the four centuries, and especially the Congregation founded by the Province to help it in its missionary work.

From the very beginning the Order saw the need to involve the laity in its apostolate; likewise, there were few apostolates open: prayer and penance were the only two for hundreds of years. But seven hundred years ago this, too, was opened to the laity. So how St. Dominic and Bishop Salazar and the first missionaries would rejoice in the number of laity, to see their apostolates like the hospital in San Juan.⁴ All these things are an expression that they have been faithful in inviting the laity, in inviting women to join in the apostolate.

⁴ The charity hospital of St. Martin de Porres, in San Juan, Metro Manila, run by the Dominican tertiaries for the indigents of the city. (E.N.)

6. THE FOUR PRIORITIES OF THE ORDER

Recent General Chapters have given us four priorities for our preaching today. When we examine these priorities, we see the whole tradition of the Order coming down from St. Dominic.

The first is the theological teaching tradition that he left us. It is interesting that one of the first things that the brethren founded here in Manila was what we now call UST, the University of Santo Tomas. And they founded it as an instrument of evangelization for the whole of the Far East. So we find that among the martyrs soon to be canonized five were professors and students from that university.⁵ A reminder to us of the role of that university in the future as well as in the present in evangelization. He founded schools and in this our sisters have a very great part in evangelization today.

The second aspect of our preaching is that it must be missionary. We have said perhaps enough about that: except just to say that the canonizations soon to take place are a direct result of the brothers here in the Philippines answering the call of other countries to preach the Gospel.

Thirdly, the orientation of our preaching must be the whole question of justice. Bishop Salazar and the early Dominicans learned very well from their brothers in the New World to oppose all kinds of oppression of human beings: to give people an idea of their worth. I think that I can say without fear of contradiction that you, the Filipino people, have given to the world in the last few years an example of a people who are conscious of their worth and of their dignity as human beings.

And finally, our preaching is to make use of the language and the methods necessary for spreading the Gospel in our times. Just like the first Dominicans here who gave the first dictionaries, the first grammars, and the first catechisms we have to learn the language of our people, as Paul VI told us.

⁵ The five were canonized on October 18, 1987 by Pope John Paul II. They are: 1) St. Antonio González, O.P., (1636) professor and rector; 2) St. Domingo Ibáñez de Erquicia, O.P., (1633) professor; 3) St. Lucas del Espíritu Santo, O.P., (1634) professor; 4) St. Guillermo Courtet, O.P., (1636) professor; 5) St. Thomas Hioji Rokuzayemon Nishi, O.P., (1634), student (E.N.)

Five years after the founding or coming of the first community of Dominicans to Manila, to the Philippines, the Master of the Order at that time wrote (within the first five years) and said: "You are perhaps the joy and the crown of the whole Order." What would he say today, four hundred years later, when we have the very recent announcement by the Holy Father of the canonization of Lorenzo Ruiz and his companions and the canonization next year of the martyrs of Vietnam? Surely, this centenary of the Rosary has given 60 Blesseds to the Church. What lesson have their lives to give us?

7. FIRST METHOD: WITNESSING

Pope Paul VI in the *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, speaking about evangelization, gives us the exact scheme of St. Dominic himself. First of all, the importance of witnessing; the people of today are tired of talk; if they do listen to a preacher, it is because the preacher gives witness to what he says or she says by his or her life. St. Dominic saw that very clearly when he founded the Order.

The second thing that Paul VI speaks about is the great confidence in the Word of God: to preach it in season and out of season. St. Dominic, likewise, saw the need of establishing an Order that would have as its only function the preaching of the Word of God.

Finally, Pope Paul VI spoke on the importance of individual contact in evangelization, just as we read in the life of St. Dominic spending the whole night with the innkeeper to persuade him of the errors of his ways.

When we look at the 16 who are soon to be canonized by the Holy Father, the first thing that we remember about them is the extraordinary witness that they give, the heroic witness of their lives. St. Dominic himself had only one desire to give his life for Christ.

The great saints had that desire; to give their lives for the Gospel. They realized in the words of the second reading⁶ today that the invisible things are eternal. So these 16 martyrs left

⁶ II Cor. 4:7-12, 16-18 (E.N.).

Manila knowing that they were already sentenced to death—that they, too, wanted to give their lives for Christ. They remembered the words of that second reading: “We have been persecuted, but never deserted” . . . They realized that God would be with them.

So we have the extraordinary testimony of Lorenzo⁷ himself when he said before the judges that he would give his life a thousand times for Christ.⁸ And they knew perfectly well the horrors of death they were to undergo. We have the example of the other Magdalena⁹ a tertiary living like St. Catherine of Siena, giving hospitality to the missionaries. She gave herself up so that she could be with Blessed Jordan¹⁰ in his agony.

It is not all perfect heroism for two¹¹ of them renounced their faith for a short time; but they were drawn back by the words and example of their companions. So, we, in our time, who will often be overcome by fear, can draw from the example of these great men and women.

Secondly, they were convinced of the power of the Word. We, too, for our part must be convinced of that power. In one of the documents of the Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, we are told of the power of preaching for our own conversion. And in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI said that preaching will of itself make the preacher more holy. So we have to learn the need of conversion if we are to be evangelizers.

Moreover, we have to learn from these 16 martyrs the importance of working together. They are a group of martyrs coming

⁷ St. Lorenzo Ruiz of Manila, martyr in Japan (1637), and the first Filipino canonized saint (E.N.).

⁸ Lorenzo said: “I am a Christian, and this I profess until the hour of my death, and for God I shall give my life; and although I did not come to Japan to be a martyr but because I could not stay in Manila, however, as a Christian and for God I shall give my life. And so do with me as you please” (E.N.).

⁹ St. Magdalene of Nagasaki (1634), Japanese and Dominican and Augustinian tertiary, daughter of a martyred couple. Her spiritual director was St. Jordan Ansalone. When the latter was arrested, she presented herself to the guards, declaring that she was a Christian. She was tortured in a cruel manner, but remained firm in her faith until she was hung on the gibbet where she died after thirteen days (E.N.).

¹⁰ St. Jordan Ansalone (1634) Italian Dominican priest. He went to Japan in 1632 and was arrested in 1634 and had to undergo various tortures before dying on the gibbet (E.N.).

¹¹ 1) St. Vicent Schiwozuka of the Cross (1637), Japanese Dominican priest. The tortures induced him to apostatize, but he soon returned to the faith and died as a martyr on the gibbet.

from five countries — the Philippines, Spain, France, Sicily and Japan. We have to learn to overcome the sin called by the bishops of Latin America, the sin of excessive nationalism.

To submit ourselves as brothers and sisters to the preaching of the Gospel we have to learn the place of men and women in evangelization. This group of 16 had two¹² women among them.

We have to learn also the place of lay people. This year the Synod of Bishops is dedicated to the role of the laity in evangelization. We learn from this group of 16, of which seven¹³ were lay people.

We have to learn from them the importance of individual contact, of loyalty to each other: they died together, priest and catechists, Magdalena with Blessed Jordan... They brought back some who had renounced the faith because of fear, and they made great efforts towards that objective.

8. SAINT LORENZO RUIZ AND COMPANIONS

Finally, I would like to refer to the figure of Lorenzo Ruiz, who worked as a sacristan with the Dominicans, whose life was somewhat hidden. Perhaps he did not know exactly why he was going to Japan. But once there, he maintained complete loyalty to his friends.

Only 20 years ago, one of our Fathers, Fr. Quintin García, going through the papers of the Dominicans found enough evidence so that Lorenzo Ruiz could be added to the list of the Dominicans whose beatification was being proposed to the Holy See. So we, Dominicans, can claim in a real sense a great responsibility for the beatification of Lorenzo Ruiz. But likewise we have to acknowledge now that Lorenzo Ruiz is bringing all our martyrs

2) St. Lazaro of Kyoto (1637), Japanese layman. He contracted leprosy and was deported to the Philippines with other lepers. In 1636 he joined González as his guide and interpreter. Not resisting to the tortures Lazaro apostatized for a few hours but then repented and died for Christ (E.N.).

¹² 1. St. Magdalene of Nagasaki (1634), already mentioned and 2. St. Marina of Omura (1634) Japanese Dominican Tertiary (E.N.).

¹³ 1) St. Miguel Kurobioye (1633), Japanese and catechist; 2) St. Mateo Kohioye del Rosario (1632), Japanese helper. He professed as a Dominican lay-brother before his martyrdom; 3) St. Magdalene of Nagasaki; 4) St. Marina of Omura (1634); 5) St. Francisco Shoyemon (1633), Japanese catechist. He professed as a Dominican lay-brother before his martyrdom; 6) St. Lorenzo Ruiz of Manila (1637) and 7) St. Lazaro of Kyoto (1637) (E.N.).

to the altars of the Church in canonization, because it is thanks to him, and thanks to the enthusiasm of the Filipino people, that the miracle that brings about their canonization has been successful. And so we thank in a very real way Jaime Cardinal Sin, Fr. Fidel Villarroel, O.P., and Fr. Ramon Salinas, O.P. for all they have done to realize this objective.

So as we gather here to commemorate 400 years of the Province of the Rosary, we see in this canonization the culmination, the crowning of all their work. It is a proud day, then, for those of you who are Filipinos. It is a proud day for those of us who are Dominicans. It is even a prouder day for those of you who are Filipino and Dominican men and women. You are heirs to an extraordinary heritage; the challenge in the future is immense.

If bishop Salazar could be here tonight and know as he does know in heaven of the spreading faith in the Philippines, a hierarchy of over a hundred bishops, two Cardinals, and to know that one of his own brothers, Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, O.P., is now the President of the Bishops' Conference, how happy he must be!

So we look back with great gratitude to God for all of these. We look forward in confidence that the God who was with these first missionaries and has been with them over the centuries, will not abandon us, provided only we have the courage and the conviction that they had, that going out armed with the power of God and His Word we have nothing to fear.

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