

and blessed of the Order of Saint Dominic and many other religious families have lived it. By the power of the divine grace we can and should live it. May the Patriarch of the Friars Preachers deign to obtain this grace for us: let us beg it of him by that prayer which so well characterizes the mission which he received and conserved: "*O Lumen Ecclesiae, doctor veritatis, rosa patientiae, ebur castitatis, aquam sapientiae propinasti gratis, Praedicator gratiae, nos iunge beatis.*"²⁴

IV

The Place of the Liturgy in Dominican Spirituality

by the

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THE PLACE OF THE LITURGY IN DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY

IN THE thirteenth century there was still much liturgical variety in the Western Church. Each particular Church had, if not its own liturgy, at least its own rites and customs, since the pope had thus far allowed to the bishops and religious superiors a very considerable liberty. Some bishops could not refrain from adding to or cutting down the liturgy of their Church.

Born at the very beginning of the thirteenth century, the Order of Saint Dominic had to suffer from this variety, which in its case became confusion. Since each religious followed the liturgy of his native place, there ensued between the convents and even between the religious when they were united in general assemblies, a diversity gravely harmful to the dignity of divine worship. This was early felt and the General Chapters decided to do away with this inconvenience by making the liturgy uniform so that in all the convents of the Order, each religious, no matter to what convent he belonged, should celebrate the Mass and Office in the same way. After several attempts, the liturgical books established by Blessed Humbert were adopted in 1254 and immediately imposed upon every convent. Thirteen years later, July 7, 1267, Clement

IV solemnly approved and placed under the protection of the Holy See, the liturgical work of Master Humbert. Thus the Order of Saint Dominic was led to create for itself its own liturgy, which it henceforth conserved.

We must not, however, exaggerate the originality of this work. Blessed Humbert had no idea of *inventing* a liturgy. He was content to choose, to gather together, often to modify, but above all to unify the ceremonies, prayers, texts, and chants in use about him. The Dominican liturgy is essentially a Roman liturgy.¹ If we desire to find in it a special characteristic, we may say that its ceremonies are clothed with the mark of an austere solemnity imprinted by an ensemble of ancient observances and a sober chant, and that it has stamped its prayers and texts with a certain theological character not surprising in an Order vowed to the study and the teaching of Sacred Doctrine.

Yet, these are not the facts which we desire to stress here, but the role of the liturgy in the formation of a Dominican. This role is of the highest, of capital, importance. In founding a Canonical Order, as Honorius III declares in the very Bull of foundation, December 22, 1216, Saint Dominic could not but demand of his brethren that which he calls in the Constitutions the "*Solemnis divini officii recitatio*," and adopt the canonical office with its traditional rites and ceremonies. The liturgy was to be at the very base of conventual life and religious formation.

It is the liturgy which in very fact regulates the daily life of the Friar Preacher. Study, recreation, sleep itself flow within the limits determined by the economy of the Divine Office. At midnight, the bell summons the Friars to Matins: while darkness covers the earth, they go to watch and pray, to offer homage to God in reparation for the crimes and disorders of the night. At dawn, they return to offer the first fruits of the new day in the celebration of Prime. Many times a day the regular recurrence of the hours finds them kneeling at the foot of the altar. Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, in turn enliven their fervor and prevent them from forgetting God. Finally, when the hour comes for rest, once more, in Compline, always solemnly celebrated, liturgical prayer closes the day which it opened at Matins. Liturgical prayer is the framework of the Dominican life. The office holds first place: "*debet nostris actionibus anteferri*" declares the General Chapter of 1481.

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What is the reason for this? It is that the liturgy, as Dom Festigière aptly says, is the "method authentically instituted by the Church to make souls like unto Jesus."²

There are methods of spirituality which prefer to draw the attention of the Christian to his own misery, his passions, his faults, his sins, and the vanity and baseness of the present life, and this consideration is unquestionably useful and even necessary. There are

times when every Christian should make use of it. Nevertheless the masters of Dominican spirituality do not believe that this is all the time and they think that there is a consideration much more simple and in every way more efficacious — the habitual consideration of Jesus and in Him the Holy Trinity. Since the object of baptism is to incorporate us into Jesus Christ and religious profession seeks to carry the virtue of baptism to its greatest power, is it not more simple and, if one may say so, more direct, to occupy oneself especially in the consideration of Christ in His mysteries, what He is, what He said, and what He did, and to draw that grace that flows therefrom? This is the reason why the Dominican soul is urged to live the liturgy, for the liturgy is, as it were, the prolongation of the mysteries of Christ.

They strangely belittle the divine worship and even the life of the Church who see in the liturgical feasts only the anniversaries or reminders of things previously accomplished for our salvation. They are much more than that. There is nothing more actual than the liturgy. Its feasts are a renewal, a recommencement. It is *today* that the mysteries of Christ, always present, always acting, operate in souls, sanctify them, and make them divine. Christ is always living, "Christ yesterday and today and the same forever," says Saint Paul.⁸ This triple existence of Christ, in the bosom of the Father, in His mortal life among men, in the Church to the end of time, the liturgy manifests and communicates. Jesus is there

before us, pursuing His life, renewing His mysteries *that we may participate therein.*

It is a capital consideration in the matter under our attention that these mysteries of Christ are reproduced not only that we may take from them occasion to render to God a homage of worship and gratitude but that the grace of the renewed mystery may come to us and that we may participate in a special state of the Holy Humanity. "That which we know has been accomplished in a divine reality," says Saint Augustine, "is the very same thing which the liturgy frequently renews in pious souls."⁴

We rediscover there the profound teaching of Saint Paul concerning the mystical body of Christ. To him who understands this doctrine it becomes evident that one of the essential principles of Christian asceticism is that the states and actions of the Word Incarnate should be reproduced in us. "All that took place on the cross," Saint Augustine says again,⁵ "in the tomb, at His Resurrection, at the Ascension and upon the throne at the right hand of God the Father, is the type of the Christian life which we must lead." "Know well my daughter," said the Eternal Father to Saint Catherine of Siena, "that all the mysteries, all the actions performed by My Truth in this world, with My disciples or without them, were representative of those which take place in the souls of My servants."⁶ To be a saint, then, is to become by grace what Jesus was by nature, is to reproduce in us, who are His members, that life which He once led in His

own Humanity. He Himself informs us that this was His aim when He said to the same dear saint: "In taking up your nature I am made like unto you. Consequently, I do not cease to labor to make you like unto Myself as far as you are capable of it and I strive to renew in your souls while they are traveling toward heaven all that has taken place in My Body."

But where, then, is accomplished this "divine labor of assimilation"? First of all in the celebration of the liturgy of which the sacrifice of the Mass is the center. In choir the religious finds himself at all times face to face with Jesus. From one end of the year to the other, the Church unfolds before his eyes the complete cycle of the divine mysteries: each day, there is another manifestation of the holy humanity and the divinity, offering ample and magnificent matter for meditation: each day, there is the closest participation in the particular sentiments and interior dispositions which animated Jesus in each of His states: a new source of grace available, the grace merited by Jesus when He accomplished the mystery for the first time. If he follows the holy ceremonies with intelligence and love, the religious will not fail to advance in that spiritual transformation which is the end of his vocation, for Jesus will ever be before him as the Model to be imitated, the divine Copy, the "form of our predestination" of which Saint Paul speaks.⁸ Better still, Jesus will not fail to come to him as the First Author of His own image, as He said to Catherine of Siena in the words quoted above. During the season

of Advent, He comes to communicate especially the graces of His interior life; at Christmastide, a grace of renewal, a new birth which will induce a greater participation in His divine Sonship; in Lent, He makes us "die to sin," He "crucifies us with Him," "we are buried with Him,"¹⁰ that we may later "rise with Him,"¹⁰ "walk in a renewed life" free and wholly spiritual, and finally, "sit down with Him in heaven."¹¹ In the interim, He manifests Himself in His members, the saints, who have prolonged Him across the ages, so that it shall be the "whole Christ,"¹² to use Saint Augustine's phrase, who is revealed and given in a sort of perpetual communion in all His mysteries, His interior dispositions, His sentiments, His entire grace, whether in His own person or in His members.

Hence we can understand why Saint Dominic gave the liturgy so large a place in the life of his sons. Primarily because it is, par excellence, the divine homage and enables us to acquit ourselves of our prime duty, the glorification of God; but also because it leads the religious to the perfection of his state, since it is the most simple and certain way to become like to Jesus Christ.

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But what, it may be asked, in the Dominican life, is the connection between the liturgy, on the one hand, and, on the other, study and the apostolate, whose importance is so great? There are not a few

religious congregations who have sacrificed the solemn celebration of the liturgy precisely that they might have more liberty for their ministry. Are the liturgical life and the apostolic life opposed to one another? We are far from thinking so and for the following reasons:

In the first place, let us note that the liturgy does not draw the religious away from the essential object of his study. What should the Friar Preacher study? Principally sacred science, theology, the Bible. But what is there in the liturgy if not the Catholic doctrine condensed in the prayers, in the extracts from Scripture, and in the texts of the Fathers? This is living dogma speaking to the heart as well as to the intelligence.

From this we can understand the well-defined purpose which our Fathers had in regulating the distribution of the Divine Office in such fashion that it enveloped the labors of the religious. Today, because the liturgical sense has become blunted, one is tempted to see in this distribution an obstacle to intellectual work and to group the recitation of many parts of the Office so as to leave long hours for study, uninterrupted, and, hence, it may be thought, more useful. This is to deviate from the primitive spirit and to change ancient customs. Our Fathers followed the apostolic customs and recited each of the several Hours at various moments of the night and day. If they interrupted study at regular intervals by liturgical prayer, they did not intend to sacrifice it: they

knew that their study would be the more fruitful for this very reason. The frequent return to choir prevents study from becoming mere intellectual work, a cold and abstract speculation: it brings about intimate contact with God and maintains the religious in the spirit of contemplation. Can we doubt that the danger of intellectualism threatens whoever makes a profession of study, criticism, or teaching? What learned man will not admit that only too often curiosity of spirit disturbs fervor of heart? What theologian would deny that the impetus of his prayers does not always attain to the height of his knowledge? Have we never heard of a theologian who knows God better than he loves Him, a doctor of science ardent in controversy against heresy and lukewarm in the service of the Lord? It is too true that intellectualism threatens to dry up the heart, to chill and sterilize prayer. And, from the supernatural or apostolic point of view, how much of usefulness is there in study which does not vivify charity?

On the other hand, the liturgy restores the balance between the intellectual and the affective life. Far from hindering study, the Office sustains it, is its complement: it serves to fecundate it, for the truth for which the religious searches in books he finds in the liturgical formulas, no longer abstruse but living, clothed with love, more suggestive, more penetrating. In these stations near the altar the soul assimilates the fruits of toil: from the head the truth descends to the heart, where it is enlivened and stirs up the

resolutions which govern life. Thanks to the liturgy, theology becomes a science penetrated with lofty speculation.

"When you study," said Saint Vincent Ferrer to his brethren, "from time to time fall on your knees and send up to God a brief and ardent prayer, or, leave your cell, go to the church or the cloister, whither the Spirit draws you: by a vocal prayer or merely by your groans or the ardent sighs of your heart, beg the divine assistance, present to the Most High your vows and your desires, call on the saints to aid you. . . . Then, recall what you have been studying: you will then have a clearer understanding of it. By this alternation you will have not only a heart more fervent in prayer but a spirit more enlightened in study."¹⁸

Such was Saint Thomas' method of study. The great doctor made but the least possible use of the dispensation to which his lectures and his numerous writings entitled him. Furthermore, not content with being assiduous in attending choir, he arrived before the others and made long visits there. When asked why he interrupted his studies, he replied, "I renew my devotion that I may later elevate myself more easily to speculation." Such is the alliance between frequency of liturgical prayer and fecundity of intellectual labor.

There is another effect of the liturgy. It accustoms the religious to attach everything to one central idea, to group the judgments of his intelligence, the affec-

tions of his heart, and, in a word, all the elements of his intellectual and moral life around the idea of Jesus Christ living before him, an idea by which he sees, understands, judges, and loves. Therein lies a magnificent and powerful unity. Everything he touches, the least particles of truth which he considers, he animates into a vast movement of heart and thought which tends toward God. He studies nothing except in the light of God, "*sub ratione Dei*," as Saint Thomas phrases it. God first: this is the unifying principle given him by the liturgy and he finds that this intellectual direction is exactly that which is given him, on another score, by Thomistic theology. The Thomistic spirit and the liturgical spirit join together to carry their disciple to those summits whence it is easy for him to reduce to order the most varying acquisitions, to arrange them in a hierarchy, because he sees everything from a universal point of view, "*in Deo, in summo rerum vertice*" according to the magnificent phrase of Saint Thomas.

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From what has just been said, it will doubtless seem useless to many to insist upon the benefits conferred upon the apostolic man by the liturgy. We gladly sum up our thought in a few words: the active life finds its safest foundation in liturgical prayer.

What does the Friar Preacher need for his ministry? Science? Without doubt, but a science vivified and made fruitful by charity: of itself science is not determined to action, still less to the gift of itself.

Without charity it will never make an apostle. It will not even suffice to make a contemplative. Religious contemplation, although residing essentially in the intellect, begins and ends in the will. Because we love God we seek to know Him, because we know Him we seek to love Him more. Love is the beginning and the end and it is that, at least here below, which makes the ultimate perfection of life.

The Friar Preacher, then, enters fully into his vocation only when the knowledge which he has of God from study ceases to be merely abstract in order to become a living and active knowledge, "a knowledge which loves" and which, in consequence, devotes and gives itself. But charity is a gift of God, by its very nature out of our reach. It is obtained, though, by prayer and in practice, for us, especially through liturgical prayer, which for this reason becomes the most direct and most efficacious preparation for the apostolate. The hours most important for the apostle, most heavily freighted with future benefits are those which he employs in becoming like to Christ and, consequently, capable of sanctifying souls. There lies the summit of his life.

On the other hand, is not liturgical prayer already and of itself a means of the apostolate? No one dreams of denying that it may be an immense power of intercession. If the simple prayer of the Christian is a power, what must be said of the prayer of the Church, of the Bride imploring her Spouse? But, in choir, the religious is deputed by the Church to offer,

in her name, the necessary tribute to praise. He is her voice: his supplication acquires therefrom a sovereign efficaciousness. Like a new Moses, he disarms the anger of God. When, in the middle of the night, he leaves his bed to go to choir to celebrate Matins, he is conscious of meriting his title of Preacher; at that hour also he spreads abroad life, his prayer is a sermon.

It is, in addition, a reparation for the disorders of our unhappy times. The gravest insult which God receives from men is not in the fall of the senses but in the infidelity and corruption of spirit, in the organization of individual and social life apart from God. Naturalism and rationalism rest upon contempt for God. Against this satanic doctrine the liturgical life of the religious is an unceasing protest and an exact reparation. By occupying himself principally with God, he proclaims that God is above all and that He should be "the first served" as Saint Joan of Arc said; he protests that God is sufficiently beautiful to captivate all the glances of the soul, sufficiently lofty to surpass all the intelligence needs of truth, sufficiently good to content to overflowing all the desires of the heart.

Happy, then, is the Friar Preacher vowed by the duty of his state to the Divine Office! Happy are they who know how to live the liturgy. "They are before the throne of God and they serve Him day and night in His temple and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell over them. . . . For the Lamb . . . shall rule them and shall lead them to the fountains of the

waters of life."¹⁴ In praising God with a perfect homage they are sanctified and sanctify. "When they endeavor to prefer nothing to the Divine Office and are eager to expend in its celebration all the care and refinement which so august a function demands, the science of their own sanctification is communicated to them under the form which they should realize in the lowest depths of their being. And if it should happen that, in a liturgical function, the souls called to lend their aid thereto were all close to the perfection of their individual liturgical life, that is to say their spiritual life, even the holy angels can hardly make up such an assembly in heaven. Certainly the divine complacencies will be without stint and the luminousness of such a center would be the astonishment of the whole world."¹⁵

V

Dominican Prayer

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