



PARISH CELEBRATION : 1 AUGUST

FEAST DAY : 3 AUGUST

ANNIVERSARY OF DEATH : 6
AUGUST

Dear Parishioners,

This year we celebrate the eighth centenary of the death of Saint Dominic, who died in Bologna on 6th August, 1221.

Our celebrations are necessarily restricted by the current health regulations, so that we cannot even hold the modest celebration we usually have outside church on the Sunday nearest to his feast.

We are looking at some other ways to honour the founder of the Order and our parish patron. Of course, we can do many things in the church: we will highlight his statue, pray a short novena in the week leading up to his feast, and the Masses of 31st July / 1st August will be in his honour. We also are planning a couple of little surprises for everyone.

Over the next few weeks, *The Dominican* will include a supplement – also available online – with material about St Dominic: some art you may not have seen, some extracts from contemporary documents about Dominic, prayers to St Dominic and so on.

We begin this week with the oldest known portrait of St Dominic, painted some twenty years after his death, and some of the grains of information that we have about his youth in northern Spain.

We hope that each week you will find something to delight, interest or challenge you.

Happy Octocentenary !

Fr Peter Nguyen, O.P.
Parish Priest

Fr Martin Wallace, O.P.
Assistant Priest

The Mascarella Table in Bologna



The oldest known portrait of Saint Dominic (detail), c. 1235

This is the earliest portrait we have of Dominic and his companions, and it gives us insight into his understanding of his mission in the Church.

The image shows Saint Dominic with a halo in the center, in the company of forty-eight of his brother preachers, seated at the same table. He is at dinner at the first convent in Bologna, known today as *Saints Mary and Dominic of Mascarella*, where he and his companions, who arrived in Bologna during the winter of 1218, lived for a few months. The faces of Dominic's companions suggest that they came from different countries in Europe, as indeed they did.

The painting has been there since about 1235, and happily remains largely intact, despite being painted over at one time and sawn in three at another. It even survived an attempt by the Dominicans in Bologna to steal it!

“We will celebrate Saint Dominic not as a saint alone on a pedestal, but as a saint enjoying the communion of a meal with his brothers, united by the same vocation to preach the Word of God and to share the gift of food and of drink from God”, explained the master general of the Dominicans, Brother Gerard Francisco Timoner, the present Master of the Order (and so the 87th Successor of St Dominic.)

THE YOUNG DOMINIC GUZMAN

Some extracts from the *Libellus* of Bl. Jordan of Saxony.



We are used to reading lives of medieval saints that are written long after a saint's death by people who never knew him, and which are filled with exaggerations and wonders that stretch credulity beyond what the modern mind can accept.

Jordan of Saxony's *Little Book on the Origins of the Order of Preachers* (the *Libellus*) is quite different. He was a close personal friend of Dominic, and succeeded him as Master of the Order. He consulted three important witnesses of the first days of the Order who were still alive (Bertrand of Garrigua, Peter Seila, and John of Navarre), and was witness himself to the later years of Dominic's life, as well as the transfer of his body from the cemetery to the tomb in the church in 1233.

For Dominic's infancy, of course, he had to rely on second-hand accounts, though he may well have heard many details direct from the mouth of his friend, Dominic, when they travelled and worked together.

His mother's dream

A boy named Dominic was born ... in the town of Caleruega. Before his mother conceived him, she saw in a vision that she would bear in her womb a dog who, with a burning torch in his mouth and leaping from her womb, seemed to set the whole earth on fire. This was to signify that her child would be an eminent preacher who, by "barking" sacred knowledge, would rouse to vigilance souls drowsy with sin, as well as scatter throughout the world the fire which the Lord Jesus Christ came to cast upon the earth. From infancy this child was carefully reared by his parents and a maternal uncle, an archpriest who lost no time training him in the practices of the Church. In this way the child, whom God had destined to be a vessel of election, was from his earliest years pervaded with an odour of holiness which always clung to him.

His time at University

In due time he was sent to Palencia for instruction in the liberal sciences, which flourished there in those days... While he was a student [there], a famine arose and almost all Spain was stricken. Being moved with pity for the poor at the sight of their misery, he resolved at once to put into practice our Lord's counsel and do all he could to relieve the wants of the dying poor. He sold all his belongings, even his books, which he very much needed in that city. Establishing a centre for almsgiving, he distributed his goods and gave them to the poor. This example so stirred the souls of his fellow-students and masters in theology that, seeing how stingy their own help had been in comparison with this young man's liberality, they began to give alms in greater abundance.

Called to the priesthood: a canon at Osma cathedral

Reports about him reached the Bishop of Osma, who, after carefully verifying all that he heard, summoned Dominic and made him a Canon Regular of his church. At once he began to shine as a special star among the canons. His humble heart and extraordinary holiness made him an odour of life unto life among them and as sweet-smelling frankincense in summertime. ...He frequented the church day and night. He prayed without ceasing and, making use of the leisure afforded for contemplation, he scarcely ever left the monastery grounds. God gave him the singular gift of weeping for sinners, the wretched, and the afflicted, whose sufferings he felt within his compassionate heart, which poured out its hidden feelings in a shower of tears... It was his custom to spend his night-watches in prayer and, having shut the door, to pray to the Father in secret.

More next week !

A BRIEF LIFE OF ST DOMINIC

Saint Dominic de Guzman was born in Caleruega, northern Spain, around the year 1170. Throughout his lifetime, Europe was in a state of constant warfare. If the kingdoms of Europe were not at war with one another, they were fighting wars against other powers. Muslim kingdoms in North Africa had conquered parts of Spain, and so Spanish kings were preoccupied with regaining their lost territory. Other European kings raised armies to fight in the Crusades, wars that were aimed at reconquering the Holy Land from non-Christian control.



Dominic was the son of the nobleman Felix de Guzman and his wife, Jane of Aza. Dominic's mother was a holy woman. She had the responsibility of caring for her children and running the household. But she always made time to help others. Her faith in God affected every aspect of her life. Her example made a lasting impression on Dominic.

Dominic's parents made sure that he was well educated in all subjects, especially his faith. He was taught by his uncle for seven years. He then attended university. Dominic enjoyed learning about all subjects, especially music. He was a good singer! However, he understood that his faith was not just another subject to study, but also a way of life. When a famine struck the country, he sold his valuable collection of books and gave the money to those who were suffering.

Dominic lived during a time when the teachings of the Catholic Church were often misunderstood: they were not always clearly and carefully taught. This was such a problem that the pope called upon priests and monks to take a more active role in teaching the people about their faith. Pope Innocent III called a Lateran Council in Rome to make clear the teaching of the Catholic Church. Many religious orders of priests and nuns were founded to help carry out the pronouncements of the council.

Dominic was asked by his bishop to help explain some of these misunderstandings. Once, Dominic stayed up all night with an innkeeper to discuss different issues of the faith with him. By morning, the innkeeper was convinced by the truth of Dominic's arguments and asked to be reconciled with the Church.

Dominic lived an austere life. He slept very little, usually on the bare ground, and ate simple meals. He spent many hours praying and studying. He wanted to be prepared to tell others about the teachings of Jesus. When someone asked Dominic why he lived this way, he explained that more people were won over by example than by words.

Dominic observed the importance of women in this work of spreading the faith. His own mother had been very influential in his own life and in their town. During prayer, he was inspired to found a community of nuns. Their convent became a centre for education and instruction for people in the area. It was the first of many communities that Dominic founded.

Saint Dominic also started a religious order called the Order of Preachers, now known as the Dominicans. He made preaching his most important work. He walked from town to town, often barefoot to make his shoes last longer! Many were inspired by his example of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Along with Dominic, they dedicated their lives to the work of preaching the Gospel. Dominic sent them out to many different parts of Europe to continue this work of preaching.

Dominic lived at the same time as another famous saint, Saint Francis of Assisi. It is believed that they met each other. The two men were both witnesses to the faith at a difficult time. They took different paths in achieving their goal, but they saw this as proof that there are many ways to live out the teachings of Christ. Many important people asked Dominic to help them—kings, bishops, and popes. He was well known for his interesting style of preaching, his generosity, and his knowledge. Dominic did not want to be famous. When he was near the end of his life, he asked to be taken back to be among his community of brothers. Before he died, he encouraged his brothers and promised to pray for them. Saint Dominic showed the world what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. He recognized that a disciple is called to spread the teachings of Jesus through his or her actions and words.

He died in Bologna, Italy, on 6th August, 1221. He was canonised (declared a saint) in 1234.