

Temptation of power even among men of the Church

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ST. DOMINIC, A TRUE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL

VATICAN CITY, 3 FEB 2010 (VIS) -

In today's general audience, held in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, the Pope spoke about the life and work of St. Dominic de Guzman, founder of the Order of Preachers, or Dominican Order.

St. Dominic was born in Caleruega, near the Spanish city of Burgos, in the year 1170. While still a student he "distinguished himself for his interest in the study of Sacred Scriptures and his love for the poor". Having been ordained a priest he was elected as canon of the cathedral of Osma, however "he did not consider this as a personal privilege, nor as the first step in a brilliant ecclesiastical career; rather, as a service to be rendered with dedication and humility. Do not career and power represent a temptation to which even those who have roles of leadership and government in the Church are not immune?" the Pope asked.

He then explained how the bishop of Osma "soon noted Dominic's spiritual qualities and sought his collaboration. Together they travelled to northern Europe on diplomatic missions. ... On his journeys Dominic became aware of ... the existence of peoples still un-evangelised, ... and of the religious divides that weakened Christian life in the south of France, where the activity of certain heretical groups created disturbance and distanced people from the truth of the faith".

Pope Honorius III asked Dominic "to dedicate himself to preaching to the Albigensians" and he "enthusiastically accepted this mission, which he undertook through the example of his own life of poverty and austerity, through preaching the Gospel and through public discussions".

"Christ", the Pope went on, "is the most precious treasure that men and women of all times and places have the right to know and love! It is consoling to see how also in today's Church there are many people (pastors and lay faithful, members of ancient religious orders and of new ecclesial movements) who joyfully give their lives for the supreme ideal of announcing and bearing witness to the Gospel".

As more and more companions joined him, Dominic established his first house in the French city of Toulouse, from which the Order of Preachers came into being. "He adopted the ancient Rule of St. Augustine, adapting it to the requirements of an itinerant apostolic life in which he and his confreres would move from one place to another preaching, but always returning to their convents, places of study, prayer and community life".

St. Dominic, the Holy Father continued, "was keen that his followers should have a solid theological formation, and did not hesitate to send them to the universities of the time". There they dedicated themselves to the study of theology, "founded on Holy Scripture but respectful of the questions raised by reason".

The Pope encouraged everyone, "pastors and lay people, to cultivate this 'cultural dimension' of the faith, that the beauty of Christian truth may be better understood and the faith truly nourished, strengthened and defended. In this Year for Priests, I invite seminarians and priests to respect the spiritual value of study. The quality of priestly ministry also depends on the generosity with which we apply ourselves to studying revealed truths".

Dominic died in Bologna in 1221 and was canonised in 1234. "With his sanctity, he shows us two indispensable means for making apostolic activity more incisive", the Pope concluded; "firstly, Marian devotion", especially the praying of the Rosary "which his spiritual children had the great merit of popularising", and secondly, "the value of prayers of intercession for the success of apostolic work".