

Homily for Dominic, Priest and Friar, 1221

August 8, 2020

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Romans 10:13–17; Psalm 98:1–4; John 7:14–18**

During the first four or five weeks of the shutdown, from the middle of March until Easter Week, while we were live-streaming daily, neither Father Smith nor I wanted to preach without a text. With the pressure of daily live-streaming off, I've discovered that I like taking the time to do enough study to have something to put down on paper. So, for most commemorations like today's, I have never written a homily.

I generally start with the-almost-always-disappointing entries about the commemorations in *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*,¹ the Episcopal Church book for commemorations on weekdays and holy days of the church year. Dominic at least gets the actual date of his death, August 6, 1221; Francis of Assisi does not for reasons that are not clear to me. I have generally found my copy of the 1978 printing *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* to be helpful, but not always. If one were looking for the role of Dominicans as inquisitors, a not unimportant development in the

¹ *Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2006* (New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2006).

history of that order, one finds it mentioned in the article on the inquisition. But the entry on the Dominican Order won't take you there.

Dominic was born in northern Spain in the year 1170. His family name is not known for sure. In 1194, he became a canon regular, a priest on the cathedral staff, of his native diocese in Osma, part of Castile's kingdom. Ten years later, he accompanied the bishop of Osma on a diplomatic mission to secure a bride for one of the sons of the king of Castile.² He also went on a preaching mission to southern France to combat heresy in the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-centuries.³

By 1215, Dominic was organizing a new religious order. He had the approval of the bishop of Toulouse and Pope Honorius III. He was a man of simple personal habits. What was new for the Order of Friars Preachers was to be a religious order devoted to studying and preaching. It was the first religious order to abandon manual labor. Following the lead of the Franciscans, they would live by begging. The

² *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (ODCC) 2ed. (New York: Oxford University Press 1978), s.v. "Dominic, St.," 417.

³ *Ibid.*, s.v. "Albigenses," 31.

community would have no property or possessions except for their houses, churches, and schools.

It's worth noting that Dominic and Francis were contemporaries. Francis was born roughly 11 years after Dominic. He drew up a rule for the Order of Friars Minor in 1209. The Franciscans were preachers too. Dominic died on the sixth of August in 1221, Francis, during the night of October 3rd to October 4th.

The Dominicans have maintained their emphasis on education, study, and community prayer. If you look at the Dominican parish website [Saint Vincent Ferrer](#), Sixty-sixth Street and Lexington Avenue, one finds a worship schedule like Saint Mary's. I know of no other Roman Catholic congregation where the liturgy of the hours is prayed publicly—or where Eucharists are listed as Solemn Masses, Sung Masses, and Mass.

I've crossed paths with two Dominicans in my life. One was a Dominican Sister who had finished her term as superior. We ended up in the same Clinical Pastoral Education unit in the summer of 1982. She was a delightful person—and sharp. The other is Father Gerard Austin, retired from a distinguished academic career. He and my teacher Father Louis Weil

were students together at the L'institut Catholique de Paris in the 1960s and remain life-long friends. Father Austin's book on Confirmation is worth knowing if that is a subject of interest.⁴ I am thankful for the diverse ministries of our religious communities in the Episcopal Church. I think Father Brown is happy that this witness has returned to Saint Mary's.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁴ Gerard Austin, *The Rite of Confirmation: Anointing with the Spirit* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1985).