Praying always and in all ways is guaranteed to bring about change. Why? Everything is seen in a new light! It's a way of life, and grows by starting where you are and going wherever it leads. There are lots of ways and times and places when it's possible to pray. Every day.

Sometimes prayer happens in silence and solitude. Okay, so those moments are hard to find. More often it involves the voices of a community. Most of the time, though, prayer happens in the midst of a noisy world that's moving at a frenzied pace. It's a challenge to keep God's Word and Spirit alive, and to cultivate a life of prayer anywhere. Like most things, it helps to pay attention and, it takes practice!

The spiritual life of Christians is based in part on the stories of people who believed before us and are remembered for faithful living. Some of them lived a very long time ago, and are remembered in the Bible or in legends of saintly lives. Other stories focus on leaders in the Church who made a mark on history. Most stories are about ordinary folks, known only to their families, their friends and their neighbors. They practiced their faith and exercised their leadership by living with integrity among an intimate circle of relationships.

It's important to learn the stories of the tradition; it's just as important to notice and name and honor the witness of ordinary folks who are part of our own heritage.

The world is desperate for dialogue, and today any spiritual dialogue needs to be both ecumenical and interfaith. Like prayer, dialogue reveals everything in a new light. Think about this: one issue of a weekly news magazine or Sunday paper contains more information than an ordinary person in the 13th century (when Dominic founded his Order of Preachers) would ever have encountered in a lifetime. Throw in access to the infinite number of resources available on the internet; it's suddenly overwhelming!
That’s why knowing the stories of our spiritual tradition is essential. We learn them over the years by participating in the sacramental life of the church. This helps us be clear about who we are, what we believe and how our prayer can be for others. It’s also important to be able to listen to and appreciate the stories that are important to others who are formed by different spiritual traditions. Being open to dialogue enlarges human imagination, helping us understand ancient, non-western and indigenous traditions as well as future possibilities.

Developing a more contemplative way of living isn’t just for religious folks these days. As the pace of life in the world quickens and intrudes on interior peace, people feel fragmented and they desire practices that will help them live more peacefully, integrating body, mind and spirit.

From the beginning, St. Dominic expected the community in his Order of Preachers to be grounded in what he called an assiduous study of truth and in a life of prayer and contemplation. Assiduous? Okay, how about serious, steady, constant, untiring. Dominic believed that by being faithful to this way of life the members would grow. They would become transformed by this intense and intimate experience of God. They would become both hearers and doers of the Word of God. This would also give zeal for the active ministry of their preaching mission. Everything in their ordinary world, and every relationship, would be seen through the eyes of God, the eyes of truth and love.

The whole point of the spiritual life Dominic desired for his Order of Preachers was so they would be immersed in the mystery of life, not separated or distanced from it. Why? Because that’s where they could find God. A Dominican of the 14th century, German mystic Meister Eckhart (1260-1325) said “All that God asks is that you go out of yourself and let God be God in you.”

It takes time, maybe a lifetime to develop this kind of contemplative spirit. When you’ve got it, though, it can be amazing! Everything is cast in a new light, and the connection to God and others is obvious. How does it work? Easy: the inner life affects outward behavior. It’s the energy that gives life to the seeker’s longing for God and the disciple’s passion for mission. Life is celebrated in all its fullness right here, right now, in the present moment because that’s where union with God is experienced.

Dialogue with the changing culture has to happen in the present moment, too. That’s how disciples figure out how to best serve the needs of their particular time and place. It’s not necessary to do things the same as they were done in the past; different circumstances call for different approaches. Freedom to be creative and imaginative is guaranteed by the wisdom of integrating contemplative study with the message of the gospel.

For Dominicans prayer expresses a desire to make every word and every deed count, by being more fully present to God’s Presence. That’s the goal of Dominican teaching and preaching, community and ministry. Hope for the future of the world depends on a capacity for contemplative living. Prayerful hearts are spacious enough to embrace newness and otherness and to be present to God’s Presence everywhere.

Hope for the future also depends on the discipline of contemplative listening. This practice increases generosity and creates an openness to gifts of wisdom that are graciously shared and gratefully received. It makes us conscious of oneness in the universe, and promotes the courage to cross boundaries between religious traditions, political differences and economic structures. Humility enables the important next step: developing an appreciation for what is authentic in other spiritual traditions. Literature and the arts, history and theology, sacred spaces and
liturgical seasons, customs, moral actions and beliefs: these all have a rich Catholic tradition. Each can also open the door to ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Contemplata aliis Tradere is a time-honored motto of the Dominican tradition. It means to “hand on to others what is contemplated.” When we do that it unleashes enormous potential. Who knows what fresh understandings will be revealed when everything is seen in a new light?!

Youth and Young Adults

**At The Heart of Dominic’s Charism**

- Community Helps us Pay Attention
- Prayer Is About Staying Connected
- Study...Who Knows Where It Can Lead?
- Preaching Takes Imagination, Simplicity and Grace
- Catholic and Dominican Means Bringing the Gospel to Life

Project Coordinators
Barbara Dannhausen, O.P., Director
Ruth Poochigian, O.P., editor

© Dominican Mission and Heritage, 2006