Freedom and generosity are signs of life and signs of holiness. For a mission or movement they are also signs of flourishing, not simply externals. Both freedom and generosity demonstrate a reliance on God and a desire to be inclusive. They celebrate an abundance that encourages living beyond fears about the disaster that scarcity could bring. The generosity of God's love offers the freedom to share that same love with others.

Freedom makes it possible to see through the eyes of others and to understand the reality of place more clearly from that unique vantage point. Freedom fosters critical minds and loving hearts, and urges taking stands based on conviction rather than power. Grace cannot be hidden when truth and love are offered with freedom and generosity. As the Dominican Order observes its 8th centenary, many women, who for much of that time were a hidden presence in the preaching mission of the Order, are both visible and vocal. Throughout the world today the grace of their presence is recognized. With freedom and generosity they engage in the preaching mission, exercising

Anteres, the Fiery Heart of the Scorpion
Catherine of Siena, *Dialog*, 92
influence in courageous and creative ways. These women are theologians and biblical scholars, teachers and preachers. They proclaim God’s Word in public and in private, through words and images, healing arts and spiritual direction, music and dance, administration and organizational leadership.

Can freedom and generosity prevail amid the story of human greed? Sollicitudo rei socialis, written to honor the 20th anniversary of Populorum Progressio addressed “the interdependence between developed and less developed countries” and the question of the international debt, which continues to burden and crush the economies of poor nations. Their voices can be heard in the pleading prayer of Psalm 30 “Be gracious to me.” Today, on the 40th anniversary, even use of the word development as a description of how the world is divided is seen by some as problematic. Only God’s endless love can overcome the tensions that continue to separate the majority world from the privileged minority. The constant presence, the freedom and the generosity of those who are dedicated to truth boldly disregards obstacles that stand in the way of genuine partnership and interdependence.

Can the interdependence the world needs grow alongside the prosperity enjoyed by the small percentage of the world’s population who live in rich nations? As with other forms of power, prosperity has contributed to a growing fear related to losing everything rather than to a sense of security. In this sense prosperity appears to be primarily an illusion. When it is unmasked it often reveals an emptiness and spiritual poverty among those who deliberately set out to be successful in the market place, regardless of the disparity it creates for others.

Prosperity has grown in direct contrast to a loss of solidarity. It is as though prosperity itself has become a distancing phenomenon. As affluence grows, possessions multiply. This is often accompanied by a perceived need for protection. At a time when the word solidarity has become more widely known, along with an awareness of being part of a global reality, the actual experience of neighborliness has seemed to diminish. On the other hand, when freedom grows, so does generosity. Serving the common good is no longer seen as a threat to personal need.

When freedom and generosity come from a place of deep trust there are no longer limits or fears. This is how the Gospels describe Jesus, and this is what is recorded about Dominic in the testimony of those who knew him. In the cloud of saints and witnesses, whether widely known or known only by those close to them, or in the partnership of all who have embraced the disciplines and practices that offer freedom from attachments to power, prestige, and possessions. There are no longer limits or fear. The gospel truth prevails: “fear is useless; what is needed is hope.”

**THE PREACHING MISSION CONTINUES**

“Dominic fascinates us by his freedom. The Order has always flourished when we live with Dominic’s freedom of heart and mind. Dominic did not leave us a spirituality embodied in a collection of sermons or theological texts. Instead we have inherited . . . a form of government that frees us to respond with compassion to those who hunger for the Word of God. This may appear surprising. In contemporary culture, it is usually assumed that government is about control, about limiting the freedom of the individual. The temptation of our age is toward fatalism, the belief that faced with the problems of our world we can do nothing. This passivity can infect religious life too. We share Dominic’s freedom when we are so moved by the urgency to preach the Gospel that we dare to take difficult decisions, whether to undertake a new initiative, close a community, or endure in an apostolate that is hard. For this freedom, good government is necessary. The opposite of government is not freedom but paralysis.” *Timothy Radcliffe, OP (Freedom and Responsibility: Towards A Spirituality of Government, To Praise, To Bless, To Preach: Words of Grace and Truth, Dominican Publications, 2004).*

“The poor, the underprivileged, have the same right as anyone else to have a Christian formation of quality—solid, well grounded. It is even a question of evangelical justice; theology is not reserved for a select few, an elite! I believe that a community is the place from which one does theology, a kind of ecclesial building site, a laboratory of the Kingdom in which it is given to clarify, to put together, invent the right and coherent attitudes with which we announce our ministry: we talk about what we experience.” *Brigitte Rigo, OP ([Belgium] Building*
"Spirit of God' connotes God as reaching out, as connecting, as self-giving and givale, as generous and compassionate. God is God, but God is also Spirit and Word. As Spirit and Word we find in God an openness and freedom toward what is other than God, toward creating that which is other than God." Donald Goergen, OP (Fire of Love; Encountering the Holy Spirit, Paulist Press, 2006).

"The mission of Dominic is a mission of compassion. This Jubilee of the Order coincides with another important anniversary: forty years from the publication of the document Populorum Progressio (March 26, 1967). In the drafting of this encyclical our brother Louis Joseph Lebret (1897–1966) collaborated in a fundamental manner." Re-read this text, wherein are the traces of a profound spirituality of compassion. (International Dominican Commission for Justice and Peace, January 30, 2007.)

"Today we see people trying to secure a sure food supply, cures for diseases, and steady employment. We see them trying to eliminate every ill, to remove every obstacle which offends human dignity. They are striving to exercise greater personal responsibility; to do more, learn more, and have more so that they might increase their personal worth. Yet, at the same time, a large number of them live amid conditions which frustrate their personal worth. . . political freedom is not enough. They must also acquire social and economic structures and processes." (Populorum Progressio, 6.)

For Reflection

What was the foundation of Dominic's freedom, and what can it teach us?

What are signs of freedom and generosity in a community?

On January 4 the Order honors the memory of Czech Saint Zedislava, known for her extraordinary commitment to the common good. Married and the mother of four children, she was untiring in her generosity and genuine love for the poor, and dedicated to promoting the Order of Preachers.
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