Preaching requires imagination. Some need to hear the gospel message of justice. Others its message of hope. Still others long to hear a word of mercy. The message for all is that God promises to be wherever life is. No matter what circumstances seem to block out the possibility of making a difference, every person has the potential to offer his or her life to the service of others by dedicating themselves, as Mary did: “Let it be done unto me” (Lk 1).

Among the stories told of Dominic’s founding of the Order of Preachers in the 13th century were those about the necessity to adopt new ways of communicating the Gospel; otherwise preachers would simply go unheard. It continues to be true to this day: if a change of heart and mind is to be the fundamental response to the Gospel, the preacher must exhibit both integrity and humility and at the same time exercise imagination when proclaiming God’s word.

Ring Nebula
Catherine of Siena, Dialogue, 141
Discovering new forms of communication is necessary if God’s love is to be shared in a credible way with people today. This is a digital world. There is also a great and growing divide between those who are part of it and those who are not. The media-savvy are often the same persons who cannot find a way to identify with traditional ways that churches gather people. In Christian cultures, what had once been an environment known for having recognizable symbols and stories and a widely understood vocabulary is now largely unknown to generations and often confusing. In some cultures, Catholic Christianity, once something to be suspicious of, if not feared, is now regarded warily.

The mystery of God’s presence on earth is convincing for those who have an experience of God’s power and grace. The story of the Word becomes flesh as remembered in Luke’s Gospel begins with the announcement to Mary and concludes with her yes to bear God’s Word in the world. The mystery of such an encounter with God can begin with silence: the silence in a human heart, the silence of an expectant community, the silence of a waiting world. Silence, even in the midst of domination, noise, and distraction.

Jesus’ promise to be present wherever justice, hope, and mercy are proclaimed, does not automatically lead to understanding and transformation. Authentic preaching, lively worship, and consistent care among a community of faith “on fire with love for God,” as Catherine of Siena once described it, makes the Gospel inviting—even when taking the next logical step (consistent action on behalf of justice) remains difficult.

No exceptions. How is that for a summary of the preaching mission? God’s love is meant for all: no exceptions! There are many challenges, of course. How are preachers to embody the good news that their words convey? Does preaching convey a trustworthy and safe message? Do preachers convey the spiritual wisdom many traditions promote: “Be the change you want to see in the world.” When the hearers live in a culture that is literally saturated in stories that include information, news, and entertainment (often blurred together), how are stories that tell the truth of human experience shared in credible ways?

Communication is critical to the message. Stories that convey personal experience and highlight the meaning of a text in the life of the preacher and the experience of the community are evocative and alive. When hearts are moved, it is sometimes because the stories almost seem to bypass the intellectual, and draw forth meaning from hidden emotional memories—from deep within the preacher or deep within the hearer. “Let it be done unto me.” The Spirit has the power to act in the hearts of those who desire to change. God’s word is alive.

The Preaching Mission Continues

“Our preaching will not be complete unless it relates the Gospel to people’s lives. As Jesus made his message relevant to the lives of people in his day, we must make his message relevant to the people of ours. Faithful to the Gospel, our preaching must also address the questions people ask. This imposes upon us the obligation of listening and an alertness also to the movements which are taking place in our rapidly changing societies.” Damian Byrne, OP (The Common Life, To Praise, To Bless, To Preach: Words of Grace and Truth, Dominican Publications, 2004, p. 231).

“Everything I do, especially teaching, I see as a kind of proclamation and sharing of the word of God. To the often-asked question: Does the Dominican Order in Slovakia need women theologians? Not just the Order, the whole church. My own experience shows me that to ‘do theology’ is very appropriate for a Dominican Sister, because her primary task is to become a preacher of the Word in such a way that everyone can meet and know Christ.” Julia Daniela Iskrova, OP ([Slovakia] Building Bridges: Dominicans Doing Theology Together, Dominican Publications, 2005).

“We are called to witness to the Truth. We are called to preach to those whose actions enslave and degrade all members of the Earth community. Like Dominic, we are to stand in solidarity with the margintated, those who have no voice.” Sharon Therese Zayac, OP (Earth Spirituality in the Catholic and Dominican Traditions, Sor Juana Press, 2003).
"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.)

"... civil progress and economic development are the only road to peace. Educators should resolve to inspire young people with a love for the needy nations. ... the press is to place before our eyes the initiatives that are being taken to promote mutual aid and the tragic spectacle of misery and poverty that people tend to ignore to salve their consciences. Thus at least the wealthy will know that the poor stand outside their doors waiting to receive some left-overs from their banquets". (*Populorum Progressio*, 83.)

**FOR REFLECTION**

How has preaching helped you to *be the change you want to see in the world*?

When has preaching called you to *take a vulnerable stand*?

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**MARCH 25, THE FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION, HONORS MARY AND HER ACCEPTANCE OF THE INCARNATION OF GOD. MARY IS DESCRIBED BY CATHERINE OF SIENA (1347–1380) AS “TEMPLE OF THE TRINITY! ... BEARER OF THE FIRE! ... MINISTER OF MERCY.”**
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Barbara Dannhausen, OP, Director
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