Mercy is what I do. The Hebrew prophet taught, even before Jesus, that it is the Creator who is the one "... ready to be sought... ready to be found" (Is 65). Over and over in the writings of 14th century Dominican, St. Catherine of Siena, she repeats the promise of God: Mercy is what I do. Immersed in gifts of memory, understanding, and love, the presence of God is revealed as a trustworthy companion, offering strength and security.

God's mercy is offered as a gift freely given. Along with it comes the gift of humble acceptance. Every Dominican asks simply on the day of profession for "the mercy of God, and yours." And so begins what will be a lifelong quest: to recognize the mercy of God, to receive it, and to freely offer it to others. Dwelling in the presence of God's mercy opens the way to an even deeper understanding: to rest secure in knowing that God has not changed in regard to people; rather God allows people to open their hearts, to change their minds! Even though the world today

fire and tears are one
in burning desire

Anteres, the Fiery Heart of the Scorpion
Catherine of Siena, Dialog, 92
is surrounded, even drowning, in empty words that intrude on the human capacity for listening. It is in the midst of this noise we are asked to trust that God will hear the cry for mercy coming from so many places on this planet.

"To teach and to preach . . . about love and justice is the role of the Church" (Gaudium et Spes). This is what Dominic claimed as the mission for his Order of Preachers as well. This is ‘not an optional contribution’ Paul VI urged in Evangelii Nuntiandi, it is both necessary and unique. What makes it unique is that at the heart of the gospel message is mercy—a mercy that goes beyond what may be experienced in religious or even liturgical settings. It is in the very presence of life. It is the holiness embodied in every aspect of life.

Presence is especially important in a world that more commonly creates distance. Advances in technology, transportation, and communication in the 21st century have deluded many into thinking that relationships are closer and resources more readily available to be shared. Loving others for God’s sake, on the other hand, demands genuine presence. This is a more authentic way to learn what needs to be addressed, what needs to be said.

The mercy of God led Jesus to bestow on Mary Magdalene the extraordinary gift of recognition, calling her name and then calling her to a new life: the life of an apostle! He entrusted her to announce the unbelievably good news—that God’s presence is alive in the Risen One. Astonishing as it was, Jesus invited Mary Magdalene to move into a world that would forever be different—for her and for all who experienced the power of resurrection.

Responding in faith is as a radical act as it has ever been. Believing has never been sufficient. Followers are called to proclaim with their own words and to embody in their lives the meaning of the real presence. In the words of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, yes, we acknowledge that Christ is really present in the bread and wine of Eucharist. Proclaiming the real presence of Christ in the Word, in those who minister, and “in the whole community gathered to worship and pray” is equally at the heart of this radical act of faith. And when sent forth, it is to recognize that presence, and to love and serve wherever it is encountered in the world.

Preachers who are faithful to this gospel message begin by dwelling in the mercy and presence of the Risen One. Only then can their words hold everything in the light of Truth. Humility enables them to recognize the Risen One in the world in which they live and move. Then with longing, desire, and passion, true witness bursts forth to give hope to others.

THE PREACHING MISSION CONTINUES

“St. Dominic wanted his Order to be, and to be called, an Order of Preachers. This is the title he chose for himself and his companions, the title granted by the Church. It determined not only his mission, but his entire way of life. Words are empty unless they are supported by the witness of life, both individually and as a community. 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. How can we speak to people’s needs, unless in some measure we share their joys and sorrows? Before we speak we must listen, not only to people’s voices, but to their eyes and hearts as well.” Damian Byrne, OP (The Ministry of Preaching, To Praise, To Bless, To Preach: Words of Grace and Truth, Dominican Publications, 2004).

“One can search the Scriptures, and see in them only the laws, the precepts, the duties, the perennial source of the ‘pious satisfaction’ of religious groups. But one can also find in the Scriptures the light: one can receive the promise of forgiveness and salvation and, consequently, commit oneself to the life and the happiness of others, encouraging them continually. One can discover the source of life, draw from it, and share the discovered treasure with one’s neighbours. There are so many people around who thirst for happiness, who have lost their way. If only we could, after carefully searching the Scriptures, become the lamps, witnesses of the light! Courage!

"God is not an object to be named, but rather a presence to be experienced. Thy Mystery of the Divine is beyond naming, yet in some sense all creatures are said to be 'names' of God." Adrian Marie Hofstetter, OP (Earth-Friendly, Lindisfarne Books, 2004.)

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.)

"Countless millions are starving; countless families are destitute, countless others are steeped in ignorance; countless people need schools, hospitals, and homes worthy of the name. In such circumstances, we cannot tolerate public and private expenditures of a wasteful nature; we cannot but condemn lavish displays of wealth by nations or individuals; we cannot approve a debilitating arms race. It is our solemn duty to speak out against them . . . before it is too late!" (Populorum Progressio, 53.)

FOR REFLECTION

What is the mercy at the heart of the Gospel? Where in the world is it needed?

How can "listening, not only to people's voices, but to their eyes and hearts as well" enhance the preaching mission?

JULY 22 IS WHEN THE CHURCH HONORS MARY MAGDALENE, HOLY EQUAL OF THE APOSTLES, AND PATRON OF THE ORDER OF PREACHERS.
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