Meeting the Charism Again/For the First Time

Dominican Values

Seeking Truth

“Truth is a light that reveals the beauty and goodness of God’s world, and also its suffering and pain.”

Timothy Radcliffe, O.P.
85th Master of the Order
TIMOTHY Radcliffe, O.P., leader of the Order of Preachers from 1992 to 2001, exercised an itinerant leadership; he traveled the world visiting Dominican centers, meeting with scholars, contemplatives, artists and activists. Wherever he went, to schools and hospitals, mission sites and war zones, he was present as a mendicant, begging for words that could help him share with the world all that he saw and heard: beauty and suffering, goodness and pain, abundance and misery, hope and terror. His presence, companionship and prayer offered courage and hope wherever he went, and as he left each gathering he reports being renewed in the conviction that seeking truth by being faithful to a life of study “…builds community and so prepares a home for Christ to dwell among us…” In a world which has lost confidence in the value of reason, it witnesses to the possibility of a common search for the truth.”

This same contemplative spirit guides intellect and imagination in seeking truth, allowing the confluence of all forms of knowledge to enhance human wisdom. One goal of a Dominican education is acquiring the skills for seeing and appreciating this unity of meaning. Another is examining personal experience and all knowledge in the light of Gospel values. The hope is that every lecture, meeting, project, experiment, report, assignment, and in particular, every conversation, will lead teacher and learner toward becoming truer reflections of the image of God, persons who can love more truthfully, and speak the truth with love.

THE YOUNG friar was sent to study in Paris, and later to Cologne where he was mentored by another outstanding Dominican, Albert the Great. Granted a license to teach at the University of Paris as Master of Theology when he was still quite young, Thomas was soon recognized as an extraordinary scholar and teacher. Among the numerous political and religious controversies that marked his career, he eloquently defended the right of friars from the new mendicant religious orders to teach in the universities, challenging vigorous opposition by the resident secular clergy.

Known for his holiness, compassion and kindness, Thomas is remembered as both an intellectual and a preacher. The depth of his intense spiritual life inspired not only his
theological writing, and his poetry and hymns, but also his preaching and teaching. He showed this same holiness in sincere compassion toward all to whom he ministered.

His passion for truth led Thomas to engage in dialogue with wisdom wherever he found it. Always rooted in scripture, he studied the commentaries of other scholars, and the writings of Church Fathers. Remaining faithful to his own tradition, his study also led him into dialogue with pre-Christian teachers such as the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato. It was a love of truth that inspired Thomas in his intellectual efforts and led to his conviction that the mystery of the universe created by God was much greater and more complex than previously understood by Christian theologians. His original and creative thought enlarged the church’s understanding and provided clarity and direction for further study.

Engaging in a systematic and dialogical approach to his study, Thomas accepted new understandings that challenged his own opinions. This made him vulnerable to fierce criticism and condemnation from academic and religious opponents. At the same time, the genius of his imagination was tempered by genuine humility. His fidelity to the pursuit of truth provided Thomas with unusual conviction, depth of theological insight, understanding and confidence. Though controversy followed him even after death, Thomas was named a saint in 1323, and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1567. Thomas continues to inspire scholars, students and leaders in every generation to a holy curiosity, never fearing to engage in genuine discourse on the issues of the day.

**For nearly** eight centuries Dominic’s daughters and sons in the Order of Preachers have dedicated the resources of their communities, projects and institutions to preaching the Gospel in every way imaginable. This same spirit is evident today. It is embodied in a collaborative and creative spirit that invites a wide circle of students and teachers, administrators and trustees, neighbors and friends to participate in and promote the adventure of its intellectual and spiritual tradition.

Sharing a common vision of God’s presence in creation, their professional, spiritual and missionary efforts gather people of conviction in a communal search for truth. Some are scholars and artists, others pastors, spiritual directors, teachers or healers. They may use conventional means of communication or emerging technologies, and their sphere of influence may be local or global. All are called to a way of being in the world that frees them for their mission of preaching the good news of God’s justice and love.

Education for the present generation depends on crossing cultural, religious and intellectual borders, and discovering in the process that truth is never complete. Embracing a fuller truth, whether from knowledge that is new or newly found, is possible when inquiry is fostered in an environment that welcomes questions, and offers mutual respect for both persons and traditions. Exercising imagination and taking risks is difficult and may even be threatening. It can also reinforce the courage to let go of what no longer serves, while embracing what is revealed as a fuller truth.

Seeking truth within an unfolding and living tradition flourishes when minds and hearts are free to dialogue, willing to risk certainty and give questions a full exploration.
TRUTH...that which conforms to reality or fact.

“We must love them both, those whose opinions we share and those whose opinions we do not share. They’ve both labored in the search for Truth and both have helped us in finding it.”

Thomas Aquinas, O.P.

Oh eternal Trinity, my sweet love! You, light, give us light. You, wisdom, give us wisdom. You, supreme strength, strengthen us. Today, eternal God, let our cloud be dissipated so that we may perfectly know and follow your Truth in truth, with a free and simple heart.

Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)
Prayers, trans. Suzanne Noffke, O.P.

“What unites us and draws us beyond all divisions is truth...this is the mystery we preach.”

Timothy Radcliffe, O.P.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

We study and pray to discover truth.
• How do we honor the importance of prayer as a vital and living tradition?
• What resources must we provide in fulfilling our responsibility to the tradition of prayerful inquiry?

We acknowledge those prejudices and social conditions that keep us from the truth.
• How do we communicate the importance of this conviction, and engage the entire community in becoming aware of circumstances that need to be challenged?
• How are we willing to scrutinize our own biases so that we can be free to address the issues before us?

We foster the arts and sciences as means to reveal truth.
• In what ways do we support both discipline and freedom in seeking truth?
• How does the design of our programs and organizational culture encourage diversity in expression?

We speak the truth, accepting its consequences and confirming our belief that truth sets God’s power free.
• How do we promote imagination and critical thought in dialogue with the living faith tradition?
• What resources are necessary to support integrity in governance, planning and decision-making?
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Additional resources for
Seeking Truth


* http://www.op.org

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