

APPENDIX III

HOMILY OF THE MASTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER ON THE FEAST OF ST. DOMINIC CALERUEGA, 1995

It is truly a pleasure to be able to share with all of you this feast of St. Dominic. He is a son of Caleruega. We are all his brothers. Therefore, we have not returned to St. Dominic's home, but rather we have come back to our own home. It has been a true joy to spend these days here, with all of you. I must confess, however, that before coming here, I thought (as did many other brothers), "What am I going to do or see in Caleruega? After a few days I'm sure I'll be anxious to get away..." I must confess to you that I was mistaken. Really, we've all fallen in love with Caleruega, her people, her countryside. I must thank you all for everything.

We have also learned to understand Saint Dominic a little better, and surely the sun and land of Caleruega is like him. It's true that since then the countryside has changed. Most of the trees have been cut down in order to build the Invincible Armada and attack England. But fear not. I'm not going to talk about that now.

What certainly has not changed is the sun, the light. St. Dominic is a man of sun, of light. Frequently he is called "Lumen Ecclesiae", Light of the Church. Castille is a place of light. The other night I was invited to a wine cellar up on the Peña de San Jorge. We sat down to enjoy your good wine and to watch the sunset. The whole countryside was vibrant with color, full of light. There was an extraordinary clarity in the air. When the sun had set, throughout the entire Peña we saw the lights from the cooking fires.

Even the flowers of your fields, the sunflowers, follow the sun, seeking the light. When I see them lined up in their rows, they often make me think of the brothers at the General Chapter, seated on the benches in the Plenary Hall. We too are here to find the light. In

those moments I almost expected to see one of the flowers lift a leaf and ask to speak: “Numero due centi tredici. Parlo in italiano”. I’ve also realized that when these sunflowers get old and heavy, they no longer turn toward the sun. They wait for the sun to come to them. This is how we can be too.

St. Dominic was a man of light, the Light of the Church. That means he saw things clearly. He saw things as they were, in all their beauty and in all their ugliness. It was said that he was happy during the day, he laughed with his brethren, and at night he prayed alone and he wept. He was a man of great joy and deep sadness. In some way, they are the same thing, as he saw the world as it was, as God sees it, totally good and marvelous, yet crucified. For all of us the great challenge of this Chapter has been trying to become men of light, men who see things as they are, to share the sorrows and joys of Dominic.

I have never known a Chapter that was so rich in joy and festivity. Surely you frequently heard the sound of the songs, of the party. We have danced and sung with you near here, in the plaza. It is an ancient Dominican tradition. Blessed Jordan of Saxony, successor of St. Dominic, once went into the church and found the novices laughing out loud. An elderly brother ordered them to be quiet. Then Blessed Jordan came forward and said to them: “Laugh, my dear friends, laugh loudly and don’t stop because of him. I give you permission to laugh, since Christ has made you free”.

Dominic was a smiling, joyful man, because he saw people as God sees them, with our beauty and goodness. When God made the world, he saw that everything was good and that goodness is always here, although hidden and buried. The worst criminal, the most depraved person, has a deep goodness, a beauty that remains hidden, even from themselves, but that God sees and loves. That was the secret of Dominic’s joy. That is why it was said of him “because he loved everyone, everyone loved him”.

Not very long ago, one of the brothers here explained in a beautiful sermon how God counts each hair on our head. He explained how this is not something about God's knowledge. Rather it's about his tenderness, the tenderness of a mother who knows, who washes and loves her baby's hair. This is the tenderness and the joy that we should have for each other.

But Dominic wept at night. He wept for all the misery, the suffering and the sin in this world. He often cried out: "Oh God, what will happen to the poor sinners?" Do we dare to look into the face of the world's pain? Are we brave enough to allow ourselves to be touched by all that is happening in Bosnia or Ruanda? I remember, upon my arrival at the train station in Calcutta seeing all the beggars waiting for the passengers in order to thrust themselves at them with their stumps and deformities. It was something hard to watch, too much to take. So we closed our eyes and we got away as quickly as we could. Do we dare to look at the hurts of our friends or, rather, when they start to talk, do we change the subject? After the war, many of those who came back from concentration camps discovered that when they began to tell what they had lived through, no one would listen to them. No one wanted to know about those things.

Do we dare face our own sadness, the hurts and wounds hidden within ourselves? Do we dare bring them out into the light, into the sunlight? This has been one of the desires of the brethren in this Chapter, to sincerely bring our own lives out into the light. There is an ancient prayer of St. William of Thiery: "I do not wish to hide myself, like Adam, from the face of the One who sees all; be it to approve or to condemn, I seek your face, O Lord".

That is why Dominic was a man who saw things as they were, and that is why he was filled with joy and sadness. No one can know that joy, truth, and deep happiness, without entering into the dark zones of human life and without knowing its suffering. Because that is where we find God waiting for us, crucified and victorious. This is the dark night where we find God. As St. John of the Cross wrote: "The night joins the beloved to her lover, the night transfigures the beloved into the life of her lover".

The most joyful Eucharist in which I have ever participated, took place in Haiti, at a time of persecution and suffering. It is there, where there is no hope, no future, nothing at all, that we can discover that surprising joy of God who has pitched his tent among us and has given us His body and His blood. We sing and we dance with more joy than any rich person who lacks nothing could have ever done, because God has come to share in our lives. There is a story about the first moments of the Order. A woman was walking near a Dominican convent and was scandalized to hear loud laughter as though all the brothers were having a great feast. Perhaps you have heard the same from us. The good woman went inside to scold the brothers for their drunkenness and discovered that they were laughing because they had nothing to eat. That is not our excuse. Those brothers knew a joy which a rich person will never know, that of total dependence on God.

We all seek happiness. But if we could catch a glimpse of the joy that Dominic had, then we would dare to enter the darkness. We would have to open our eyes to see the suffering of others and allow that sorrow to affect our lives. We must dare to face with courage, our own darkness, our failures, our own moments of despair. Then we will find God awaiting us with open arms and we will be able to shout out: "May your face shine upon us and save us"!