

A DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY OF FORMATION **MARGARET ORMOND, OP (DSI/Columbus)**

Once upon a time, some twenty odd years ago, the Communists imprisoned a Vietnamese theologian. After a while, some companions and jailers asked this prisoner how he was able to maintain his faith and hope. He knew he had to answer them in a way that they would understand, not with scholastic terminology, but with the simple truth of the Gospel. Finally he found a way of explaining. He said. "I left everything because I love the defects of Jesus: he has a terrible memory, doesn't know math or logic, and he doesn't understand finances or economics. " (**Testimony of Hope**, Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan p.36.)

When I think about this topic of Dominican Spirituality for you, my august sisters and brothers, who are living this reality day in and day out, I begin by saying that we can learn the most about this topic by looking at the defects of Dominic.

He disobeyed some of his own rules and disregarded the existing laws of the Church.

He failed in getting some of his own ideas off the ground and he took on more than he was prepared for.

He was negligent in some ways because he didn't leave, like other founders did, a Rule of his own making, or a body of writing to guide and inspire his followers.

So there is hope for people like you and me. We do not have to have it altogether. In fact, that would not be very Dominican. In imitation of Dominic, we can be disobedient, unsuccessful, outrageous, and irresponsible, and still be good formators! So let's relax! As I speak about formators, I include all the vocation directors present for they are truly the ones to position us for the future.

After reading and reflecting on our Dominican history and tradition, and reflecting on my own experience in formation and leadership and presently as the International Coordinator of Dominican Sisters International, I would like to consider three qualities that typify our Dominican Spirituality of Formation---three ways that the Holy Spirit inspires us to be Dominican formators today. This is my list. It has been enriching to arrive at these three. Maybe some of you would enjoy searching for your own list. What are the qualities of Dominican leadership that I see? Very simply, they are to be *trusting, truthful* and *tender*. I hope to develop these qualities so that you can see if they resonate with your own perceptions, and/or to challenge you to include them more explicitly in your personal formation style. I do not have enough time to explore each of these three qualities in terms of God, self, others, so I have refined my thinking to state that I think Dominican formators are to trust in God, be truthful with self and tender towards others. I will look at the Dominican foundation for each, the effect when such qualities are absent in formation, and some suggestions for reclaiming them in our daily lives.

TO TRUST IN GOD

It is not original on my part to include this aspect in any understanding of Dominican Spirituality. I am sure that many of you recall immediately that marvelous quote from Schillebeeckx. He states that Dominican Spirituality consists in the "Belief in the absolute priority of God's grace in any human action: the theological direction of the Dominican life and its programme in relation to

ethics, the world, society and the betterment of people. There is no cramped self-concern but trust in God. I can trust God more than myself.... God still gives an unexpected future to the limited meaning and scope of my own actions." (**God Among Us**, Crossroad, NY, 1987, p. 241) Koudelka also focuses on Dominic's trust in divine Providence. "If the Order is indelibly stamped with the imprint of Dominic's personality, this is not because he imposed or sought to impose his own ideas and temperament on it, but because he imparted to it his own sense of the dynamism of God's providence and his immense confidence in God and in the helpers and companions God gave him." (Vladimir Koudelka, **Dominic**, Darton, Longman, Todd, England, p. XVII)

We have within our tradition this principal of total trust in Providence. From the very beginning, Dominic sent out his young preachers, even novices, all over the world because he told them that he would pray for them. John of Spain testified at the process of canonization: "Dominic had such confidence in God's goodness that he sent even the ignorant to preach saying, "Do not be afraid; the Lord will be with you and will put power in your mouth." (Simon Tugwell, "Dominican Risks", **Ashram**, p.187). A good example of this trust is seen in the story of Buonviso: "He was a novice and had no skill in preaching, because he had not studied scripture, Dominic told him to go to Piacenza to preach. Dominic spoke so charmingly that he induced Buonviso to go, saying that God would be with him and would put words into his mouth. God did in fact give Buonviso such grace in his preaching that many people were converted and three entered the Order as a result of this preaching." (Simon Tugwell, **Early Dominicans**, SPCK, London, p. 73) There was criticism of Dominic's "carefree" way of sending out the young and unprepared. What Jacques de Vitry said of the Franciscans was also said of the Dominicans: "This form of religious life strikes me as very dangerous, because not only mature men, but also young, immature ones, who ought to have been confined and tested within the constraints of conventual discipline, are scattered throughout the whole world in pairs." ("Dominican Risks", p. 174)) This dangerous approach, I believe, had much to do with Dominic's reliance on divine Providence.

There are so many examples in Dominic's life where we see this trust in God. For ten years in Fanjeaux, he was alone. In 1207 Diego died and so did one of the original three legates. In 1208 another one of these legates was assassinated. Dominic could not get the project off the ground. Dominic was basically a failure according to good management criteria. But he held out, did not give up and trusted, ever so really, on Providence. I can't help but think that this was his dark night of the soul. Like John of the Cross, he experienced an impasse but never gave up on God.

As founder, Dominic's trust in God is likewise evident. We see this when Dominic introduced the formula of profession. The followers of Dominic were to vow obedience first to God. At that time other religious groups made profession to some Rule or Church structure, but Dominic insisted that his followers would first make obedience to God. God was to come first in all things. God was to be the primary person to whom we would commit ourselves. God was to hold first place in Dominican religious life, and God was to have the first hold on Dominic's followers. Secondly, they were to make profession to superiors, which would "be relativised by the explicit recognition of the independent actions of God." (**Early Dominicans**, p. 26). First, last and always, God was the one on whom we were to rely. Yesterday, today and tomorrow, God would be the source of our life.

Another striking example of this trust was when Dominic insisted on mendicancy at the 1220 Chapter. While making concessions previously, and waiting patiently for the full realization of this goal, Dominic said that the Order was to renounce all fixed incomes and revenues, even preachers on the road, individual friars and communities were to live off alms. What better witness to this

dependence on divine Providence than to beg for one's daily needs? At this same Chapter, Dominic entrusted the Order to his brothers and asked to be relieved of his position. The friars would not accept, so Dominic set up a group of four collaborators to assist him with the Chapter. (This might be the first Dominican leadership team or steering committee!) Believing that nothing is impossible with God, he could surrender his life's dream to the care of his brothers. As Schillebeeckx said, and Dominic believed, God gives an unexpected future to the limited meaning and scope of our own actions. It is no wonder that when the controversy about the theology of grace began, that the followers of Dominic adhered to the interpretation that-- good deeds, while being genuinely mine, are also entirely due to God.

All throughout his life, Dominic kept in constant contact with his boss. While re-reading Vicaire's life of Dominic this summer, I was overcome by the repeated references to Dominic's contemplative prayer. He prayed all day, during difficulties, before decisions and after hours. He prayed everywhere: on the road, in the chapel, in the chapter hall, at the Vatican. He trusted personally in his relationship with the God of Providence. It was not a yearly report or a quarterly Board meeting, or a monthly retreat or day of prayer. It was constantly.

Because of this confidence in God, Dominic trusted his community. He deliberately tried not to impose his own views too much on his associates. After the Fourth Lateran Council, when Dominic was told that he had to choose an existing rule, he returned home to Toulouse to discuss this matter with his community and to listen to their wisdom. Together they choose the Rule of Augustine. While Dominic's trusted in the community, it is also apparent that Dominic trusted in himself too, he believed in himself. When he decided to send out his followers in 1217 he met with a lot of resistance, both from the bishop and the brothers. He remained steadfast and stated: "I know what I am doing!" Can you agree that one of Dominic's ways of being a formator was to trust, wholly and completely, in God for everything and with everybody?

What happens to us as Dominican formators when there is not this trust in God? Parker J. Palmer, an influential and contemporary Quaker, talks about "functional atheism: the belief that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with us. This is the unconscious, unexamined conviction that if anything decent is going to happen here, we are the ones to make it happen – a conviction held even by people who talk a good game about God." (**Let Your Life Speak**, Jossey-Boss Inc, California, p. 88) This attitude often drives us to burnout, depression and despair. Through trusting in God in a daily, constant, sort of way, we realize that we are only the Assistant Novice Directress, the Assistant Director of Junior Professed, the Assistant General Councilor in charge of Formation, Assistant Vocation Director. We can resign as "General Manager of the Entire Universe," as well as the entire congregation/province, and just do what we can on our watch. Remember that quote from Walter Farrell: **YOU ARE A DOMINICAN**. "It seems to me quite entrancing to be able to pile into bed realizing there is someone as big as God to do all the worrying that has to be done...You can't get everything done in a day nor can you get any part of it done as well as it should be, or even as well as you'd like it to be; so like the rest of us, you putter at your job with a normal amount of energy, for a reasonable length of time, and then go to bed, with the humiliating yet exhilarating knowledge that you are only a child of God, not God Himself."

Trusting in God enables us to realize that we do not have to carry the whole load. We can share it with our sisters or brothers, who want us to empower them. Trusting our members is a very Dominican form of leadership. Dominic borrowed from Roman law the dictum. "What is of concern to all must be dealt with and agreed by all." (MH Vicaire, **The Genius of St. Dominic**, Dominican

Publications, Nagpur, India, p.41) To this day, I truly believe that wisdom resides in the good will and common sense of our sisterhood and brotherhood and this is because of God's providential plan and care.

Another obstacle is that sometimes we do not trust ourselves. We doubt our abilities to be formators. We are insecure about our capacity to remain strong amidst the chaos. We forget that the hand of God is upon us. And so without even realizing it "we deprive other people of their identities as a way of buttressing our own". (Palmer, p. 86) We rob our sisters and brothers of their abilities to think, respond, create and evaluate. Trusting in the "grace of the office" is also a very Dominican thing to do, is what enables us to relax and be reassured. I remembered when I started working with DSI, I had so many hidden insecurities: DSI will fail because I am not able for it... because I am too American and not International enough...because I am not sure of its future...because I will not be able to engender support, financial and otherwise...because I cannot get done all that I believe should be done...because there is such oppression against women here in Rome...because the Church does not support women in their efforts...because there are so many differences among Dominican sisters...because...because.... And rather than deal with all these insecurities, or even some of them, I latched onto the most visible and negative in my experience and let it get a hold on me. I forgot Meister Eckhart's words: Listen carefully, "If this birth has truly taken place within you, then no creature can any longer bind you. To grasp God in all things, that is the sign of your new birth."

How can we build into our daily lives those moments of contemplative presence where we enjoy the awareness of God's Providence? How can we continually rely on the dynamism of God's Providence? Passive resignation sometimes heard in the expression "It is God's will" is not part of Dominic's legacy, active engagement is the way forward for Dominicans. How can we allow God's providential care to interrupt our busy lives and carry us onward and upward? What holds us back from relying more firmly on God as our rock and fortress? Is it that we do not have the time, or we do not take the time to gain perspective on the reality of the situation before us? I never cease to marvel at the wisdom of our older sisters. Some seem to have perception that includes the past, the present and the future, and a lot of this comes from their reliance, dependence on God in all things. How does the immensity of God's Providence impact our ministries? One of the former Prioresses of my Columbus congregation, Mother Stephanie, wrote four years after the Depression of 1929: "Just put your entire trust in God and go on courageously with your great work; plan everything for the future as if you had a million dollar endowment. In fact you have something more secure – faith and trust in the Providence of God." Are we bold enough with our ministries? Are we willing to risk because of the immensity of God's Providence? What decisions have we made recently that were based on faith and not fear? Can we afford to appear somewhat reckless? It is in keeping with Dominic's legacy. Do we leave the door open enough for the unexpected and the surprises? Or are we so organized and efficient that we have an answer or a form for everything? Do we need to puncture some of our "professionalism," to leave room for the ridiculous or the outrageous? Maybe not everyday- but at least once or twice a year.

QUESTION: IN WHAT PARTICULAR SITUATION DID YOU FIND IT MOST DIFFICULT TO TRUST IN GOD/

TO BE TRUTHFUL WITH ONESELF.

The second quality that I consider essential to a Dominican Spirituality of Formation is truthfulness. As with trust in God, truth is not a surprising characteristic, because truth is a long-

standing virtue, and is in fact the motto of the Order. It was only in the 19th century that the Order chose for itself this epithet, even though there are references much earlier. We sing about our founder as a "Doctor of Truth." We know that Thomas Aquinas, who wrote three large volumes on Truth, **De Veritate**, was fascinated with Divine Truth and viewed it as encompassing all divine, physical and human reality. There is also a letter from Pope Clement IV to the General Chapter of 1266 in which he applies to the Order of Preachers the formula of Isaiah 26:2 "the righteous people which guards the truth." And in the fourteenth century, Louis of Bavaria, adversary of John XXII, wrote, "the Order of Preachers is the Order of Truth, which it defends with equal fearlessness and freedom. (Guy Bedouelle, **The Grace of the Word**, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 168)

Likewise, Catherine of Siena emphasizes Truth. She addresses God in the Dialogue as First Truth, the source of all truth-- and Jesus as "Gentle Truth." And she ends this conversation with "Clothe me, clothe me with Yourself, Eternal Truth." For Catherine, to be committed to truth is in the first place, to be committed to God. "God's truth is this: that God wants only our good, our fulfillment in truth and love, and our holiness within God's own holiness." (Suzanne Noffke, **Vision through a Distant Eye**, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, p.167)

I would like to emphasize in this section what our dear sister Catherine says about being truthful with one's self. In our day, some mock this kind of introspection while others exalt it in an isolated way. Our sainted sister Catherine is the one who emphasizes the necessity of self-knowledge as the starting point for moving out towards all others, including the Other, who is God. Catherine says that we need to move from a false self to a true self. She uses the image of a journey down a well and describes the process of building a well where one has to dig through mounds of earth before one finds water. Similarly, we have to work through the earth of our false self with our self-sufficiency and our pride, "the soil of our poverty, the recognition that of ourselves we are nothing." (L 41) Only in that way will we come to the running water of God's goodness in the depths of ourselves, wherein we find our true selves.

When Catherine talks about this self-knowledge, she describes it as a gentle, growing process. This knowledge of self does not happen overnight, and there are stages all along the way. It is more a process of seeking the truth. As Timothy Radcliffe says, "Truth is not to be captured with the cleanness of a single vision, but sneaked up on, through many partial notions, many inadequate theories, through all sorts of tools and it comes to us finally as a surprise and a gift" (Timothy Radcliffe, **Sing A New Song**, Dominican Publications, p. 239) Searching for the truth about ourselves is as much an attitude as it is a single action. Somewhere on the journeys of our lives, we need to look at our limitations and imperfections and in that way we will come to know the goodness of God.

Another aspect of Catherine's attention to truth is that no one person has the truth so we need each other. It is not a lonely, private journey. Catherine was convinced that all members of the Body of Christ have the responsibility to speak the truth in love because no one human person, not even the Pope, has the ability to grasp the whole truth. In the Dialogue we hear God speaking to Catherine: "...the same is true of many of my gifts and graces, virtue and other spiritual gifts, and those things necessary for the body and human life. I have distributed all in such a way that no one has all of them. Thus have I given you reason – necessity, in fact- to practice mutual charity. For I could well have supplied each of you with all of your needs, both spiritual and material. But I wanted to make you dependent on one another so that each of you would be my minister, dispensing the graces and gifts you have received from me. ... So you see, I have made you my ministers, setting you in different

positions and in different ranks to exercise the virtue of charity. For there are many rooms in my house." (D7) Self-knowledge leads us to others as well as to the Other, God.

What happens when this truth about us is missing? To a group of women in Florence, Catherine writes: "Let your spirit be filled not with fantasies but with true solid virtue, loving with a heart that is sincere and not false, free and not two-faced." (Letter T 82) And to the monk Giovanne dalle Celle: "Go forward with a sincere truth that is never tainted with human respect." Letter T322 (Noffke, p. 21) According to Catherine, we create fantasies, become two-faced and tainted with human respect when this truth about ourselves is missing.

May Sarton echoes Catherine in her poem:

Now I become myself.

It's taken time, many years and places.

I have been dissolved and shaken,

Worn other people's faces..."

(May Sarton, **Now I Become Myself in Collected Poems**, 1930-1973 (New York: Norton, 1974), p. 156)

We mask ourselves in faces that are not our own. I think formation sometimes forces us to put on masks because we have so many different things to attend to. Sometimes in formation we are asked to wear the face of a spiritual leader, teacher, guide, judge, and all at the same time. And just between us, there are times when we have to "fake it," mask ourselves in faces that are not our own. Don't you agree?

This milieu—these many demands-- can sometimes move us to deceive and delude ourselves in creating our own truth. Sometimes we think that our words can say anything, whether it is the truth or not. As Catherine says, sometimes we are tempted to "hide the truth and tell lies if that is to our own advantage." And other times, we believe that we have the last word on everything. I remember a situation with Pat Walter, the year after she completed her term in formation and as Prioress. She was living in Rome with me and she went to see the film, "Elizabeth". She loved the costumes and the script and told the community the next morning over breakfast how much she enjoyed it. People seemed to listen to her opinion. That evening two sisters from England went to see the film and they did not care for it at all. They could not see any redeeming features and proceeded to share their abhorrence the next day during breakfast. Pat sat quietly listening to their version. Afterwards she pulled me aside and said, "Margaret, I just discovered one more perk of leadership that I have to let go of. Everything I say is not now viewed as significant, noteworthy and true." "I know what I am doing" is often repeated, sometimes out of conviction, other times, out of obstinacy and fear. The pressures on us in leadership are overwhelming. We are so often required to function as public persons and the temptation is great to assume a persona.

Though this external world is demanding, we are aware deep down that it is easier to establish an institution than it is to deal with our own soul. "We make institutions sound complicated and hard and rigorous, but they are a piece of cake compared to our own inner workings. (Palmer, **Let Your Life Speak**, p. 202). Sometimes keeping busy helps us maintain the illusion that we have things under control.

What are some ways we can encourage this truth telling, this self-knowledge? Of course, there are the traditional ways of spiritual accompaniment, retreats, sharing with friends, consistent time for solitude and silence, building in occasions where we feel appreciated, loved and admired. My places for this kind of affirmation were with the Montessori children, the sisters in the infirmary and visiting my brother and his family. Sometimes I got too busy to do any of these things and inevitably I started to engage in unhealthy behaviors.

It is clear from Catherine that we have to take seriously this inner journey, for its own sake as much as for our ministry of formation.. Like Rosa Parks, I need to say, "I will no longer act on the outside in a way that contradicts the truth that I hold deeply on the inside. I will no longer act as if I were less than the whole person I know myself inwardly to be." (**Rosa Parks: My Story** Dial Books, New York, p. 116). We all need to look clearly at what is going on inside of each of us so that we do not distort the reality and allow that distortion to influence our thinking and decisions. One other thing is to embrace the shadows, those parts of us that we do not wish to be, that we would like to hide, and that are home to our fears, anxieties and insecurities. (Moxley, p. 138) and then we will stop projecting them. Life offers clues about our shadows. We know that we are getting close when we become aware of things that tend to set us off. What slights cause us to overreact? When does our anger pop out to haunt us? What about our fears? What don't we like in others, especially others of the same sex? It is onto them that we most likely will project the shadow. (Moxley, p. 142) My favorite quote of Jung is "We do not see things the way they are, we see things the way WE are."

It also helps to let others into our dark places, certainly not every novice of the congregation, even though many would love to have access to your mind and heart. But enough so that we are not alone with our secret, whatever, it may be. I recently read about a Quaker tradition, called the "clearness committee", a process in which the group refrains from giving you advice but spends three hours asking you honest, open questions to help you discover your own inner truth. (Palmer, p. 44) There are some truths about us that are deeply personal, but they are not necessarily a private matter. And the sooner we recognize this fact, the freer we will be.

And lastly one thing that I have discovered recently that helps me to maintain perspective is to laugh and celebrate life more. This new emphasis flows from my experience at Family Assembly in Manila. Every evening in Manila there was a celebration of some kind, even though there were typhoons, political crises and economic disasters. At first I thought it was too much, but after a while, and in retrospect, I discovered that it was the key to the profound prayer and memorable mission discussions. Have you ever noticed that there is no foreign accent when one hears laughter? The Arabic sister's laugh sounds like the French one. This breaking down of barriers and this leveling that take place in recreation are very restorative and unifying. Through celebrating we are able to laugh together and be at one with each other, surrendering some of our control and opening ourselves to transformation. Remember that film in the mid- 80's entitled, **Babette's Feast**. In it celebration was transformational. A chef used her lottery returns for a special gala, and the 12 invited guests were changed in the course of the celebration. The guests overlooked past hurts, ceased their gossip, spoke to enemies and began to dance together. Sometimes celebration is the only thing that we really can do. So much has been taken away that there is nothing to control, no place to climb or hide. As one friar said "We need the courage to leap from one edge to another: from climbing to dancing, from control to celebration." In retrospect, I wished I had laughed more during my time in leadership. I realize now that I strayed a bit from a more regular dose of this kind of care and chatter, lilt and laughter! Some of us can take this whole leadership thing so seriously, that we lose the truth of our being-- that we are only the "Assistant Novice Directresses" of the congregation!

QUESTION: TRY TO THINK OF AN EXPERIENCE WHEN YOU WERE LESS THAN TRUTHFUL WITH YOURSELF. WHAT DO YOU THINK PREVENTED YOU FROM BEING SO?

TO BE TENDER WITH OTHERS

It is not difficult to see why tenderness is part of our Spirituality of Formation. Dominic was known the world over for this quality. Dante in the *Paradiso* (XII, 57) said Dominic was "gentle to his own" and Lacordaire commented that Dominic was able to "touch the heart of his century."

Dominic was most tender in his dealings with the brethren. Some of them would watch Dominic from a room in the dormitory that had a window opening into the church. Here is the account of one who watched him: "A certain discreet and virtuous friar (Brother John of Bologna) declared that he had observed our blessed father for seven nights to see how he spent his night watches.... After praying, he would rouse himself and visit one altar after another. This would go on until midnight. Then quietly, he would go where the brethren were sleeping and cover anyone requiring it. After that he returned to the church and continued praying." And we know of the tenderness of Dominic in bringing back souvenirs for the sisters and in inviting all of the sisters, possibly one hundred or more of them, to have a drink of wine. "Drink up, my daughters!" he was known to have said. The stories about his tenderness abound.

Possibly the one story that most of us remember is the story of John of Spain, sometimes called John of Navarre. "When the Holy Father Dominic was sending him to Paris...with Brother Laurence, John asked to be given some provisions or some money for the journey. The saint refused to give him any, urging them to go like disciples of Christ, not carrying gold or silver. "Trust in the Lord, " he said, "for those who fear God lack nothing." John would not accept this; he absolutely refused to obey the saint's word. When the holy and loving father saw the wretched man's disobedience, he fell at his feet, weeping and howling for the miserable man who would not weep for himself. He told them to give him twelve deniers for the whole journey to Paris" (page 89 ED) Here I also am reminded of the story that is told about Timothy Radcliff's lunch with the Pope. During the European Synod, the Pope invited different participants to sit at his table. When Timothy found himself sitting to the right of the Pope, he heard the Pope ask, "Friar Timothy, what do you do with a disobedient friar?" Timothy in his inimitable quickness responded: "I love him!" The Pope was fascinated by this response and shared this story among the Synod on several different occasions. Brother Ventura said that "blessed Dominic had such charity, (another word for tenderness) that he wanted to extend it to everybody, even the damned, and he used sometimes to weep for them. (Pg. 69 ED) What an example for us! Are we praying for our persecutors?"

It is no wonder that Dominic was tender with others because this is how he was with God. Dominic did not just talk *about* God. Dominic addressed God as—"My Mercy." Remember that prayer: "My God, my Mercy What will become of sinners?" What do we call our God? Does it contain the tenderness implicit in Dominic's prayer? The nine ways of prayer of Saint Dominic also demonstrate this tenderness. Using the body in prayer could make St. Dominic dissolve utterly into weeping. And we know that he enjoyed the gift of tears from early on. As a canon in Osmá, compassion typified his prayer, for he was seen weeping for sinners, the wretched and the afflicted, whose sufferings he felt within his compassionate heart. These were Spirit produced tears that were generative and fruitful. In the history of Christian spirituality, tears were a sign of the consoling and

empowering presence of the Spirit of God. Jesus' tears were divine sorrow over Jerusalem and Mary Magdalene's were tears of sorrow and joy in the garden of the Resurrection. Dominic's tears moved him to found the Order of Preachers!

Saint Catherine also was known for her tenderness. The story of her meeting with Niccolo di Toldo captures for me the essence of her tenderness. As you recall, Catherine was asked to visit Nicolo, an angry prisoner, who had refused to see a priest. He was very upset because he was accused wrongly and did not want to hear pious platitudes about forgiveness when he thought justice needed to be sought. Catherine was somehow able to win Nicolo's confidence through listening to his pain and fear and in gently reminding him of Jesus' great love for him, no matter what. In the end, even when Catherine's attempts to address this injustice failed, Nicolo asked Catherine to be present at his execution.

We read in Catherine's letter to Raymond of Capua a tender description of this event: "I waited for him at the place of execution, and as I waited, I kept praying...Before he arrived, I lay down and stretched out my head on the block, and begged Mary for the grace I wanted, namely, that I might give him light and peace of heart at the moment of death...Then he arrived, like a meek lamb, and when he saw me he began to smile. He asked me to make the sign of the cross over him...He prostrated with great meekness and I stretched out his neck and bent down to him, reminding him of the blood of the Lamb. His lips kept murmuring only "Jesus" and "Catherine," and he was still murmuring when I received his head into my hands...." (Mary O'Driscoll, **Catherine of Siena: Passion for the Truth, Compassion for Humanity**, New City Press, New York, p. 41) Catherine's tender touch was such a source of comfort and strength. Regretfully, mal-practice concerns today caution us about the use of appropriate touch in our ministries. Touch can be so healing and restorative, sometimes so much more so than even words.

We know that Catherine had many things on her mind and was very busy at this time in her life. For most of the year, 1375, preceding Nicolo's execution, Catherine was in Pisa preaching a crusade and working for reconciliation between city-states and the papacy. In April she received the stigmata in the church of Saint Cristina in Pisa. But she found time during the summer of this year to return briefly to Siena to visit and help Nicolo. She never seemed to lose her touch for ordinary people, even in the face of other important demands, such as reconciling warring city-states and the papacy or mystical experiences.

Catherine wrote a letter to Caterina de Scetto, a Dominican laywoman who belonged to the Mantellate in Siena, encouraging her to love tenderly: "You should neither diminish nor grudge your love towards others whether they offend you, or whether their love for you, or the joy or profit you gain from it, weakens. Rather you should love them tenderly, accepting and putting up with their faults...in this way, you are like gentle, loving Paul who weeps with those who weep, and rejoices with those who rejoice (cf. Rom. 12.15).... Remain in the holy, gentle love of God--Gentle Jesus, Jesus Love. (O'Driscoll, L 50, p 27) Let's us listen to part of Catherine's eulogy to God's Mercy and use another word for mercy, tenderness:

"I see your mercy (tenderness) pressing you to give us even more when you leave yourself with us as food to strengthen our weakness, so that we forgetful fools should be reminded forever of your goodness. And what has done this? Your mercy (tenderness)...For wherever I turn my thoughts I find nothing but mercy! (tenderness) (D 30) Catherine and Dominic both loved a gentle, tender God who embraced them and empowered them to go and be the same.

And what happens when this tenderness is absent? Harshness creeps in. Many times the harshness that exists between leaders and members, and among members, takes over the life of a congregation or province. There is much criticism and judgment with nary a word of understanding or tenderness. We need to look at the root of this harshness and find ways to address it. Otherwise it just festers and spreads like poison ivy. What kind of structures do we have in place to address this kind of harshness? Do we just leave it to friends to notice? In my experience, many friends are not willing to risk the relationship? And besides, sometimes friends encourage this. In many places, we no longer have any structures in place to address this divisive and death-dealing practice. Annie Dillard writes: "In the deeps are the violence and terror of which psychology has warned us. But if you ride these monsters down, if you drop with them farther over the world's rim, you find what our sciences cannot locate or name, the substrata, the ocean or matrix or ether which buoys the rest, which gives goodness its power for good, and evil its power for evil, the unified field: our complex and inexplicable caring for each other, and for our life together here. This is given. It is not learned." Annie Dillard, **Teaching a Stone to Talk**, Harper-Collins, New York, p 94-95. What structures are there in our Dominican lives to "ride these monsters down" and care for each other?

And then eventually this harshness extends over into our ministries. We are impatient with novices, critical of their weakness, intolerant with their mistakes. I am reminded here of my visit to Vietnam in 2000. I had the privilege of meeting the oldest Dominican sister in the world, Sister Main in Lang Son in the North, just 18 kilometers from the Chinese border. Sister Maim told the story about the attempt on the part of the Communist in 1979 to get her to sign over the property of the Catholic Church in Lang Son. At the time of the request, Sister was the one person on the compound. The Communist soldier asked Sister to sign the prepared document. Sister Maim refused and said: "I cannot do that. You see if I sign this I will not go to heaven and you will be condemned to hell. And I don't want either to happen!" There was no harshness here even with her enemies. I once read the best way to manage conflict is to relinquish our need to win and agree to part as friends. Before we address our adversaries, we must never forget that they are our sisters and brothers first.

And many times, this harshness is not intended. It is that we just don't have enough time to mean it when we say how are you, or to pat someone on the back, or to wink the eye. We are too busy. It is helpful to remember that in Genesis, the Seventh Day did not depend on the completion of work. It was not a moveable feast once tasks were accomplished. The Sabbath was intended to make us pause, rest and gain a different perspective, a God-like way of being and doing.

QUESTION: WHEN DID YOU LAST EXPERIENCE TENDERNESS FROM ONE OF YOUR MEMBERS AND WHAT DID IT FEEL LIKE? WHEN DID YOU LAST OFFER TENDERNESS TO ONE OF YOUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS?

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion, I have tried to show three key qualities for Dominican leaders and Micah's words come to my mind: act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with God. I have also attempted to present some of the consequences that follow when these qualities are absent, along with ways to keep these qualities as a part of our consciousness. So, my dear sisters it is now over to you. I will conclude as I began, relying on your own ability not only to reflect on your own valuable experience as formators, but also to search for the truth of your own "Spirituality of Formation." Let us continue to trust in our search for the truth and to live it in love. Thank you.