



FRATRES ORDINIS PRÆDICATORUM
CURIA GENERALITIA

First Sunday of Advent, 2008

Dear brothers and sisters in St. Dominic and St. Catherine:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...and the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:1.14).

There are few scripture texts that better capture the spirit of the Advent and Christmas seasons than this one from the Prologue of John’s Gospel. In few words, the evangelist invites us into the fullness of the mystery of the Incarnation. This is not a spectacle that we contemplate from afar, for as the text says, the Word came to dwell “among us,” as one of us. At the closing of the XII Synod of Bishops on the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church, the Synod delegates, in their *Message*, wrote, “In the original Greek, there are only three fundamental words: *Lógos sarx eghéneto*, ‘the Word was made flesh’. And yet, this is the summit not only of that poetic and theological jewel which is the prologue to John’s Gospel (Jn 1:14), but it is the actual heart of the Christian faith” (II, n.4).

The birth of the Word “among us” takes on an even greater urgency in a year in which several paths cross in the life of the Church and the Order. First, we celebrate and give thanks for the recent Synod on the Word of God, which itself took place within another grace-filled context: the year of the great apostle to the Gentiles, St. Paul. And both of these events coincide with the ongoing unfolding of our own Dominican Jubilee Pilgrimage which will culminate in 2016, with the celebration of the 8th Centenary of the confirmation of the Order by Pope Honorius III.

For Dominic, too, the Word of God was present “in the beginning” of the miracle that gave birth to the Order of Preachers. His entire life, lived in intimate union with the Word, invites us into a profound contemplative *listening* to the Word and a bold commitment to preach that very same Word to the world today. In the *Dialogue* of our sister, Catherine of Siena, we read, “[Dominic] appeared as an apostle in the world, sowing the seed of my Word with great truth and luminosity, dissipating the darkness with the gift of light” (n. 158). The Word of God that became flesh and burned in the heart of Dominic was the very same Word which he preached with ardent zeal, setting Europe on fire with the love and tender mercy of Christ.

The Blessed Dominic had a great and burning thirst for the salvation of souls, for which he was an unequalled apostle. He gave himself to preaching with great fervor, and he exhorted and obliged his brothers to announce the Word of God by day and by night, in churches and in homes, in the fields and along the byways – in other words, in all places to speak only of God.¹

His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, in opening the Synod on the Word of God, reminds us that, “It is important that individual believers and communities enter into ever increasing intimacy with God’s Word...[for] to draw nourishment from the Word of God is [the Church’s] first and fundamental task.” Therefore, as part of our ongoing Jubilee pilgrimage that began with the celebration of the 800th anniversary of the founding of the community of Prouilhe, the whole Dominican Family is invited to pause and focus on the following theme throughout this year of 2009: **“In the beginning was the Word: Dominic, Preacher of Grace”**. With the help of this theme, we commit ourselves to sit with Dominic at the feet of Christ, and with him, “to draw nourishment from the Word of God.”

This is the heritage of grace is shared by all of us – friars and nuns, apostolic sisters and lay Dominicans, young and old, rich and poor. And we well know that once we have been nourished by the Word, we face the other great challenge that St. Paul had to face, summed up in his apostolic cry: *“Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!”* (1 Cor 9:16). Therefore, following the example of Dominic, we make St. Paul’s cry our own, and we do so by making it the overall guiding theme for these years of Pilgrimage, from now until we reach the Jubilee celebration of 2016. To do this, though, we recognize the need to make one small, yet essential modification: as Dominicans we can only be true to our vocation if we cry out as a community:

“Woe to us if we do not preach the gospel!”

These words of St. Paul, said Pope Benedict in his opening address of the Synod, are, “a cry that becomes for every Christian a pressing invitation to serve Christ.” And so we take to heart these words, recognizing in them the very Gospel that gave birth to the preaching mission of our Holy Father St. Dominic who, carrying the Gospel of St. Matthew and the letters of St. Paul with him as he traveled, truly became God’s Preacher of Grace. Each time we sing the *O Lumen* we invoke Dominic under this title: *Prædicator Gratiæ*, for it is he, the preacher, the disciple of the Word, who promises to walk with us and renew in us the gratuitous out-pouring of the Word that was present when the first seeds of the Holy Preaching were sown in the fertile ground of southern Europe. May he unite us as a family gathered around the Word, and give us a contemplative, obedient heart, willing and ready to respond in freedom to the challenges of the Gospel in our day.

On a more personal note, as we make our way through these days of Advent towards the contemplation of the Word-made-flesh beneath the night sky of Bethlehem, I would like to add here my wishes for a most blessed and joyous Christmas for each and every member of the Dominican Family worldwide. “Bethlehem” – the house of bread – is a reminder to us of two important realities. First, the Incarnate Word has come to nourish us. May we feed at his table of mercy and compassion each day of the new year. And secondly, in a world that continues to face massive hunger and the ongoing scourge of war, let us look again to Christ, whose “words proclaim justice, instill courage to the disheartened and offer forgiveness to sinners” (Synod *Message*, IV, n.13). May his words become our words, so that we, too, might proclaim the gospel of peace in his name.

Brothers and sisters, we walk this pilgrimage of faith together, as a family, encouraging one another along the way. May the Holy Spirit anoint us as we journey forth in hope, and may St. Dominic bless us and inspire us to be ever faithful to the great heritage which he has left us.

Your brother in St. Dominic, Preacher of Grace,

bro. Carlos A. Azpiroz Costa OP
Master of the Order

ⁱ Witness, cited by Quilici, Alain, “En suivant un Maître spirituel”, *La Revue du Rosaire*, July-Aug, 2003.