

# The Contemplative Dimension of our Dominican Life

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fr. Vincent de Couesnongle, OP

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In my first letter to the Order, I asked this question: "Who among us really and truly prays?" The reply that each Dominican gave to this is known only to God. Each one needs to ask himself or herself about this. Personally, I believe that there is a certain number of brothers and sisters who are experiencing today a real desire, a real thirst for personal prayer and for contemplation. This is evident to me from all those who have been asking me here and there what ever became of that letter that I promised quite some time ago on this subject. Then too, there are some Dominicans who have never known this urgent desire, but who feel in some confused way that something important is lacking in their life. And they ask how to go about this: "I don't have time", says one, or again, others often remark, "They didn't teach us how to pray in the noviciate".



It is about personal prayer, therefore, that I want to speak to you, but from a particular angle. I will not speak about prayer in itself. There are plenty of books on this. My starting point is meant to be more realistic, more existential, beginning from what we cannot avoid living as Dominicans, and then I want to show how this invites us to prayer, opens us up to prayer, and finally even manages to quicken within us a living relationship with God - this is the way I designate all private prayer - which, when it is intensified and prolonged, becomes a looking, a loving, a listening and welcoming of God, and deserves to be called contemplation.

I shall start, then, from the three values or characteristic elements of our life which St. Dominic determined himself on the day he dispersed the first brothers. To their question: "What should we do in Paris, Bologna, and Rome?" he replied, "Preach, study, found houses.". And we know that for him preaching should proceed from the abundance of contemplation. Let this living relationship to God mark what is concrete in our life, and then we can speak about the "contemplative dimension of our Dominican life". I shall finish up with some considerations on the "rhythm of prayer".

## "To preach..."

The remark of Karl Barth is truer now than ever: "Theology is made with the Bible and the newspaper". This is at least as true of preaching. How, in fact, can one proclaim Jesus Christ to men and women, if one is ignorant of their aspirations or of the conditions in which they live? Written or spoken, the daily news and all the means of communication which this word evokes help us to know the mental and spiritual furniture, the "decor" of the heart of those we meet. Our dialogue rings true.

One could say as well that, for preaching, a double contemplation must possess us: the contemplation of the street, which puts us in communion with the ever-present look of Christ, "who has pity on the crowd" and the contemplation of Jesus in the mystery of his love. But do we know how to pass from one to the other? Or rather, do we know how to make of this double contemplation one and the same look? How many among us know thus how to "pray our newspaper"?

And yet, when they hear us speak in a church, a bible study, a charismatic prayer meeting, in a university chair, rare are the hearers who are fooled. They quickly distinguish the preacher who speaks of the Friend with whom he constantly lives, from the preacher who speaks of him as of a stranger and tries to pass him off as a companion with whom he is on familiar terms. The first knows how to speak about God, because he is in the habit of speaking to God. And it is quite understandable that of the Father of Preachers it was said that he spoke only to God or about God. The two were inseparable.

If he wishes to be an authentic witness of the Gospel, the friar preacher needs to be first of all a "prayer". Then he will meet the Lord not just in the preparation of his sermons and conferences, but in the very fact of speaking. His word will send him after the event to a new meeting with his Lord, deeper, perhaps, than that which preceded. And so forth.

For, we must not interpret in only one sense or in too material a way the celebrated text of St. Thomas: "contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere". Contemplation should not simply precede preaching. The proclamation of the message, if we know how to be attentive to it, enriches and vivifies our lived relationship with God. Happy are those in the Order who have the mission of preaching the faith. It is perhaps easier for them than for others to be true contemplatives according to St. Dominic.

But, we no longer live in Christendom. The world inhabited by the men and women and young people whom we meet is a "post-Christian" world, which is an antiseptic way of saying that it is openly anti-Christian, now that there is

nothing Christian left: to deny the existence of a person is at least to refer to the person; to say nothing is far worse.

This suffocating neutrality does not come solely from the ignorance or malice of human beings. With science, technology, the human sciences, the forward march of history and ideologies of every kind, the world has gained autonomy and is developing every day in its own sphere. Once secularized, de facto, the world doesn't find God relevant.

Our brothers who work in these purely profane sectors are more and more numerous. They are sometimes tempted to think of themselves as "second-class" preachers, because the apostolic commitment which is theirs - they are there by duty as Dominicans - does not allow them to encounter God directly or speak about the Gospel. And yet, they also proclaim an indispensable part of the Gospel, because the Gospel is either whole and integral, or it is not. From the first to the last page of the Bible, in fact, Scripture commands us to deliver men and women from those injustices that prevent them from inhabiting and developing the earth and the talents that God has given them for discovering the Truth.

In particular, there is a risk that we might even let ourselves become secularized in our prayer and in our heart. What we need, then, is a to have a vision of the world which is large enough so as not to reduce the demands of the Gospel to a too facile intimacy with God ("Jesus and me in a bottle", as the phrase goes) and to interpersonal relationships that are more sentimental than constructive with those of like mind. It is in this "vision of wisdom" that everything, all research, every discovery finds its place in the design of God for the universe, of which Christ is the corner-stone.

One can not become interested in the human situation or study the ideas which mark those cultures which are developing outside the influence of the faith, if one does not consider the tear stains on the faces of those who are the victims of this society. The compassion characteristic of St. Dominic urges us to work for the delivering of humanity from the bewitching enchantments of the present world. Mercy, active compassion, relates us to St. Dominic. It ought to quicken prayer in us, as it did in him. A priest whom I know, a curate in a rural parish that was totally de-christianized, evoked beautifully what can - and must - happen in an apostolic heart facing the post-Christian world: "With eyes fixed on the Eucharist, where the Church expresses itself and builds itself up, we have to accept the fact that people for whom we are responsible remain for a long time (perhaps forever) on the road without ever arriving at the journey's end, but we must be careful to keep inviting them to walk on, even though we may not be able to tell them what the goal of the journey is."

I know of two Dominicans who devoted their life to "pure research", one in economics and the other in the natural sciences. Both of them were true contemplatives. However, I particularly remember a homily on the rosary, very simple, but so very much "lived", given by one of the two on the Feast of the Rosary. Here was not a "functionary", but a man of faith

Great contemplative that he was, St. Dominic was not one after the manner of Benedict, John of the Cross, or Theresa of Avila, because he was also a great apostle. Blessed Jordan of Saxony tells that he devoted his days to men and his nights to God. Once again, we need to understand what this means. During the day, it is God about whom Dominic tells men. At night, it is "sinners, the poor and the afflicted" whom he has met during the day that Dominic speaks about to God. The two sole texts where he speaks to us about his prayer are eloquent on that subject. At night: "My God, my Mercy, what will become of sinners ?" By day, to his brothers who accompany him on the way, he speaks of a prayer of salvation and pardon: "Go on ahead, let us be quiet, and think of our Savior". St. Dominic teaches us, thus, what the prayer of petition for the liberation of "sinners, the poor, and the afflicted" is. And this is another way which, starting from the spiritual and material, social and personal needs of men, incites us find ourselves with St. Dominic at the feet of Christ on the cross, as Fra Angelico has painted him several times.

### **"To study..."**

My purpose is not to tell you that we need to study. Nor am I going to ask you how many hours you dedicate a week to some truly serious study. I would simply like to try to show you how in the Order intellectual work opens up for us the way to prayer and contemplation.

The Constitutions try to situate our study in the total context of our religious life with these words: "Assiduous study nourishes contemplation" (LC O, n. 83). What should our study be today, in order to achieve this ?

Undoubtedly, it is on the Word of God, transmitted through the Sacred Scriptures, that they ought to bear especially. It has always been thus in the order, since the time of St. Dominic, who kept with him always the Gospel of St. Matthew and the Epistles of St. Paul. Let us rejoice to see that in the present-day Church, there is a renewal of interest in the Bible which is quite exceptional. I can think of a priest in a parish where a number of the faithful follow Bible courses. He told me that in order not to lose the esteem and confidence of his parishioners, he had been obliged to take up anew his studies in this field. (And this is precisely the situation I shall find myself in very soon!)

In an allocution to the Biblical Commission (March 14, 1974), Paul VI, having recalled that God reveals himself to the

little ones and the humble, and not to the wise and the prudent, cited this beautiful text of St. Augustine: "To those who devote themselves to the study of the holy writings, it is not enough to recommend that they be versed in the knowledge of the particularities of the languages... but also, and this is at once primary and sovereignly necessary, they need to pray in order to understand." To pray the Bible in order to understand it: this is what so many Christians do today. The Bible has become their book of prayer. They pray the Bible and they pray on the Bible. This is quite new.

To pray on the Bible: nothing better, but we must be careful. The discovery of texts which speak to us too much and too readily, of biblical phrases which are cries to God and which correspond to what we are living through - praise, hope, joy - can have as effect that we take them too literally, without enough discernment. We infuse them with our own feelings, whatever they happen to be. It thus comes about that we are not praying so much on the Bible itself, with all its richness and its harmonious overtones, as on our own feelings. In this case, the danger of falling into a certain "fundamentalism" is not merely an imaginary one. We must not confuse prayer with a sort of parroting of Bible verses. Our preaching would then risk becoming too facile. It would not bring the faithful, who are hungry for truth, what they have a right to hear from us.

There is, thus, a balance to be found between scientific knowledge of the bible - which is absolutely indispensable - and a purely material reading, which has no perspective and is not set in relief, or in context. That is to say, it is important that a "tasty" reading of the scriptures be supported by exegesis and lived in prayer. On these conditions, how can we doubt that there is a contemplative dimension to the study of the scriptures ?

Is it not true that our biblical reading is all too often an occasional reading or one dictated by circumstances ? Yet, according to the text cited in the Constitutions, it is assiduous study which nourishes contemplation. In preparing a sermon, is it never the case that we look for some quick and handy texts which will support, often artificially, what we are trying to say ? As a professor of theology used to say, "Once I had proved my thesis, I opened my bible and 'salt-and-peppered' my text with quotations". If scripture is supposed to be at the heart of our intellectual and Dominican life - because it is salvation that we are proclaiming - an occasional study will not suffice. It is a systematic, deepened, and persevering study that we need to undertake. Father Aniceto Fernandez, I remember, used to insist very much on the importance of the Office of Readings, because it made us re-read and meditate each day on the sacred texts. Moreover, we need to add to this reading by real study. Programs of permanent formation ought to give pride of place to this.

But Dominican study does not stop at the Bible, whatever its importance and its inspiring role. You know the antiphon of the feast of St. Albert the Great taken from his works, "Theology is closer to prayer than to study". In other words, it is more contemplative than speculative. Some will perhaps say in speaking thus, St. Albert seems closer to St. Bonaventure than to St. Thomas. Perhaps. In any case, it is a happy way of emphasizing the contemplative dimension which ought to mark all theological reflection.

With St. Thomas Aquinas, this dimension was all the more real and perceptible as his thought was situated on the level of a philosophy of being, which allowed a deep perception and a systematization of the whole of Christian doctrine. All the elements of revelation were organized in relation to each other in a veritable "vision of wisdom" which attracted the contemplative gaze.

### **What has become of this today ?**

Far be it from me to judge or condemn a priori the efforts of many present-day theologians. Their job is formidable, while any out-and-out, excessive specialization, in whatever area - and that also goes for reflection on the mystery of God - can only give us a selection of diverse "flashes" or "headlines" about God, without any binding link among them. The teaching of theology and philosophy is reduced all too often to an accumulation of fragmentary studies. But rare are the theologians who dare to present an ensemble which would deserve today to be called "a theology".

I think, therefore, that at the present hour theological reflection is opening us less than before to contemplation. Not only has it studied revelation in a piecemeal way, but for reasons which come from the secular ambience of our times, among other things, it is developing without also being interior to faith and to the life of faith.

This, too, comes from the humane sciences which have a very strong ascendancy and cannot reach, at least now, the data of faith as deeply as in the past. Let us not conclude, however, that it is necessary to come back purely and simply to the philosophy of yesterday and to medieval theology - which have still very much to tell us. As Dominicans we would be wrong to ignore the efforts of contemporary theologians.

Here is one final remark on theology. As we know, Christology is one of the themes most studied in contemporary theology. Expressions such as "Jesus the free man" and "Jesus the prophet", "Christ, the man for others" (the expression is found in Paul VI) and so many others cast light very happily on certain characteristics of the Christ of the gospels. One imagines that these discoveries are not foreign to the situation in which we live today. Once again, we should not consider these qualifications in an "exclusive" manner, I mean as if they manifested everything there

was to say about Christ. That would not be without consequences for our religious life which is supposed to be a following of the life of Jesus. Religious, as other Christians today, recognize themselves very easily in these expressions. And one can imagine what kind of religious life would give so much weight to these aspects, as if such expressions of Christ were practically the essential matter of the life of Christ and of one's own life. In other terms, one sees how the religious life is far from being independent from all Christology.

All this is explained by the period of transition in which we find ourselves. May God grant that a future is being prepared which will assure, perhaps more than before, the contemplative dimension of Dominican study and of all our life.

You will tell me perhaps that in speaking like I have about study, I have given myself the better portion. "What you say goes for those who have a work that is properly pastoral, those who proclaim the faith and the gospel. But what about the others, those who work for justice, who teach the profane sciences within the Order or outside, the worker-priests, the professional priests, etc. ?" I will reply by insisting that all apostolic commitment, however secularized it may be, requires a certain amount of study which is properly ecclesial. If this is not the case, then spiritual suffocation awaits us. The experience of each one of us shows this sufficiently.

Above all, we must know how to organize, to sort out professional studies from listening to the Word of God, to discern lost time from those necessary relaxations - for example, at Rome each evening I watch the news on television. For several years, when visiting the provinces, I used to congratulate the brothers for working so hard. I don't do this any longer. What needs to be said is that a good number of the brothers are over-worked. This is not the same thing. And the reasons for this excess are not always the needs of the ministry, but other reasons which are not always able to be acknowledged. Sometimes people are not even conscious of them. They believe that one has to work like this. And, thus, an unbalanced life results, one which needs to regain its equilibrium by stressing more a basic study that is at once serious and prayerful. I shall touch this problem further on when speaking of the "rhythm of prayer".

However, I do know brothers who are struggling with some success to regain this balance. I know of others who have apostolic commitments as profane as can be, and in extremely secular environments. And yet, they find the means to preach in certain circumstances at certain times, for example during vacations. This is for them a real bath of spiritual rejuvenation. And you can see on the bookstand at their bedside the books that nourish them spiritually and deeply.

Balance between all the elements of Dominican life is a formidable problem, especially when contemplation and action are at issue, because very often the balance between one and the other was what attracted us most of all to the Order. Provincial and local superiors have particularly heavy responsibilities in this area.

#### **"To found houses ..."**

"To found houses". Here I would consider only one point, that is, what St. Dominic had in mind above all else in speaking thus: community life.

This is one of the aspects of the religious life about which people have spoken most over the last twenty years. I do not know well enough what the situation is in your provinces. But if I look at the totality of the Order, I can state that much effort and much progress has been made in this area. Yet, this still seems to me rather modest, when I compare it with what certain superiors general say in Rome.

Shouldn't we have more difficulties with this than other religious ? Undoubtedly, individualism is a defect that everyone is acquainted with these days. Formerly, common life was very organized, with structures from which it was difficult to escape. At the present, people have more freedom, are more expansive, and more spontaneous. It is the same with us. Let us also add that the Dominican spirit, mentality and formation develop - and this is one of the aspects of our charism - the seeds of originality in each one of us, starting with our personalities. Hence the risk of seeing individualism and non-participation grow. This is enemy-number-one of community life.

There is no community life without four conditions, as you know.

1) First of all, our relationships as brothers must call into question what makes up our personal life, our worries, our interests - while all too easily we may remain superficial in this domain.

2) There is no religious life without interpersonal relations and deep exchanges. Here, I sometimes ask myself the question: are we not too easily secretive, in the bad sense of the word ? Do we not spontaneously hide what we are, what we think, what we are living out in ourselves ? If there are times and places which facilitate exchanges - and superiors ought to have a look out for this - do we practice the art of avoiding them ? We bottle ourselves up and dodge compromising questions.

3) There is no community life without sharing: one opens up, one becomes free, one risks revealing himself to

another.

4) Finally, there is no common life without participation in the life and the pace of the community, which is all the more demanding as it is in constant evolution. Each one must feel himself responsible for this. We must listen, be receptive and try to understand, even when it hurts us at first sight. We have to pay out of our own person...

In speaking as I have just done, I am not forgetting my proposal: to bring to light the "contemplative dimension" of our community life. But this depends on the human material, so complex in this case and so very decisive in the make-up of a person and a community. The mystical aspect is grafted onto the human reality, and how very human it is here. The greatest instance of human reality, no doubt.

Now, it is in the Gospel that we find this mystique in the teaching and example of Christ. The daily needs of the common life are too strong, they demand too much effort on our part not to have the grace to be able to open us up to the Gospel and to prayer, if at least we place no obstacle in the way.

It is, thus, the person and life of Christ - the example of his "greatest love" - which ought to show us what the common life expects from us. It would be interesting to see again in the light of the Gospel and the Sermon on the Mount the debates of one of our chapters or councils. We would discover there rather easily the "reason-why" of the success or failure in our exchanges and discussions. The transposition would be easy.

The beatitudes speak of the poor, the gentle, the afflicted, those thirsting for justice, the merciful, the peacemakers, etc. Do we not meet these in our dialogues ? The brothers who, not wanting to impose themselves, know all the more how to make themselves heard ? The misunderstood who keep silent ? And those who seek to convince us with their grains of truth that they have found ? Those who pardon the excesses of language ? Those who always seek behind the more or less interesting remarks for what is positive, and who aim indefatigably at the greatest harmony possible ?

And always, in the Sermon on the Mount, we have the different petitions of Christ which have value in our mutual relationships: "Whoever is angry at his brother...", "Go first and be reconciled...", "Do not turn your mind to evil...", "Your Father makes the rain to fall on the evil and the good...", "Let your left hand not know...", "Pardon...", "There where your treasure is, is your heart...", "No one can serve two masters...", "Do not be concerned...", "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God...", "Do not judge..." Everything needed for community life could be drawn from these "golden words" of Christ. So many demands. And the whole Gospel ? (Would we not have in the Gospel a sort of "vade mecum" for the perfect capitular father ?)

Thus, community life doesn't deliver us over bound hand and foot to the explorations of every psychology and sociology. It invites us above all to lift our gaze higher to Christ. Inversely, the gospel and the person of Jesus ought to transform our manner of being, of acting, or reacting, in our relationships with our brothers.

The meaning of this conduct at the heart of the Church is very well illuminated in a "note de travail" for the last assembly of Canadian religious in Montreal. The author, Fr. Laurier Labonté, speaks of the reality of two-facedness that life constantly proposes to today's Christian. On the one hand, he says, are the Beatitudes, the memory of the Crucified, and the call to the parousia; and on the other hand are wealth, well-being, privileged situation, all too diplomatic arrangements, selfishness, the "as-for-me" mentality, etc. Continually, Christians have to struggle against the "easy life" so that this will not carry them away from their overcoming of self and of the world. The community life of religious, which cannot be separated from the evangelical councils, places the religious in a life where interpersonal relations and social life ought to be commanded by the absolute primacy of a life in conformity to that of Jesus, the Lord of the Beatitudes. Such a life gives witness not to a relativization of the gospel demands for all Christians, but, thanks to the radicalization which defines the life of religious, it recalls to all Christians, keeping their own situation in mind, the primacy of God. As the author says, "community life consists in holding radically present the prophetic critique of dangerous compromises" (to which all Christians are in danger of yielding).

I spoke before of the chapter. One could also take another example: that of "obedience" such as it is understood more and more today. As yesterday, as always, it should permit the religious to know the will of God for him and to conform to this. But while formerly the superior alone was responsible for this search, today it happens more and more through common sharing of ideas and common discussion among the members of the community, often in the presence of the religious in question. As Fr. Tillard says, the religious "will obey a will of God which he will not have been alone in perceiving, but which will come to him thanks to others, and which often will not correspond to that which he might have thought he perceived by himself." This common quest will go on by way of "community discernment", which will seek to discover truth gropingly, through the insights and the questions that each will bring to the discussion. Above all, from the Holy Spirit, people will await that light and certitude which can only come from him. And the presence, in the course of this quest, of the nine fruits of the Spirit, which St. Paul lists for the Galatians (Gal. 5:22-23), charity, joy, peace, etc., could serve as the sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit while waiting for the superior, made au courant of all the meandering discussion (in which he perhaps even participated), to say the last word.

Thus, community life situates us in a privileged way at the heart of "charity towards our neighbor". It opens us up to God and allows us to meet him and unite ourselves to him, despite all the doubts, all the bitterness, and all the opposition which are often the daily bread of every grouping: "contemplative dimension of community life".

In this address, if I intended not to speak about private prayer *\_in \_se*, I have thought of nothing else. Because everything that I said had but one goal: to help my brothers these brothers for whom you and I are responsible - find and intensify the way of personal prayer or, if need be, give it once again its due place in our Dominican life.

At the end of our reflections, we see better, I hope, how our three fundamental elements have a "contemplative dimension" which open us up to God. At the heart of this more or less diffuse presence of God that they give us, a door opens which puts us immediately into a more lively relationship with the Lord. Undoubtedly, the liturgical life is the means par excellence for arriving there, but, because preaching, study, and the common life occupy the greater part of our days, we should be very attentive to their contribution.

A real interior life, however, cannot be content with this. Work is not prayer. Someone has said, "I only exist if God says 'Thou' to me." How could anyone who deeply realizes the meaning of this divine interpellation not desire to encounter God and stand in wonder before him with the only answer which needs must spring forth almost spontaneously: "Abba, Father".

A real Christian life, and how much more a religious and Dominican one, should feel the vital need for interior and silent prayer. This should be our spiritual breathing. It should be a prayer freely given, simply because God is. The different aspects of our life help us here, if we are living them as human values as well as in their mystical frame of reference. However, this living relationship with God on the level of realities would be so much more true and intense, if we would reserve for God each day even only that which our constitutions ask of us... Then our days would be marked by a sort of *chasse-croisée*, a dancing partnership, between life in the concrete, which leads to God, and "pure prayer", which grows stronger and takes flesh in life itself.

In order to set us firmly on this way, which helps us to speak "*ex abundantia contemplationis*", it seems to me that we need two things especially.

The best arguments in favor of personal prayer have no great weight beside the only one which, in my view, is decisive: experience. Experience of private prayer has the best chance of convincing us and making us take up again the way that we may have abandoned at one time. May we go to prayer "as to a dance or to a combat". (St. Nicholas of Flüe)

Besides experience, what we lack is time. Who doesn't complain about this and find in it an easy excuse? We know how historians marvel at the activity of St. Dominic during the last years of his life: journeys on foot to Rome and across Europe, the organization of the Order, help to his brothers, the drafting of the Constitutions. And all that did not hinder him from preaching, or, indeed, from praying day and night. How did he do it? In comparison with this, what are the little quarter-hours of common and private prayer that we have such trouble fitting in each day?

We ought to reflect here on the rhythm of our prayer. I am struck by the important place that week-ends, days off, "little bridges of time", vacations, etc., occupy in the life of everybody... It's the hustle and bustle of our life that dictates these necessities. Why do we not take account of these ourselves? Not just to allow that relaxation which the body and spirit need, but also to see that our spiritual life profits as well. Let us be inspired by these stages to make some interior resting-places. Desert days, renewed annual retreats (a challenge to our creative power), shutting ourselves away in our room with the door closed, some days in a monastery: so many needs for our contemplative life in a harassing world. Walberberg contains some interesting suggestions on this subject (nn. 52, 53, 54). Alone or in community, let us have the courage to confront this problem. And then: "Do what He tells you".

Allow me to dream. The notes de travail of Montreal, say that at the present time many men and women religious are summing up their religious life in two words: contemplation and service to the poor. I really believe this. But for the Order, I prefer to say - and this is my dream - contemplation and preaching.

## **Postscript**

### **Some reflections on the rhythm of our prayer**

After reading through the preceding pages, I feel the need to add some reflections - reflections inseparately linked up with that life which, in one way or another, the complexity of today's world places heavily on our shoulders, conditioning every instant of our life.

Time is needed, if we are to pray. This is so true, that to devote entirely to God only a little of our time, is already to pray. And we need to say something like this if we want to share how Christ looked upon the hungry masses. Of all the obstacles we meet on the road leading to prayer, the greatest is the impossibility we too often experience of having some moments in the palm of our hand during which we are free to do what we wish. In these conditions,

what is left of prayer ? Let us look at our "daily routine" from this point of view. Public prayer ? Most often we say Lauds and Vespers, and from time to time Midday Prayer. But the Office of Readings ? Walberberg insists upon this (n. 53 c), but we must admit that there are still too many communities which abstain from this almost systematically. As for Compline, which should be the last prayer of the day, do we not find in this principle - in itself an excellent one - a far too easy reason for not reciting it together ? Undoubtedly, this is not true everywhere. Here and there, Lauds and Vespers are over in no time at all, whereas elsewhere the community experience the joy of coming together before the Lord, singing to Him, thanking Him, and praising Him, with but one heart, one soul, one prayer as brothers. A sumptuous prayer in its truth, although without brilliance in its simplicity.

Faced with the mediocrity of our prayer, in time and quality, we could always say that we lack time. And it is true when one thinks of the work, the research, the courses, the appointments, the expectations, etc., that monopolize us and hinder us so often from catching our breath, even in a physical sense. We need not even speak of the radio, the television, newspapers, reviews, magazines, and other time-consuming things which are so difficult to let go of. And in all of this, what becomes of the daily half-hour of meditation and of the rosary provided for in our Constitutions ? What these demand of us is very little indeed, compared to what the order was like not even fifty years ago. The biggest problem for me, if I might share this with you, is that we yield to this way of doing things, for lack of being able to do any better. Particularly today, when what the Order expects from us plagues us in a thousand ways, one more unforeseeable than the other, and pulls us in every direction, we are drowning. What ever became of that magnificent balance between the different elements of our charism which St. Dominic knew, that balance by which, with his face smiling as he sensed his presence to God, that face so full of compassion for the misery of the world, he won our hearts for all time ? Do we have the right to present ourselves as religious whose word proceeds from the abundance of contemplation ? Is this an experience of former days ?

Historians are unable to understand how, in the last years of his life, St. Dominic was able to be at once a preacher, traveller, founder, legislator, organizer of his Order and ...yet, he still prayed. He was one of the greatest contemplatives in the entire history of the Church. This was because he had found a rhythm of life which allowed him to be all of these things simultaneously.

It is only too evident that the rhythm of life in our world doesn't have very much in common with that of St. Dominics. Time was, not so very long ago, when the rhythm of life in the West was a daily one, following the rhythm of the sun. Today, the rhythm of work becomes more intense and demanding every day. One has to adapt to the rhythm of the machine. And this very fact both allows and demands week-ends and summer holidays to balance the bustling life of our contemporaries. This means that our life is lived, in a word, on what we might call a weekly rhythm. Now, shouldn't our prayer take its inspiration from this ? This is the point I want to emphasize.

I want to be very careful not to say that we should definitely abandon the daily time of prayer demanded of us, one which is truly a minimum for spiritual survival. Simply because this time is a minimum, because St. Dominic never thought about this when prayer was at stake, because as friars preachers we cannot be content with what the mercy of the Church and the Order ask of us, we need to do more, but in today's way. Finally, our rhythm of prayer has to bear in mind the time in which we are living.

I insist upon the responsibility of superiors on this head. Some years ago, as I said, I often used to congratulate the brethren on their work. No more. Too much work spoils the salt which ought to season our apostolate and also our entire Dominican life. Just as the balance between prayer and preaching and the balance between preaching to the faithful and to non-Christians ought to mark our life, so in both cases, the times that we live in throw us a challenge that we always need to take up afresh.

What do we do with our Sundays ? This is an important question, even if Sunday can become just another day of the week. Do we have a day or at least some hours during the week when we can breathe ? What are we doing about this ? Do we know how to devote our time at least once a month, in our cell, or in a quiet place, to some refreshment and renewal, with Bible in hand, in the solitude and silence of God ? The word "desert" has become fashionable, and happily so. Do we know how to reserve one or more days in another convent, a monastery, or in the country to this same goal ? At the end of our vacations, do we feel calmer, more at peace before God, or are we longing to return home to get some rest ? For a long time, the week of annual retreat at least had this same objective, hopefully in the company of our brothers. This is a point of our life in which, since Vatican II we have often been lacking in imagination and creativity.

Some people will perhaps conclude that we have no need of all this because, according to what I said in speaking of the "Contemplative Dimension of Our Life", preaching, study, and common life can and ought to replace prayer. To speak thus is to have understood nothing of what I said. What I said is that these cardinal points of our life open us, if we wish, to an encounter with God, while reviving on the level of the very fabric of our life the desire to unite ourselves to God. But this "springboard" cannot really play its role, unless, besides the supplication of the Church and the desire of our hearts, the practice of meeting God in the silence of solitude inhabits our hearts in privileged moments of our life.

Time is needed, if we are to pray. Let us find this time and give it to God, even if we lag far behind St. Dominic in our giving. At least we are with him. May he inspire in all of his followers who read this what he expects of them !