

To Praise, to Bless, to Preach

The Mission of the Dominican Family

An address to the Dominican Family, Manila 2000

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When I was asked to address this Assembly of the Dominican Family, I was extremely excited. I am convinced that if we can come to share a common preaching of the gospel, then it will renew the whole Order. But I also felt very inadequate. Who am I to articulate a vision of that common mission? How can any individual friars or brother, man or woman, do this? It is together, listening to each other, that we need to discover that new vision, and that is what we are here for in Manila. So I thought that what I should do is to listen with you to the Word of God. All preaching begins with listening to the gospel. And we become preachers together, when we listen together.

When we listen to the gospel, then we bring it to our experience. We make sense of our experience in the light of the gospel. We try to see again what we have lived and done with new eyes. But our experience also helps us to understand the gospel better. We read it in the light of what we have lived. It is like a conversation, between the Word of God and human experience. And the fruit of that conversation is our preaching. In any good conversation, one does not know where it will take us, especially when one is in conversation with God.

So what I want to do today is listen to a text from the gospel with you. I hope that it may illuminate what we are living now, as the Dominican Family learns how to preach together. And I hope that our experience will help us to understand the gospel better. We are preachers of the Resurrection, and so the text that I have chosen is of the Risen Christ appearing to the disciples in John's gospel.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." And he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." John 20. 19 – 23

That scene of the disciples seems very far away from this meeting of the Dominican Family. There you have a little group of disciples, locked away in the upper room, not daring to go out because they are afraid. And here we are, 9000 kilometres away and almost 2000 years later, in this great big meeting hall. They were a little group of Jews, and we in this meeting are 160 people from 58 nationalities, with all our brothers and sisters from the Dominican Family in the Philippines. They did not dare to leave the room, but we have come from all over the planet.

And yet in many ways, we are just like them. Their story is our story. We too are locked in our own little rooms; we too have our fears which imprison us. The Risen Christ also comes to us to open the doors, and send us on the way. We too will discover who we are as a Dominican Family, and what is our mission, not by gazing at ourselves, but in meeting the Risen Lord. He also says to us: "Peace be with you", and sends us to preach forgiveness and reconciliation. And that is why I wish to reflect on this story and discover what it is saying to us. It may seem absurd to compare the renewal of the Dominican Family with the Resurrection of the dead. But for Christians, all new life is always a sharing in that victory. Paul calls us to die and rise with Christ every day. Even the smallest defeats and victories are shaped by those three days, from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews,.....

The disciples are locked in the upper room. It is a time of waiting, between two lives. The women claim to have met the Risen Lord, but the men have not seen him. As usual, the men are a bit slow! They have seen only an empty tomb, but what does that mean? Their old life with Jesus is over, when they walked with him to Jerusalem, listened to his parables and shared his life. But the new life after the Resurrection has not yet begun. They have heard that Jesus is risen, but have not met him face to face. And so they wait, or go back to what they were doing before, fishing for fish. It is a moment of transition.

In a small way, the Dominican Family is living such a moment. From the beginning Dominic gathered together a family of preachers, men and women, lay and religious, contemplatives and preachers who took to the road. We can see inscriptions in S Sabina which talk of the Dominican Family which go back to the beginning. It has always been part of who we are. But now we claim that something new is happening. All over the world, sisters and lay Dominicans are claiming their identity as preachers. When we read the Acts of General Chapters of the brethren, we are told that this is a new moment in our history. We proclaim that all the members of the Dominican Family are equal and that we share a common mission. There are lots of beautiful words and documents. But some of us are like the disciples. We have not seen much evidence of change as yet. Most things seem to go on much as before. We hear stories of a wonderful new collaboration, but it usually appears to be happening somewhere else, and not where we are! So, we may be like the disciples in the upper room, waiting, hopeful but uncertain.

This is part of the experience of the whole Church at the moment. We have beautiful documents from the Second Vatican Council, proclaiming the dignity of the lay vocation. We have statements from Rome about the place of women in the life and mission of the Church. We have a new vision of the Church, as the pilgrim People of God. But sometimes we may feel that nothing much seems to have changed. In fact, sometimes the Church seems even more clerical than it was before. And so for many Catholics this is a time of mixed feelings: of hope and disappointment, of renewal and frustration, of joy and anger.

And then there is fear. The disciples are locked up in their upper room by fear. Of what are we afraid? What fears keep us locked inside some little space, reluctant to try something new? We must dare to see the fears that lock us in and prevent us from throwing ourselves wholeheartedly into the mission of the Dominican Family. Maybe we are afraid of losing the distinctive tradition of our congregation with its own founder, its unique history and stories. Will we lose what is special to us, our own identity? Maybe we are afraid that we will try something new and fail. We may give up a good ministry for a project that might not work. Maybe we fear to ask our brothers and sisters to collaborate with a new project, because we could be humiliated and not taken seriously. Maybe we fear that we are not up to it; we do not have the theological formation, the organisational ability. It is safer just carry on doing what we have always done. Let's go on fishing for fish.

Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." And he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord

It is the sight of the wounded Christ that frees the disciples from fear and makes them glad. It is the wounded Christ that transforms them into preachers.

One cannot be a preacher without getting wounded. The Word became flesh, and was hurt and killed. He was powerless in the face of the powers of this world. He dared to be vulnerable to what they might do to him. If we are preachers of that same Word, then we will also get hurt. At the heart of preaching of St Catherine of Siena was her vision of the wounded Christ, and she was given a share of his wounds. We may only suffer small wounds, being mocked, not taken seriously, being considered fools. We may be tortured, like our brother Tito de Alencar in Brazil, and killed like Pierre Claverie in Algeria or Joaquin Bernado in Albania, or our four sisters in Zimbabwe in the seventies. The vision of the wounded but living Christ can free us from the fear of getting wounded.. We can take the risk of getting hurt or worse, because hurt and death do not have the victory.

When we see that wounded Christ, then we can face the fact that we are already hurt. Perhaps we have been hurt by our childhoods, by growing up in dysfunctional families, or by our experience of religious life, by botched attempts to love, by ideological conflicts in the Church, by sin. Every one of

us is a wounded preacher. But the good news is that we are preachers because we are wounded. Gerald Vann, an English Dominican, was one of the most famous writers on spirituality in the English-speaking world since the Second World War. He struggled with alcoholism and depression all his life. That is why he had something to say. We have a word of hope and mercy because we have needed them ourselves. On my bookshelves I have a book written by an old French Dominican called "Les Cicatrices", "The Scars". In this book he tells how he came to Christ through the hurts of his life. And when he gave it to me he wrote a dedication saying "For Timothy who knows that the scars can become the doors of the sun." Every wound we have can become a door for the rising sun. One brother suggested that I should show you my wounds. I am afraid that you will have to wait for my memoirs!

The most painful thing for the disciples is that they look at the Jesus whom they have wounded. They denied him, deserted him, ran away. They hurt him. Jesus does not accuse them, he just shows them his wounds. We must face the fact we too have wounded each other. So often I have seen the brethren wound other members of the Dominican Family unintentionally, through a patronising word, by a failure to treat women or lay people as our equals. But it is not only the brothers. We all do it! Jesus was wounded by the powers of this world, and we have the power to hurt: the power to speak words that wound, the power of the priests over the laity, of men over women and of women over men, of religious over laity, of superiors over the members of their community, of the rich over the power, of the confident over the fearful.

We can dare to see the wounds that we have inflicted and received, and still be glad, because Christ is risen from the dead. We may hobble on one foot, but the Lord makes us happy. This was Dominic's joy, and there is no preaching of the good news without it. Earlier this year, a team from French TV came to spend a few days at S Sabina to make a programme. And at the end the director said to me, "It is very strange. In this community you talk about serious things, and yet you are all always laughing." We are joyful wounded preachers.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you

Jesus sends the disciples out of the safety of the locked room. This sending is the beginning of the preaching. To be a preacher is to be someone who is sent by God, but we are not all sent in the same way. For the sisters and the brothers, this will often mean being literally sent to another place. My brethren sent me to Rome. Yvon and Margaret could be sent to the South Pole to preach to the penguins. It is my hope that with the evolution of the Volunteer movement we will see lay people being sent to other parts of the world to share in our preaching, Bolivians to the Philippines, and Filipinos to France. For many of us, being sent means that we must be prepared to pack our bags and go. I remember an old friar telling me that no brother should possess more than he can carry in his two hands.

But for many members of the Dominican family to be sent does not mean to travel. The nuns are members of the monastery, and usually that is where they will stay all of their lives. Many lay Dominicans are married or have jobs, which mean that they cannot just get up and go. So being sent means more than physical mobility. It means being from God. It is our being. Jesus is "the one who was sent" (Heb 3.1.). He is sent from the Father, but that did not mean that Jesus made a physical journey, that he left heaven and came to another place called earth. His very existence to be from the Father. Being sent is who he is, now and for ever!

Being a preacher means that every one of us is sent from God to those whom we meet. The wife is sent to the husband and the husband to the wife. Each is a word of God to each other. The nun may not be able to leave her monastery, but she is just as much sent as any brother. She is sent to her sisters, and the whole monastery is a word of God sent to us. Sometimes we accept our mission by remaining where we are and being a word of life there.

One of my favourite lay fraternities is in Norfolk prison in Massachusetts, in the United States. The members of that fraternity cannot go elsewhere. If they try they will be stopped forcibly. But they are

preachers there in that prison, sent to be a word of life and hope in a place of despair and suffering. They are sent as preachers to a place to which most of us cannot go.

But Jesus does not just send the disciples out of the locked room; he also gathers them into community. He sends them to the ends of the earth, and commands them to be one as he and the Father are one. I believe that this paradox is central to Dominican life. When Dominic received the Bull confirming the Order, he went back to his little community in Toulouse and he dispersed the brethren. No sooner was the community founded than it was broken up. The brethren were not at all keen to go, but for once Dominic insisted.

For Dominic, the Order disperses the brethren, and gathers them into unity. We are sent away as preachers, but we are one. We are one because we preach the Kingdom, into which all of humanity is called. As Paul writes, we preach "one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all..." (Ephesians 4.4). We cannot preach the Kingdom and be divided. This is why we have always struggled not to split into separate Orders. Sometimes we only hung on by the skin of our teeth!

So for the brethren, from the beginning this was the pulse to our lives, of being sent out and gathered back into unity. It is the breathing of the Order. And the genius of Dominic was to give this breathing strong lungs, which are our democratic form of government. Government is not just a form of administration. It embodies a spirituality of mission. It is the strong lungs that sends us on mission and gathers us back again into unity. In the early centuries there was a General Chapter every year. Every year the brethren gathered in Bologna or Paris, and sent out on new missions. All year long there were brethren on the road, walking to Bologna or Paris to meet for the Chapter, and then walking away to new exotic places of mission, like England! These were the lungs that gave life.

We have already seen that as a Dominican Family we have different ways of being sent. How are we to be one? What form will our communion take? What are our lungs, that breathe us out and bring us together again? We are at just the beginning of reflecting on this. The monasteries of nuns feel deeply part of the one Order, and yet each monastery has its own precious autonomy. For many branches of the Family unity has never been so important. Many congregations of sisters came into existence through a process of splitting, through dividing like cells. Juridical unity was not important for you. With Dominican Sisters International, the sisters are at the beginning of a process to see how 160 congregations can collaborate together and find unity. As yet, there is no world-wide structure which brings together the Dominican laity.

I believe that we must start by finding our unity in the mission. We are sent out together to preach the one Kingdom, in which all humanity is reconciled. Our unity with each other will be discovered as we go out together. We will need new structures to build a common mission. Already these are beginning to emerge. The Bologna General Chapter, two years ago, encouraged the Dominican family who live in the same place to meet and plan a common mission. In Mexico City or Paris, for example, the whole Family can meet to decide what is our mission here. At the International level the General Council of the brethren is meeting regularly with the co-ordinating team of DSI, to share each others' concerns. When we found the Order in new places, we should try to plan the new presence as an initiative of the whole Dominican Family from the beginning.

At this meeting, our aim is not to set up new juridical structures. We have no authority to do this. In the future we can discover together what structures best serve that unity. Today we have the far more fundamental and important task of discovering a common vision of the mission. That is the first step to unity. And so let us return to the appearance of the Risen Christ, and see what vision of mission we have here.

Jesus says to the disciples "I send you"

He gives the disciples authority to speak. The preacher is not someone who just communicates information. He or she speaks with authority. If we are all to claim our identity as preachers, then we must recognise that each of us has the authority to preach the gospel.

In the first place we all have the authority to preach because we are baptised. This is the clear teaching of the Church, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, *Redemptoris Missio*, and *Christifideles Laici*. We have been baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ, and so we can proclaim it. Each of us also has a unique authority because of who we are, the lives we have lived, and the gifts that we have been given. Each of us has a word to proclaim which is given to no one else. God is in our lives, as married and single people, parents and as children. Out of these human experiences of love, its triumphs and failures, we have a word to speak of the God who is love. We also have authority because of our skills and knowledge. We are politicians and cooks, carpenters and physicists; we are teachers and taxi drivers, lawyers and economists. I went to a meeting in Goias, in Brazil, of members of the Dominican Family who are lawyers. They had their special authority as lawyers, to address issues of justice and peace in the Continent.

Ultimately the authority of our preaching is that of the truth, *Veritas*. This is the truth for which human beings are made and recognise instinctively. When fray Luis Munio de Zamora OP drew up the first rule for the Dominican fraternities in the thirteenth century, he did not invite them just to be penitents, as was the tradition then. He wanted them to be people of the truth, “true sons of Dominic in the Lord, filled to the utmost with strong and ardent zeal for Catholic truth, in ways in keeping with their own life.” It is a truth that we must seek together, in places like Aquinas Institute, in St Louis, USA, where lay Dominicans and sisters and brethren study and teach together. Seeking can be painful. It can lead us to be misunderstood and even condemned, like our brother Marie-Joseph Lagrange. But it gives our words authority and it responds to humanity’s deepest thirst.

If we are to be truly a family of preachers, then we must recognise each others’ authority. I must be open to the authority of a sister because she speaks from the truth of her experience as a woman, also perhaps as a teacher, or a theologian. I must give authority to the lay Dominican who knows more than I do about so many things: perhaps marriage, or poverty, or some science or skill. If we recognise each other’s authority then we will be truly a Family of preachers, with a strong voice. Together we can find an authority which none of us has individually. We must find our voice together.

For many Dominicans, the discovery that we all have the authority to preach has been exciting and liberating. And the restriction of preaching after the gospel during the Eucharist is deeply painful for many of our sisters and laity. It is experienced as a negation of your full identity as preachers. As asked by the General Chapter, I appointed a Commission to examine this question, but unfortunately its conclusions will not be published until next March. I wish that I could have read them before preparing this talk!

All that I can say is this: Do not be discouraged. Accept every other occasion to preach. Let us together create new occasions. Whether we agree or disagree with this ruling, it is not for us the crux of the matter. Preaching in a pulpit has always been only a small part of our preaching. In fact one could argue that Dominic wished to carry the preaching of the gospel out of the confines of the Church and into the street. He wished to carry the word of God to where people are, living and studying, and arguing and relaxing. For us, the challenge is to preach in new places, on the Internet, through art, in a thousand ways. It would be paradoxical if we thought that preaching in the pulpit was the only real way of proclaiming the gospel. It would be a form of fundamentalism that would go against the creativity of Dominic, a retreat back into the church.

I know that this might look like an evasion, an excuse for depriving lay people and sisters of active preaching of the word in the ordinary sense of the word. It could look as if we are saying that the non-ordained should settle for a lesser form of preaching. But this is not so. The Order of preachers exists to get out and share the good news, especially to those who do not come to us. The brethren do this in an incredible variety of ways: writing books, appearing on the television, visiting the sick. However much the exclusion from the pulpit may be hurtful and not accepted, I do not believe that it is the big issue.

We are all “good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4.10) in different ways. Each of us has received the *gratia predicationis*, but differently. The Dominican martyrs in Vietnam, China and Japan in the seventeenth century were men and women, lay and religious, with an extraordinary diversity of ways of being a preacher. St Dominic Uy was a Vietnamese Dominican lay man who was known as “The Master Preacher”, and so obviously he proclaimed the word; Peter Ching was a Chinese lay

man, who took part in public debates in Fogan, to defend the truth of Christianity, just like Dominic with the Albigensians. But other lay Dominicans who were martyred were catechists, inn-keepers, merchants, and scholars.

We preach the Word which has become flesh, and that Word of God can become flesh in all that we are, and not just in what we say. St Francis of Assisi said: "Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary use words!" We have to become living words of truth and hope. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "You are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on the tablets of the human heart." (2 Cor. 3.3) In some situations the most effective word can even be silence. I was struck in Japan by how our monasteries are powerful witnesses to the gospel. Buddhists may meet Christ more powerfully in their silence than in any words that we could say. I think of the lepers' colonies here in the Philippines, run by the brothers of St Martin, which are an embodiment of Dominic's compassion. The Word also becomes visible in poetry and painting, in music and dancing. Every skill gives us a way of propagating the word. For, example, Hilary Pepler, a famous lay Dominican and a printer, wrote that, "The work of the printer, as all work, should be done for the glory of God. The work of the printer is to multiply the written word, hence the printer serves the maker of words, and the maker of words serves, - or should serve – the Word Which become Flesh"

We do not preach this word as scattered individuals, but as a community. Christifideles Laici says that communion with Jesus "gives rise to communion of Christians among themselves...Communion gives rise to mission and mission is accomplished in communion" (n.32). As you all know, in the early days, a community of the brethren was known as a *sacra praedicatio*, a holy preaching. When Antonio de Montesinos preached his famous sermon in defence of the Indians in Hispaniola in 1511 in, the Spanish conquistadors went to complain to the Prior, Pedro de Cordoba. And the Prior told them that when Antonio preached, the whole community all preached. We should be midwives to each other, helping our sisters and brothers to speak the word that is given to them. We must help each other to find the authority that is given to them. Together we are a living word in a way that we could not be separately.

I met a brother in the United States recently who had had an operation for cancer and lost part of his tongue. He had to learn to speak again. He discovered how complex it is to speak a single word. We need parts of the body we never think of: our minds, lungs, a throat, vocal cords, a tongue, teeth and a mouth. All this is necessary just to say: "Peace be with you". And if we are to proclaim this to the world, then we need each other so that we can together form these words of life. Together we are the mind, the lungs, the tongue, the mouth, the teeth, the vocal cords that can form a word of peace.

I was at a meeting of the Dominican Family in Bologna earlier this year. There was a group of laity who worked with the sisters and brethren in preaching missions in parishes. There was another group of laity and brethren whose love is philosophy, and who saw their mission as to confront the intellectual vacuum at the heart of people's lives. They preach by teaching. And there was a group of sisters who ran a University for the retired and unemployed. And there was a group of laity who said that they wished to support the mission of the others by praying. There was no competition between these Dominicans. No group could claim to be the "true Dominicans" or that the others were "second class citizens". For example, the fraternities have a central role in the life of the Order that no new group can threaten. But these fraternities can strengthen the Dominican Family by helping to found youth groups, new associations, and these in turn will renew the fraternities. If we are to be a true Family of Preachers, then there can be no competition between us. If there is, then we will fail to embody the gospel.

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Jesus breathes upon the disciples. This deliberately echoes the creation of humanity, when God breathed upon Adam and made him a living being. Jesus breathes on the disciples so that they become fully alive. This is the completion of creation. Peter says to Jesus, "You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6. 68). The goal of preaching is not to communicate information but life. The Lord says to Ezekiel, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.

Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live.” (37.4f) We preachers should speak words that make dry bones come alive!

We must be honest and admit that most preaching is very boring, and is more inclined to put us to sleep than to wake us up. At least it drives us to prayer. After ten minutes we discreetly look at our watches and pray for the preacher to stop. The Colombian Dominicans say: “Five minutes for the people, five minutes for the walls, and everything else is for the Devil”. Even Paul, the greatest of all preachers, managed to send Eutychus to sleep, so that he fell out of the window and almost died! But God sometimes gives us the grace to speak words that give life to others.

I met a woman here in the Philippines called Clarentia. She had caught leprosy when she was fourteen years old, and spent all of her life in leprosaria, living with our Brothers of St Martin. She hardly dared to leave these places where she was accepted and welcome. Now that she is already in her sixties, she has discovered her vocation as a preacher. She has found the courage to leave her locked “upper room”, to go out and to visit leprosaria to encourage the people who are there also to find a freedom; she addresses conferences and government agencies. She has found her voice and authority in fighting this terrible disease. This is what it means to preach a word of life.

For us preachers, all words matter. All our words can offer life to other people, or death. Our words can sustain and renew other people, or they can undermine and destroy. All day long we are offering words to each other; we joke and tease, we exchange information, we gossip, we repeat the news, and talk about the people who are not in the room. Our lives are filled with words, doing good or evil. A computer virus was sent out from this very city, Manila, earlier this year. It was disguised in a message called “I LOVE YOU”. We all like to get messages like that. But if you opened that message, then all your computer files were destroyed. Sometimes our words can be similar. We can give the impression that we are just being truthful, just or honest, “I am just saying this for your own good, my dear”, while sowing poison!

One motto of the Order is “Laudare, benedicere, praedicare”, “to praise, to bless, to preach”. Becoming a preacher is more than learning to speak about God. It is discovering the art of praising and blessing all that is good. There is no preaching without celebration. We cannot preach unless we see the goodness of what God has made and praise it and bless it. Sometimes the preacher must, like Las Casas, confront and denounce injustice, but only so that life may have the victory over death, and resurrection over the tomb, and praise over complaint.

We will therefore only flourish as a family of preachers if we make each other strong, and give each other life. We must breathe God’s breath into each other, as Jesus did on the disciples. St Catherine of Siena was a preacher not just in what she said and wrote, but in giving others strength. When the Pope was getting discouraged, she stiffened his courage. When her beloved Raymond of Capua, Master of the Order, was afraid, then she encouraged him onwards. All Masters of the Order need that sometimes. When a criminal was condemned to death, she helped him to face execution. She says to him: “Courage, my dear brother, we shall soon be at the wedding feast. . . . Never forget this. I shall be waiting for you at the place of execution”.

The Dominican Family in Brazil established what is called “The Dominican mutirão”. Mutirão means “working together”. Every year a small group of brethren, sisters and laity goes to be with people struggling for life or justice, especially those who are poor and forgotten. They go just to be with them, to show support, to hear what they are living, to show that someone remembers them. We need this if we are to be strong.

So we shall grow together as a Dominican Family as we learn to make each other strong and alive, as we recognise each other’s authority and praise God for what we see. Most of us learn how to be human in our families. Our parents and siblings, aunts and uncles and cousins, teach us how to talk and listen, how to play and laugh, how to walk and get up when we fall over. You cannot learn to be human alone. Perhaps this is why Dominic always thought of the Order as having the breadth of a family, with nuns and laity and brethren. Dominic was eminently human and he preached the God who embraced our humanity. We need our Dominican Family to form us human preachers, and make us alive. We need the wisdom of women, and the experience of married people and parents, and the depth of contemplative if we are to be formed as preachers. So all Dominican formation should be

mutual formation. In many parts of the world, the novices of the sisters and the brothers spend part of their formation together. We can teach each other to speak a word of life.

And the last words of Jesus that I will comment upon show us what is at the heart of that word of life.

“If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

Twice Jesus says to them “Peace be with you”, and then he gives them the power to forgive or retain sins. That is the heart of our preaching. This includes the forgiveness of our individual sins. St Dominic wept for sinners. It also includes the healing of divisions between peoples, reconciliation and the birth of a just world.

Again this is a vocation that we live in different ways. There was a French Dominican lay woman, called Maïti Girtanner who was brilliant young pianist. But in 1940, during the Nazi occupation of France, she founded a resistance group. Finally she was caught by the Gestapo and tortured by a young doctor. This destroyed her nervous system, and for the rest of her life she was in pain. It destroyed her career as a pianist. Forty years later, this doctor realised that before he died he had to seek forgiveness from her. And so he tracked down Maïti and asked for reconciliation. She forgave him and he returned home, able to face himself, his family and his death. As Maïti said, “Vous voyez le mal n’est pas le plus fort” “You see, evil is not the strongest”. That is an embodiment of Jesus’ preaching.

I also think of Dominican Peace Action in Britain, a group of nuns, sisters, laity and brethren, who made a commitment to work together for peace and especially the abolition of nuclear weapons, through writing and preaching, and even through breaking the law. There is the community of S Maria Maggiore in Rome, which is entrusted with hearing confessions in the Basilica. For hours every day, especially during this Jubilee year, and in innumerable languages, they are there to offer God’s forgiveness. All these are ways of preaching those words: “Peace be with you.”

But we cannot preach that peace unless we live it among ourselves. When the brethren and sisters make profession they ask for God’s mercy and that of the Order. We can have nothing to say about peace and forgiveness if we do not offer it to each other, as a whole Dominican Family.

When war broke out between Argentina and Britain over the Malvinas Islands in 1982, the brethren of the community in Oxford went out into the street in the habit and carrying candles. We went in procession to the war memorial to pray for peace. Last year I happened to be in Argentina on the “Malvinas day”, the day when the nation renews its commitment to the islands. I was in Tucuman in the north of the country, and the streets were filled with Argentinean flags and banners. I must admit that I wondered whether I had chosen the right day to come! In the afternoon I went to a meeting of a thousand members of the Dominican Family, and there was a little British flag too! And we celebrated the Eucharist together for all the dead. The peace we preach is a peace that we must live

In the north of Burundi, there is a Dominican monastery of nuns. The whole countryside has been destroyed by the violent civil war between the Tutsis and the Hutus. Everywhere the villages are empty and the fields are burnt. But when you draw near to the hill upon which the monastery is built, you see that it is green. Here the people come to tend their fields. In this desert of war this is an oasis of peace. And it is so because the nuns themselves live peacefully together, although they too are Hutu and Tutsi. All of them have lost members of their families in the war. It is a peace and forgiveness that is made flesh in their community.

This peace that we should share is much more than an absence of conflict. It is more than forgiving each other when we do wrong. It is the friendship that is the heart of Dominican spirituality. Before he died Jesus said to the disciples, “I call you my friends”. Three days later, after betrayal, denial, suffering and death, he appears among them and offers them again his friendship, “Peace be with you”. It is a friendship which can transcend any betrayal or cowardice or sin. It is the friendship which is God’s own life, the love at the heart of the Trinity.

This friendship is the foundation of our equality with each other. It means that we all equally belong in the Dominican Family. It means that there can be no competition, between the brethren and the sisters, between the nuns and the sisters, between the fraternities and the new forms of lay groups. It implies a certain fidelity to each other. We should stand by each other, and never denounce each other in public.

The Dominican Family is our common home. We are called to be *chez nous*, in *la nostra casa*. I know that sometimes the sisters and laity can feel that in our Dominican home, the brethren are in the upper room, and they have tried to lock out everyone else. One of our biggest challenges is building a shared consciousness of the Order as the place where we all belong. To be at home means that one does not have to justify being there, that one is at ease. One is accepted just as one is. Of course each community needs its own times and its own space. We cannot all go barging into the monasteries and demanding to share the lives of the nuns. The communities of brethren and sisters and the families of the laity need their own privacy. This is obvious. St Thomas says that friendship does not consist in living under the same roof or even eating at the same table “like cattle”, but in communication, in the pleasure of conversation. It means that we recognise each other as brothers and sisters. It shows in our faces, gestures and words, in the welcome we give each other.

Many little tensions within the Dominican Family, such as who can put which initials after their names, who can wear the habit and when, are symptoms of this more important and deeper longing, for friendship, for a home, to belong, to have one’s assured place. In the old days we used to belong to the First, Second and Third Order. This terminology was abolished at the General Chapter of River Forest in 1968, to make plain our equality. No one is first or second or third class. But in so doing we lost a way of stating our unity in a common Order. Together we must find ways to build that common home.

And it should be an open home, which welcomes the friends of our friends, which welcomes new groups whose Dominican identity is not perhaps clear but who want to be part of the Family. The friendship that Jesus offers is wide and open. He welcomes in everyone. He gets impatient when the disciples try to stop someone preaching because they do not belong to the group of the disciples. He does not shut doors but bursts through them. Let us embody that big hearted friendship. Let us be a sign of that welcome, so that we may all be at ease in Dominic’s Family and know that we belong. May Dominic liberate us from the fear that locks the doors.

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1. ed Aidan Nichols OP Dominican Gallery, Leominster 1997, p. 347
 2. L. 273; DT XXXI
 3. e.g. ST 1-2. 28. 1. Ad 1