

**Homily for Mass with the Serra Vocations Club of Madison County
St. Anthony Hospital Chapel, Alton**

**The Memorial of Saint Dominic
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My brother deacons, women religious, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, for the past week and a half, many of us have been watching the summer Olympics from London. We are inspired by the dedication and commitment of these athletes, not necessarily to imitate their achievements in their particular sports, but more generally to draw encouragement from their examples of overcoming obstacles to attain their goals. Similarly, throughout the ages the Lord has raised up for us certain men and women who point out the way of authentic discipleship in a luminous way. One such man is Saint Dominic Guzman, whom the Church celebrates today.

Recognizing the two-fold challenge present before the Church in his day, Dominic wanted to find a way to evangelize peoples on the northern borders of Europe and to counter the growing heresies of the day. He went to the Pope to find an answer to these

challenges, who asked him to preach to the Albigensians and lead them back into the fold of the Church.

The Albigensians believed that matter was evil and the spirit was good. This belief led them to renounce earthly goods and pleasures, even going so far as to reject marriage, the Incarnation of Christ, the power of the Sacraments, and the resurrection of the dead. Because they arose in reaction to the opulent and immoral lives of many of the clergy, the Albigensians greatly valued poverty and humility, which many of them practiced particularly well.

Saint Dominic knew that if he was to win them back to the Church, he could only do so through the example of a holy life. So it was that he devoted himself to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience and began the Order of Preachers, more commonly known after himself as the Dominicans.

The example of his holy life bore great fruit, both within his work of reconciling the Albigensians and within Christendom itself. Much like with his counterpart, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Dominic's order for men grew and flourished, and he established also a Second Order for women and a Third Order for the laity to share in his spirituality. Within the brief span of sixteen years,

men and women of the Order of Preachers were present in most of Europe. It was through these men and women that Saint Dominic was able to meet the second of the Church's challenges, namely, the evangelization of peoples on the borders.

Together these spiritual sons and daughters of Saint Dominic took up the challenge presented to them by the Albigensians. It was as though, confronted by so much infidelity to the Gospel, the Albigensians said to the Dominicans:

Persuade us that the Catholic religion is something more than a mere label, a mere favor that a man can wear on his sleeve; that it is a life, and an interpretation of life; an attitude towards our daily tasks, as well as an attitude towards God.¹

This they did exceptionally well, and you and I are called to do the same, to persuade others of the beauty of Catholic life.

Many of the same challenges that threatened the life of the Church in the thirteenth century are present in our day, though under different guises and different names. Nevertheless, the primary objection of non-believers remains the same: Where is the holiness of your life?

It is a sad reality of life that too many of the Church's sons and daughters do not actively and consciously seek to follow Christ Jesus in all things as Saint Dominic and so many of his followers did. It often happens that they fall away due to a lack of faithful examples; they do not see the Christian life well lived and so they deem it not worth living. Through the example of his own life, Dominic demonstrated the falsity of this presumption and showed others the way to Jesus Christ. Seeing such a good example of Christian life, they flocked to him. We, dear brothers and sisters, must seek to do the same if our prayers for more vocations to the priesthood and to the consecrated life are to bear great fruit.

Let us pray the Lord to raise up many more such men and women who will devote themselves entirely to a holy life and, through it, the proclamation of the Gospel.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Ronald Knox, *Captive Flames: On Selected Saints and Christian Heroes* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), 57.