



4 August 1878

Feast of St. Dominic

Saint Marie Eugenie of Jesus

My dear Daughters,

Today's Saint is one to whom we have always had a great devotion and I am glad to speak about him. You know that St. Dominic was trained in the Augustinian Order. He was a Canon Regular, and for a long time he led a life of prayer and study in his monastery, practising the virtues of regular observance, silence, obedience, fidelity to prayer and love of the Divine Office. All these have to be learnt by practise and without them it would be dangerous to launch out into active work for souls.

My purpose in saying this is to convince you that the most important thing for us is to be trained in regular observance, to have a great and perfect love for the Rule, to keep it in every point, so that it will have more weight with us than personal views or ideas we may have about doing good. We can be true Religious of the Assumption only on condition we do good according to our Rule and not according to some other ideal, and that we are most intent on prayer and Office, and look on them as the most important things in our life.

I sometimes regret that you who joined us later see the Sisters in charge obliged now by age and the burden of their many occupations to be dispensed from Office in Choir and from the regular times for mental prayer. But I am glad to tell you that when we were young we were all in choir for all the Office and that for a time even got up at night for Matins. The Divine Office was one of the things dearest to our hearts, one of the great devotions on which our Assumption was founded. When one is young one is stronger and one can more easily do without a lot of things and live in greater poverty as regards the visible, material things we have for our use. Our whole religious life, Sisters, must be based on regular observance in this way.

But to return to St. Dominic. Why did he leave the Order where he had been trained and where he had acquired all he was to give? One must have in mind a clear picture of the time and place. In a small town in Spain in those days, the Chapter of Canons of very strict observance did not make its influence felt very far. There were no railways, the roads were bad and people only

travelled on foot or on mules or in more or less bad vehicles. A religious of a monastic order, like St. Dominic, heard Confessions if anyone came to confession in their chapel; he preached when his turn came round; he prayed and studied and chanted the Office. Such was his life.

Now God called St. Dominic to combat the heresies of his day and the ruin of faith and morals and religious practice that were devastating the whole of the south of France. The Albigensian heresy was more horrible than one can imagine. It was a fore-runner of the Reformation and it wrought havoc in the southern provinces.

There was nothing extraordinary in a Canon devoting himself to the apostolate. You see this in the life of the Venerable de la Salle¹. Although his life was dedicated to the education of poor children he was called upon by Vicars General to go and preach in country places because he was a Canon. So we need not be surprised that St. Dominic got permission to undertake the work that God called him to. But when he found how enormous his mission was, he saw that it would need a number of men who would be apostles and not only apostles in the ordinary sense of the word but who would work for the salvation of souls by mortification and zeal and learning and by love of the Divine Office. And that is how the Order of Preachers began.

There is a certain likeness between the Dominicans and us and they like to acknowledge it. For one thing, who should have a devotion to Our Blessed Lady if not we, daughters of her Assumption? And then, St. Dominic did not dispense his Friars from Regular Observance. He wished them to keep silence, to practise mortification and obedience and to recite the Divine Office. All that an Augustinian has to do in his monastery, a good Dominican has to do as an apostle in his life of work for souls.

Well, Sisters, that is an example for us. Sometimes the good to be done to souls by the apostolate may tempt us to leave aside something without which we should not be true religious. Look at the Congregations devoted exclusively to the active life, for instance, the Sisters of Charity. They are called the servants of the poor and not 'religious'. They are not obliged by certain elements which make up religious life, such as silence and the Chapter and they say to those who want to hear: "We are not religious". We, on the contrary are religious, and that is the foundation on which we have to build. We must be first and foremost Religious of the Assumption wholly faithful to obedience and prayer, with the keenest desire that the Rule shall be kept from morning till night wherever we may be, and that it shall over-rule everything else.

In certain Dominican houses I have seen the most perfect observance of this kind. For example at Lyon in the part of the house reserved for the Friars there are parlours where those who have to speak can go so as to respect the silence in the places where the Rule requires it. Here, Sisters, you have the community room where you can speak in a low voice when you have anything necessary to say.

One of the most admirable things about St. Dominic was his love of Regular Observance. Imagine this man who had left his monastery, who was always on the road, preaching first in one place and then in another, going round the whole of southern France where war and heresy had put everything in turmoil and confusion. And in the midst of it all he kept his Rule as faithfully as if he had been in his monastery. He prayed, he kept silence with his companions and when it was time to talk they talked about the things of God. In short, in this new life spent outside enclosure he was faithful to monastic rule and to the least points of Regular Observance.

¹ John Baptist de la Salle

We ought to do the same, Sisters; in our outward activities for souls; in our work with the children; our efforts to make them pass their exams; our duty to try to please seculars; on the occasions when we must go outside enclosure and likewise on journeys. In all this it is our duty to behave so that people can see that we are religious who hold to Regular Observance, to office, to silence and poverty, to the common life and to obedience. In fact to everything that constitutes the religious life and makes it the basis of an activity that is all love and ardent desire for the salvation of souls.

