

## The Four Pillars of Dominican Spirituality

From the Central Province of the Order of Preachers, U.S.A.

**The 4 pillars are the way in which our life is divided;** yet the life of a Dominican is not divided at all. All four of these areas must be lived in a faithful and rich way in order for the Holy Preaching to be accomplished. Living a balanced life placing proper emphasis on each area when appropriate helps us do the work our founder Dominic and the Church have asked us to do: preach Jesus Christ.

### 1. Prayer

Dominicans center our lives on Jesus Christ, the true light, and are moved by the Holy Spirit who radiates God's healing presence in the world today. We celebrate the Word in daily common prayer, meditation, study, and in the proclamation that is preaching. "In imitation of the Mother of God, who "pondered these things in her heart, our lives are nourished by God's Word as spoken in Sacred Scripture, celebrated in the Eucharist, and encountered in everyday life.

According to the desire of St. Dominic, the solemn and common celebration of the liturgy must be maintained among the principal duties of our vocation. In the liturgy, especially in the Eucharist, the mystery of salvation is present and at work, a mystery in which we share and which we contemplate and proclaim in preaching to others so they may be incorporated into Christ through the sacraments of faith. In the liturgy, together with Christ, we glorify God for the eternal plan of the Divine and for the wonderful order of grace. We intercede with the Father of mercies for the entire Church as well as for the needs and the salvation of the whole world. Therefore, the celebration of the liturgy is the center and heart of our whole life, whose unity especially is rooted in it.

Each Dominican is called to balance in his own life the two dimensions of our life, the contemplative and the active. The balance is something for which we continually strive, not something that we achieve once and for all.

### 2. Common Life

We live together in large (as many as 30) and small (as few as 2 or 3) communities. The basic idea of community is not just people living together under one roof. Rather, community living is about the willingness to share our lives with one another.

For Dominicans, the communal dimension of our religious life challenges us to be of "one mind and one heart in God." Profession into the Order of Preachers includes the promise to hold all things in common. We live together and pray together and share a common vision in the ministry of Preaching. It was St. Dominic's desire to imitate the apostolic poverty of Jesus and the early church, so "we call nothing our own." As Dominicans, we share our blessings with the rest of the world.

We live a vowed life, that is, we make public promises to live according to the ideals counseled by Jesus. Our vow of poverty calls us to live a simple life, free from the need to possess many

things. Our vow of chastity is a deliberate choice on our part not to limit our life to a spouse and family, but to allow ourselves to be witnesses to the unlimited love of God. Our vow of obedience puts us at the service of the Church, free from the need to always have the last word about what we will do and where we will live. The vowed life is a challenge, but an exciting and fulfilling challenge.

### 3. Study

St. Dominic made study an essential part of the “Sacred Preaching.” This was no small innovation in the thirteenth century when most of the clergy were uneducated. St. Dominic sent the friars to the great universities of his time to study, to preach, and to establish places of learning. This dedication to study and teaching continues today.

The primary object of Dominican study is the Word of God, which comes to us through Scripture & Tradition, is interpreted authoritatively by the Church’s Magisterium, and Whose fullest manifestation is the very Person of Christ Himself. What we might call the secondary object of Dominican study does not differ in content from the Truth Who is Christ, but it differs in its mode of discovery. Insofar as creation, the accomplishments of human genius and even other religions all reflect the light of the Gospel, these too are profitable means through which the wise and zealous student can come to know more profoundly the Author of all that exists. Hence, both the entire created order as well as “the revelation of the mystery kept secret for long ages but now manifested through the prophetic writings” lie open to the discerning mind of the studious friar.

The purpose of Dominican study is to make us useful to the souls of our neighbors. As distinct from mere curiosity, it is a spiritual work of mercy aimed at facilitating a more effective communication of the truth that saves. While knowledge can certainly be sought for its own sake, study is all the more noble and virtuous when one is motivated by the dual command of love of God and love of neighbor.

### 4. Peaching

As the “O.P.” after our name suggests, preaching is at the heart of Dominican life. In fact, we were founded to be “useful to the souls of others,” and we make ourselves useful primarily through our ministry to the Word of God. Our common life, our study and our prayer are all geared to support the vocation of a preacher. For us preaching takes many forms. We preach from the pulpit during liturgy and at retreats, but we also consider our teaching and various kinds of pastoral care to be ways in which we bring the healing Word of God to bear on the lives of those we serve. Our preaching ministry takes us to parishes, university campuses, retreat centers and sometimes even to food pantries, shelters for the homeless and other places where people are impoverished literally as well as spiritually.

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