



Rome, December 22, 2013

**Novena of the Jubilee of the Order (2014)  
The Dominican Laity and Preaching**

*"I will pour out my spirit on all flesh ;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
Your old men shall dream dreams,  
And your young men shall see visions" (Joel 3:1)*

Dear brothers and sisters,

It is with great joy that I write this letter – on this day, anniversary of the confirmation of the Order – to open the year of the Jubilee novena dedicated to the theme: "Lay Dominicans and preaching". This year begins just after the Year of Faith which was inaugurated by Pope Benedict XVI at the Synod on the new evangelisation and the transmission of the faith, in the course of which the memory of the opening of the Second Vatican Council was celebrated, and which concluded with the promulgation by Pope Francis of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. So we must direct our attention to Lay Dominicans in a context in which the Order of Preachers is particularly called to take to its heart the many appeals for a renewal of zeal for evangelisation. Indeed, the recent General Chapter of the friars gave as the theme for the celebration of the Jubilee this motto, as simple as it is radical: "Sent to preach the Gospel", echoing the sending forth of the first friars as preachers at the service of the Church, totally devoted to evangelising the Word of God.

This motto is simple, in that it centres our attention on what is at the heart of the service that the Church expects of the Order: to proclaim the Gospel. It is radical, because, beyond all the difficulties that may be encountered, beyond the uncertainties that may inhabit us as to what we must be or do, it reminds us that first and foremost we must be open to this "sending forth" from which we take our identity. Today, perhaps more than ever, the theme of the Lay Dominicans should help us to discover more clearly that all of us, members of the Dominican Family, are sent together to favour the conversation of God with the world in proclaiming the Gospel of peace.

***A "Dominican communion" sent forth to preach the Gospel***

Obviously, things have developed since this time of the beginnings. For example, the Church has pursued its reflection on preaching. It has also pursued its reflection – and the Second Vatican Council was a particularly important moment in this sense – on the laity and their essential role in witnessing and proclaiming the Gospel. In the same way, the reflection is pursued, supported by concrete experience, as to the way in which the laity can be an integral part of Orders and Congregations, of new communities and of traditions of spiritual life. What all this has in common is a powerful conviction stressed by Paul VI during the Council: the Church becomes what it truly is to the degree to which it makes itself a conversation in the world, that is to say to the degree to which, proclaiming the Gospel in the world, it wishes to testify that the God of the biblical revelation comes, in Jesus, to encounter human beings in order to converse with them. I have had the opportunity for many years now to take part in Haiti in the life of a parish when small ecclesial communities were being born, called "Fraternities". In some other parishes, the name subsequently became "Ti Legliz" (little Churches), the two terms incidentally reminding us very simply that "Fraternity" was the name used, in the first centuries, to designate the assemblies of the Church. The fraternity, where the sharing of faith and the becoming human of each individual were forged, was also the crucible of witnessing and of mission. Thus it was designated as the seal of the act of birth of the Church ...

If it is quite clear that things have changed since the time of the beginnings of the Order, we are also very often sensitive to certain analogies that cannot fail to remind us of what for Diego and Dominic lit the fire of preaching: changes in the way the Church was living as a result of the changes

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in feudal society, the emergence of new knowledge and new ways of obtaining it, profound changes in the organisation of society and of cities. At the heart of these changes, groups of lay people arose who invited the Church to act, to dare to venture outside structures that were too firmly established and too rigid so as to risk suffocating the widespread breath of life. These “poor”, “humble” people made the choice of a life that offered a humble presence in the world, an authentic, living word preached as good news, and a certain radicalism in their way of life. They were moved by this intuition, that radicalism lived in full humanity because of the Gospel was the best way to “interpret” the Word and to make manifest the presence of the One who comes to save the world.

Some of these groups of lay people were even given, by Pope Innocent III, the possibility to undertake itinerant, mendicant preaching. The “Third Orders” of mendicants were in one way or another the heirs of these movements. And it is in this ferment of a Church that was seeking to rediscover the vigour of its authenticity that the “Holy Preaching of Prouilhe” arose, when some lay people came to take part in Dominic’s adventure in its very infancy. Rereading these earliest times, I cannot help thinking that, when he received the first sister converts who had come to put themselves under his protection, then Ermengarde Godoline and her husband, Sanche Gasc (8 August 1207), Dominic began to dream of this adventure as modelled on the group of which St Luke speaks in his Gospel, the group who accompanied Jesus, going “through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God” (Luke 8:1-3). This short passage from Luke’s Gospel describing Jesus the preacher is at the heart of the account in Chapters 7 to 10, in the light of which we can rejoice that we are, in our turn, “sent to preach the Gospel” on the model of fraternity. Further to the “holy preaching”, we are sent as a family to preach the Gospel. The idea of the “Dominican family” is thus not just a way of expressing the coming together of several groups with a single purpose. It also expresses a way of evangelising and, from this point of view, lay Dominicans are a reminder of this requirement, rooted in the Gospel.

The unity of our Order is in fact given by its evangelizing mission: laity, sisters and friars of the Order are members of a single family whose identity is that they are sent to preach the Gospel. Or rather, we might say that the “Dominican” identity is precisely that of a family – of a “communion” – constituted by this organic bond between evangelisation and the contemplation of that truth that is the living Word that has come into the world, what we try to develop in the three forms of prayer, study and fraternity, each in the specific manner of her/his state in life. In Luke’s Gospel quoted above, the sending forth of the twelve, then of the seventy-two, falls into this dynamic in which Jesus is revealed as the Word that fulfils the promise and gives life, the Word that must be heeded and put into practice, this Word that brings brothers and sisters together. In commending the Preachers, Pope Honorius presented them as totally dedicated to the evangelisation of the Word of God. This consecration to the Word, to preaching and to contemplation (“sanctify them in the truth: your Word is truth”, John 17:17), is what makes our unity. In this perspective, the dimension of the unity of the Dominican family is essential because it is linked to the mission of preaching the Kingdom (the continuation of the Son’s prayer to the Father, in the Gospel according to St John, explicitly evokes the sending forth into the world and asks that they may be one: John 17:18-23). It is obvious that the Order of Preachers does not have the monopoly of preaching or of evangelisation in the Church, but it seems to me that its “confirmation” for almost 800 years ordains it, as “holy preaching”, to serve the charism of preaching in the Church: in other words, to serve this essential dimension of the Church according to which this charism is constituted, established by the grace of the Spirit of Christ. This service does not take only the form of the act of preaching or evangelisation, but much more, because of the constitution of a family united in order to preach, it is a reminder to the heart of the Church that evangelisation contributes to establish the Church as fraternity and communion.

### ***Conversation and communion***

It is in the light of these three reminders – of the Church as fraternity, of the beginnings of the holy preaching of the Order, and of the unity of the Dominican family– that I invite you to consider the theme for this year: “Lay Dominicans and preaching”, and to make of it the inspiration of our reflection. What has already been said will have made us realise that the formulation of this theme opens wider horizons in order to understand more clearly how the commitment of the laity in the Dominican Family is crucial for the preaching mission of the Order.

“The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God, that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.” (*Lumen Gentium*, §31). In this general perspective, the expression “Lay Dominicans” makes it possible to take cognizance of a certain diversity among the men and women who today wish, by the very grace of their baptism, to take part in the mission of Christ – “to make the presence of Christ alive in the midst of the people” (*Prologue to the Rule of 1968*) – attending the school of Saint Dominic. All of them, as lay people, are called to undertake “the pre-eminent responsibility of working to make the divine message of salvation known and accepted by all men throughout the world” (*Decree on the apostolate of the Laity* §3). And all are invited to do so in contributing to the constitution of this Dominican “family” sent forth to preach the Gospel.

As lay Dominicans, “faithfully clinging to their vocation, they endeavour to be suffused with the spirit of St Dominic: they will draw on assiduous contemplation of God, together with prayer and study, a firm faith; they will bear powerful witness, each according to her/his grace and condition, in order to enlighten the faithful who share their faith and those who are deprived of the light of Christ. Thus, thanks to them, the Order is able more fully to attain to its goal. The poverties of men and women, their sufferings and their aspirations: they will do their utmost to recognise and share all these. Guided by the light of the Gospel according to the spirit of the Church, in union with all those of good will, they will promote by means of the apostolate of truth all that is true, just and holy, and they will endeavour to come to the aid of all men and women, as far as possible, in a spirit of joy and honest freedom” (*Prologue to the Rule of 1968*).

Among these Lay Dominicans, the members of the Lay Dominican Fraternities clearly have an important place, choosing as they do to commit themselves with a promise to carry out this specific participation in the mission of Christ as members of the Order. They also register their commitment to the living Word not only for the whole of their lives as baptised persons, but also within the balance of the whole of their commitments and of their lives which they want to be “preaching”, serving the conversation of God with the world. At the same time, they register for the duration of the life of the Order, the need to preach the Word, always referring this preaching to the constitution of the Church of Christ seeking communion and unity. As we know well, today we must reflect on the diversity at the heart of these Fraternities, seeking together how we may always best accept, promote and combine this diversity, brought together in a single concrete witness of a lay life that seeks to be preaching.

There are also other ways in which lay people decide to take part in this mission and to belong to the “Dominican Family”, although without committing themselves in this form: lay associate members of many Congregations of Sisters, at a particular convent or in a specific Dominican organisation; heirs to the medieval “militia”; members of the International Dominican Youth Movement; Dominican Volunteers; members of the Lataste Fraternities and of the movements that are inspired by his vision of Bethany. To each of these groups there is a corresponding specific manner of commitment within the Dominican Family. And, as in any family, there are also friends who, without explicitly opting for this belonging, share the mission, whether for the professional collaboration that they choose to anchor firmly in the spirit of St Dominic (for example, professionals in teaching, in publishing, in communication), or because of their choice of evangelisation (for instance, the many lay people committed to the preaching of the Rosary in the Dominican tradition). The idea of the Dominican family, of Dominican communion, allows us to bring together all these dimensions, with the nuns, the friars, the apostolic sisters, the members of the secular institutes and of the priestly fraternities, in the name of evangelisation, the shared mission for the Kingdom, in the respect and autonomy of the vocation proper to each (cf. *Bologna Document*).

This diversity is important to make explicit the sense of the link between lay Dominicans *and* preaching. It must immediately be stressed that the term “preaching” is being used in its broadest sense, and acknowledging the specific nature of preaching the homily in the course of the liturgy as defined by the discipline of the Church. “Your sons and your daughters will prophesy”! Evangelising the Word of God, proclaiming the Kingdom of God, announcing the Gospel, preaching the Gospel of peace, spreading the presence of Christ... All these expressions echo the prophecy of Joel: everyone will prophesy, everyone will speak “on behalf of God”. The terms of the Second Vatican Council

clearly express the specific nature of the lay vocation to evangelisation and it is in line with this that we must place the link of the lay Dominicans with the mission of the Order's service of preaching. This specificity is bivalent. It applies to the specific environments in which lay Dominicans live and bear witness and in which, by their service of evangelisation, they permit the Order to fulfil its mission, to "attain its end more fully". It also has to do with the contribution which, in turn, is made to the Order and to the Dominican communion, and it is another, complementary way of contributing to the accomplishment of the mission of the Order. There were women converts who made Dominic aware of the need to protect them. There were the first poor Waldensians who highlighted that the witness of radicalism was the bearer of the Gospel witness.

It seems to me that lay Dominicans can allow the preaching of the Order to achieve its end more fully in several ways. As in the case of the sisters and the friars of the Order, the preaching of lay Dominicans is rooted in their experience of life. This is why the wealth of their specific contribution to the preaching of the Order comes from their experience of family and professional life, their experience of parenthood, their experience of life in the Church, the experience of being young in contemporary society, the particular experience of the baptised person who must testify her/his faith in the midst of a family or a group of friends to whom s/he is daily bound by ties of affection but who do not share the same faith and often show no desire to share it ... Moreover, they know the difficulty of witnessing the faith in a specific manner: in many places in the contemporary world, the habitual situation of a lay person brings her/him face to face with indifference, scepticism and unbelief, in a very different way from religious, and this must come to enrich the preaching of the Order as a whole. Similarly, through the activities of their professional, family or political life, lay persons experience how the Christian demands for fraternity and truth, according to which they try to contribute to the transformation of the world, are a form of preaching essentially linked to their state, which comes to be combined with the preaching of the whole "family of preachers".

It is through all these experiences that one also experiences God, his presence, his Word, his Providence... To speak on behalf of God is to allow the breath of God to inspire our human words in such a way that they witness to the presence and to the "life with us" of one who is greater than us all. But it is also to allow to be registered in us, in the depths of our own experiences, a mysterious echo of the experience that God himself wanted of the human condition.

It is easy to understand that the complementarity between the preaching of the laity and that of the friars or sisters committed in the Dominican family in the form of consecrated life, is a consequence of the complementarity of the experiences of human life. From this point of view, it is important to stress that one of the treasures of the roles of the Dominican family is its being organised in such a way that these multiple experiences – and not only the concrete actions of evangelisation – enter into conversation and teach one another the presence and the providence of God. Too often, it seems to me, we consider it a benefit that we are mutually attentive to what constitutes the singular nature of the experience of being Dominican today in the various states of life, that we know how the other members of the family live... At heart, too often perhaps, we think it is possible to build our "family" passing over in silence what is the very foundation of preaching, because it is the fundamental place of the work of grace in each of us. In order to favour the conversation of God with humanity, we have to take the time, and find the means, to listen to the echoes of the many conversations that He carries on with this world.

Starting from these remarks, we may say that Lay Dominicans enrich the way in which the Order day by day must learn to "love the world" to which we are sent to preach, not only through subtle, pertinent analyses of the world, but by making ourselves vulnerable to the diverse experiences of the world that are the experiences of the members of the Dominican family. Moreover, in doing this, the Order in its diversity will also learn to allow itself to be marked by the different interpretations of the Word that arise from the heart of these experiences. With the Bible in one hand, a newspaper in the other, some of our forerunners liked to say. Shared experience will further enrich this attitude. And it is starting from this awareness that the Order in its entirety will always be able to make still stronger its conviction that one of the first duties of the proclamation of the Gospel is to allow each one of its interlocutors to discern their own place in the Kingdom we proclaim, to discover their own responsibility which is taken on when they accept that they are, in their turn, sent forth.

In the very heart of the Order, Lay Dominicans have the responsibility to remind the other members of this first obvious fact: lay people in the Church are not first of all those to whom preaching, evangelisation and pastoral care are addressed, but rather people who are called to be active participants.

### ***In communion, renewing the zeal for evangelization***

Very recently the Church established the notion of a ‘spiritual family’, corresponding in particular to what are usually called the ‘new communities’. In a sense, if we accept the anachronism, we might dare to say that the ‘holy preaching’ of the beginnings would have answered to this definition and that the ‘Dominican family’ is its fulfilment today.

Today it is urgent for the Church – the message is repeated over and over again – to renew its zeal for evangelisation, which means at one and the same time to be strengthened, to stretch out, through the power and the grace of evangelisation. And to that end, it is urgent to ensure that the initiative of evangelisation is not seen as the fruit only of the clerical works of the Church, but rather as the fruit of a common initiative by means of which the Church as a whole brings into play what is essential to it, launching itself into the encounter with its contemporaries. Hence, in order to become what essentially she is, the Church needs the commitment of everyone to giving the Gospel to the world. How can we fail to understand this urgency for our own Order? As a “servant of the charism of preaching”, the Order of Preachers has a duty to promote the charism of lay people for evangelisation, and to show that the very constitution of the Church is at stake, through the integration of Lay Dominicans in a single Dominican communion. But this means that, in the Order as perhaps in the Church, it is urgent that we consider that the horizons of evangelisation can no longer be defined in the absence of a solid conversation among us all, laity, ministers and consecrated individuals, paying particular attention to the experience and the missionary yearning of the laity.

Several elements strike me as decisive in the specific contribution of Lay Dominicans to this renewal of zeal for evangelisation on the part of the whole Dominican Family. First of all, at the risk of being banal, the laity reminds everyone that an evangelical intuition like Dominic’s cannot be reduced to its translation into consecrated life. There is always a risk, in a spiritual family, of allowing distinctions to be established that lead, implicitly, to false hierarchies: consecrated or not; priests or not; men or women; young or old. We must have in our own midst the simplicity, and certainly the courage, to face up to this temptation and set it to rights. It is at this cost that we will be able to make the best use of the charism of preaching at the service of a Church that is fraternity. And it is in listening to Lay Dominicans talking about the joys, but also the difficulties that they experience in their ecclesial commitments, too often discovering that, if the support of the laity is generally intensely desired, their initiatives, their theological formation, their theoretical and practical knowledge, their human experience are not always welcomed as we might wish. It is as though there were two weights and two measures in the space conceded to each category’s voice in the ecclesial conversation.

To insist on the commitment of Lay Dominicans in preaching means, in the tradition of the Order, to insist on the demand for study. In fact, as was said at the beginning, preaching must find its source in the balance between the three forms of contemplation that are prayer, study and fraternal life. Proclaiming the Word, listening to the aspirations of the contemporary world for the truth, seeking to establish the best conditions possible for dialogue with cultures and new forms of knowledge: all of this requires the asceticism of study. The Order must never cease to be “student”, in order that the testimony and the words of faith find in study the knowledge of the tradition of the Church, the rigour and objectivity that open to our interlocutors true paths of liberty on which to deploy their intelligent understanding of faith in the Church.

The diversity of concrete situations in which lay people live is also a very great source of richness for the whole Dominican family. It makes it possible, in fact, not to yield to the ease with which the human, personal, family and social realities could be represented univocally, or from a “theoretical” point of view that might become normative and reductive. It is in concrete experience that the questions are raised regarding the life of couples, the upbringing of children, professional responsibility, precarious employment, the financial level of living, and political or social commitment. It is also in the concreteness of experience that the death of a spouse or an offspring is felt, those difficult moments in perhaps having to undertake professional redirection, the stages of the



journey to retirement, the handicaps of advanced age. Because all these experiences are, in the concreteness of life, in dialogue with their commitment to preaching the Gospel, Lay Dominicans offer an unparalleled contribution to the understanding of the Word of God within the Dominican family.

The Church's insistence today on the need for a renewal of evangelisation often goes along with the observation that "secularisation" is a major challenge to the proclamation of the Kingdom. Here again, it is necessary to stress the specific character of the experiences lay people have of this secularisation in their professional, friendship or family environments. We sometimes hear lay brothers and sisters express their sadness at seeing their family grow away from faith with a certain indifference, the loneliness they feel when it seems almost impossible for them to declare their faith publicly in the contexts in which they live or work, the incomprehension they are faced with when they try to show that there is no necessary contradiction between modern reason, which is above all scientific and technical, and the convictions of faith and of values. Sometimes, too, some people speak of the difficulty, in very diverse cultural contexts, of finding the right attitude in the current context of religious pluralism. In this lay Dominicans can help the whole Dominican Family to deploy creatively a preaching that holds together the testimony visible in how they live and explicit speaking.

Considering this complementarity, the Dominican family's commitment to the shared mission of evangelisation can lead to the recognition of a number of objectives of primary importance. It is clearly first of all the task of every local "holy preaching" to identify these priorities, keeping in mind the concrete reality, the culture of each country and of its specific ecclesial history. But I believe that there is a particular need today for joint reflection of the other members of the Dominican Family with the laity, at a time when there is envisaged the renewal of evangelisation with families, with the world of education, towards the young. Their experience of practical contemporary knowledge must be sought in order to arrive at a better definition of how there can be a meeting of evangelisation with scientific and technical cultures, and with those of the new social networks. It is with them, and probably by attending in the first place to their experience, that we can tame secularisation not only insofar as it unsettles habits of recognition for the Church, but also in that it opens up new paths of freedom for evangelisation.

In this time of the appeal to a renewal of evangelisation, the Order of Preachers seems to me, then, very specially called to integrate within the dynamic of its mission, to attend as a priority, to the promotion of the lay vocation to take the Gospel into the world. That would be a wonderful way of serving the Church today. To this end, I would like to put special emphasis on certain means we could develop. The spirit in which the various groups of Lay Dominicans are called to live must be and must remain marked by joy, freedom and simplicity: it is in this perspective that we position the charters prepared for the Dominican Laity after the Council. The Lay Dominican Fraternities have a pre-eminent responsibility in the whole constellation of the various groups of lay people, because they are committed to registering, in a fully lay life, the balance among all the dimensions of the tradition of Saint Dominic. We must ensure that the fraternities offer this possibility of life at the school of Saint Dominic, deliberately distinguishing themselves from any "contamination by religious life", and avoiding formalisms that would lead to fossilisation. For all that, we must also be open to the emergence of other forms of lay life in the Family, precisely because of the diversity of experiences mentioned above. The challenge of evangelisation of the young certainly calls us to promote as far as we are able the groups that may take part in the coordination of the International Dominican Youth Movement, not as "pastoral" groups for young people, but rather as groups being set up and formed to be groups of young missionaries to the young (paying special attention to those young people who have not received faith, and those who live a long way from worlds in which there are generally spiritual traditions). In the course of this year, I feel it is important that the other members of the Dominican Family take time to listen, to get to know, to understand better, the lay vocation in the ensemble of the mission of the Order, and thus to take part more vigorously in the promotion of this vocation.

If we develop this dynamic of the Dominican laity, it will commit us to promoting in the heart of the Church a topical reflection on the nature of the lay vocation to evangelise which regards all the baptised, and also a reflection on the contribution of "lay communions" that fall within the spiritual traditions that characterise the establishment of the local ecclesial communities.

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Consecrating a year of the novena preparatory to the Jubilee of the Order to the theme of "Lay Dominicans and Preaching" can help us to be more fully aware of the challenge of being "sent to preach the Gospel" in the Dominican family. Fundamentally it is an appeal to everyone to root our desire for evangelisation ever more deeply in the mystery of our baptism, which ordains us to the building up of the Church in the world as the sacrament of salvation. I invite all the communities of the Order, and all the communities and groups of the Dominican Family, to take time in the course of this year to go more deeply into this. And to this end, I invite them to take advantage of the period of Lent to devote some time each week to community *lectio divina* on the texts of the five Sundays of this liturgical year, creating their communion anew as they follow the path along which the Church invites catechumens to be reborn for the joy of evangelising.



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