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ORIENTATION 2003: TO PRAISE, TO BLESS, TO PREACH

COMMISSIONING MASS

August 10, 2003

Homily excerpts by Diane Zerfas, OP

St. Dominic probably considered himself an ordinary person, living an ordinary life. People might have complained about him like they did about Jesus in today's Gospel: We know him and his parents and where he's from. What makes him think he's special?

He could have stayed at home and inherited his father's tower. He chose to go and study.

He wanted community so he chose to join a local bishop's house.

He had the opportunity to travel so he did.

He could have watched the scenery but he chose to notice the people in those new places.

He could have condemned the poor theology of those people, but he chose to listen to them and discover their truth so he could point them in the direction of the Eternal Truth.

He could have preached alone, but he chose to invite others to share in his journey.

He could have named us Dominicans after himself, but he preferred to call us The Order of Preachers. We join our journey with his. Whether we become vowed religious or associates, or Dominican Volunteers, our journey is forever changed. We are Dominicans. Once a Dominican, always a Dominican. We must preach the Good News because the Good News has been preached to us.

And when we get discouraged, and we want to go and sit under the broom tree because the journey gets to be too much for us, we are given the bread of life to strengthen us. Wherever we are on our journey, we do not travel alone. The true bread who comes down from heaven will help us find our way. Jesus is our bread of life. He chooses to feed us, he chooses to show us the way to everlasting life and eternal Truth. When our feet get tired and sore or when we get too big for our boots Jesus still walks with us and will even carry us. That's why Dominicans must preach the Good News.



Volunteers received a candle and a Dominican blessing as they were commissioned at the Dominican Chapel at Marywood in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

"During orientation, I met other volunteers who, in my opinion, can be counted among the best and brightest young American Catholics. Their dedication not just to service and social justice, but to leadership, causes me to expect that I will continue to hear of them in the years to come. Orientation caused me to expand my definition of the religious life. Although I am not a Dominican sister and do not feel called to become one, I would now say that I am part of the Dominican family—a family that has expanded to include lay people."

-Julia Bninski



Julia Bninski is a graduate of the University of Virginia. She is volunteering in Chicago at Deborah's Place, a shelter for women and children. She lives in community with Sinsinawa Dominicans at the House of Connections.

“All God wants is love. If you are bound by this love, you will do everything you can to BE OF SERVICE WHEREVER YOU ARE.”

-St. Catherine of Siena

Adrian Dominicans

Akron Dominicans

Amityville Dominicans

Blauvelt Dominicans

Caldwell Dominicans

Columbus Dominicans

Dighton Dominicans

Dominican Sisters of Hope

Grand Rapids Dominicans

Great Bend Dominicans

Kenosha Dominicans

Province of St. Albert the Great

Racine Dominicans

St. Catharine Kentucky Dominicans

Sinsinawa Dominicans

Southern Dominican Communities

Sparkill Dominicans

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ministry

respond to the needs of all

by Jessica John

attention and heard the directions I gave, and by getting at least five 8th graders to be excited about the sports we're playing. Small victories you might say but have you ever tried to teach a 4 year old how to sit in a circle? I've entered into a whole different life....the teacher's world. Here in this world we are constantly faced with the "challenge of trying to develop the minds of young people, without losing our own."

When I accepted the placement at St. Pius V school I don't think I realized how much "teaching" I would be doing apart from just teaching kids how to do jumping jacks and sits ups. It is part of my job to make sure uniform shirts are tucked in, that language is positive and encouraging, that peace is shown in every action, and that when they do a lap that their over-sized sweatpants don't fall down...teenagers! Working in an inner city school for the last few weeks has shown me how different life really is. I have never wanted to speak Spanish more in my life than when a little kindergartener came up to me, and I couldn't communicate with her because I didn't speak her language. Or when I walked into a Mexican bakery on my way into work and I had to order by pointing at the pastry I wanted, because she didn't understand me. I have a new appreciation for the wide open spaces I was used to growing up in Las Vegas. Here we play our sports games on blacktop that is the size of two small tennis courts, and the St. Pius kids are fine with that. My suburban brothers would look at the space we have and say that's not enough room to play baseball! For the first time in my life I am a minority everywhere I go. I no longer have the privilege of blending in, and that's a security that I didn't know I had until it wasn't there anymore.

Here in the heart of the "Windy City" my perspective is slowly taking new shape. I feel so rich that I can measure the success of my day not by how many coins I have in my pocket, but by how many marks are left on my heart. Oh, how God works through those we meet each day. Oh, how very lucky I am to be able to see his work every day in the beautiful children I teach.



Jessica John is a graduate of UNLV. She is in Chicago working as a Physical Education teacher at St. Pius V school in the Pilsen neighborhood. She lives in community with Sinsinawa Dominicans at the House of Connections.

Some people measure the success of their business day on how many clients they saw, or how many memos and emails they sent out or received, or how much money they made. I, on the other hand, measure the success of my day by how many shoes I tied, how many 4 year olds actually paid

For the last three years, Dominican Volunteers USA has received generous financial support from our Dominican sponsors. As we continue to grow and improve our program, we must also expand our funding base. Our Dominican sponsors continue to support us financially, as well as by providing sites and communities for our volunteers. Please take some time to consider contributing financially to DVUSA, so that more volunteers will have the opportunity to serve, and by doing so contribute to a more just world. All contributions to DVUSA are tax-deductible. Please use the enclosed envelope to make your contribution.

Thank you for your support!

Pictured are this year's volunteers and the staff.



spirituality

find your gifts
by Adam Hoppe

I've been walking for an hour in the oasis woods of Shepherd's Corner when I disturb the family of deer. The deer have made their home in one of the more remote corners of the 160 acre island of green space which stands alone, preserved by Dominican Sisters, in a sea of subdivisions and strip malls. The mother deer bounds away, fawns following, but one young doe remains behind. We stare in silent greeting as I notice the spots that dapple her sides, a sign of her youth. I might be the first human she's seen. The thought makes me glad. I hope she doesn't think of me as predator – certainly I don't think of her as prey or pest. For now, at least, that deer could be my sister. As this thought comes the doe, bored with her brother perhaps, leaps away with a goodbye wave of her white flag-tail.

The doe's retreating crash through the undergrowth is the loudest sound I've heard all day. It jolts my mind to awareness,

"It's an interesting experience, living in community with mosquitoes."

then to introspection as I come again to the familiar thought: mankind is never alone on this Earth. But on this sweltering, steamy day my mind isn't reaching into abstract realms, nor am I thinking now about the eternal companionship of Jesus Christ.

Mostly, I'm thinking about mosquitoes. Mosquitoes have been my constant companions since I entered the woods to clear the trail's Summer accumulation of troublesome branches. Even as I pause, still watching the place where the doe slipped out of sight, I'm being bitten on arms and neck. On a day like this, it's pointless to swat them. Like an annoying kid's sibling, the mosquitoes are somehow omnipresent – pestering and poking, though never doing any real harm. The best thing to do is just endure, and learn patience at the hands of hungry mother skeet. It's an interesting experience, living in community with mosquitoes.

Another forest inhabitant has something to say to me this day. Not far from where I spotted the deer, a giant sycamore tells me its redemptive tale. At its base the sycamore's bark is black and scaly, but at some point midway up the trunk the baptismal process begins. The sycamore recounts how its outer bark sheds slowly with age. By the time the topmost branches reach the canopy roof and spread wide, they've shed all their dark flecks of outer bark, exposing the inner layer, smooth and white. The old branches of this sycamore shine in the sun, the brightest, highest life in the forest, free at last from those spots of darkness they once carried. So the sycamore says. Trees know all the best stories.



As I make my way out of the forest, I'm struck by a feeling of oneness with my experiences of the day – with the deer, with the mosquitoes, with the sycamore. I feel at home in the woods and the fields, as comfortable with the trees as with close friends. It feels good not to be playing the role of destroyer or usurper, to simply –*be*– out in nature, sharing the simple, sufficient bond of existence with the rest of God's creation. It's a different spirit of community out in the woods, a basic and raw one, lacking the comfortable trappings of human society. But it's one which I'm blessed to feel deeply this day in the midst of God's woods, on the face of God's good Earth.

Adam Hoppe graduated from the University of Virginia. He is volunteering at Shepherd's Corner in Columbus, Ohio and lives in community with Columbus Dominican sisters.

community

the spirit of the home we make
by Mark Meyer

It has been quite an experience to live in Yankeeville. I have always wanted to live near a major league ballpark. I have had the opportunity to see a few games this year including a three game series with the White Sox. The Sox played great and won two out of three by ten or more runs each game. I think Sr. Ellen Rita and Sr. Pat were considering changing the locks on the door so they would not have to endure my prideful disposition. Jeff and I have spent some time hanging out with Karen around New York. The three of us have had a lot of fun and are enjoying the city.

I have really enjoyed living in community. The Sisters have been great to live with. We pray together almost everyday and meet once a week to discuss any concerns we have. We watch a lot of sports in our house and talk a lot of sports as well. We also talk about how things are going and the news of the day. Everyone has an opinion on everything and knows what is going on so the conversation is great.

Mark Meyer is a U. of Illinois graduate. He is Volunteering at High-bridge Community Life Center in Bronx, NY. He lives in community with another volunteer, Jeff, and two Blauvelt Dominican sisters.



Look Out Houston!

Dominican Volunteers are headed to Houston, Texas for our Midyear Retreat February 12-15, 2004. We'll be celebrating St. Valentine at the rodeo, catching up with one another, and meeting as many Houston Dominicans as we can! If you are in the Houston area and would like to join us, we will be scheduling a gathering during the weekend. Please call the DVUSA office or the Houston motherhouse as the weekend approaches for more information. We are looking forward to our weekend together, taking the time to look back at what we have seen in the first half of our volunteer year and to look ahead at what is in store for the next half. Look out Houston, here we come!



Check out our website!

We have been busy updating the website with an application for the 2004-05 volunteer year, new pictures, stories, and an opportunity to meet this years' volunteers. Make sure to see what's new at

www.dvusa.org

You can also access this newsletter and past newsletters online at www.domvolsusa.org/newsletters.htm

CLOSING RETREAT

PLANNED FOR JUNE 11-13, 2004

Dominican volunteers will gather in Watermill, New York for their sending off in June. If you would like to be a part of this exciting event, please keep the dates on your calendar! A commissioning celebration will be held on Sunday, June 13.



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