

St. Dominic

We have had a nice variety of saints in August! Along with St. Alphonsus Ligouri, St. John Vianney, and Pope St. Sixtus II and his companions, today we have St. Dominic, the founder of the Dominicans. Dominic is certainly in the category of great saints in our Catholic tradition.

Our saint today was from Spain. He was born in the 12th century to a noble Spanish family. Before he was born, his mother had a dream of a dog leaping from her womb holding a flaming torch that set the world on fire.

In the Biblical and Medieval world dogs were symbols of preachers as they would bark, keep people awake, and alert them of danger. Imagine Dominic's mother had a dream of a cat. We would certainly not be celebrating this beautiful saint today! Dominic is a contraction of *Domini canus* – the hound of the Lord. Even today, one of the symbols of the Dominicans is a dog holding a torch in its mouth.

Dominic was well educated as a young man. In his teenage years, he spent ten years studying the arts, including theology and philosophy. He was a very *good* student. In 1191, there was a famine in Spain that left people starving. In response, Dominic sold his furniture, clothing, and even his schoolbooks. When others asked why he was selling his books, he responded, "Can I study from dead skins while others are dying of hunger?"

Dominic was ordained at the age of 24, when he became the bishop's assistant. Both the bishop and Dominic realized what was needed was not just good teaching, but also a heroic way of living. Those who had fallen away from the faith in southern France needed heroes. They needed not just words, but *good example*. Dominic lived a very penitential life as a witness to the beauty of our faith.

It is said that Dominic traveled everywhere entirely on foot. Between 1218 and 1219, he completed an exhausting walking tour of roughly 3,380 miles (5,440 kilometers) across France, Italy, and Spain to visit and grow his new religious communities. Along with a life of humility and simplicity, Dominic spent much time fasting and in intense prayer asking God for all the graces necessarily to convert others.

In southern France, Dominic had a famous vision where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and gave him the rosary. "It is by this," she said, "that you will defeat heresies." Essentially, Mary was saying, "Preach to them the mysteries of Christ – preach the joyful mysteries, the sorrowful mysteries, and the glorious mysteries of Christ. Draw them back into the mystery of my Son."

Dominic was overwhelmed by the vision and went to the town of Toulouse. As he entered the cathedral, the bells began to miraculously ring. The people gathered and Dominic preached a thunderous sermon when there was literally a thunderstorm going on! The people saw a large picture of Our Lady in the Church where her arms in the picture began to move. Naturally, they became terrified. Dominic told them this is the true faith and the people began to convert in droves.

Like Ignatius of Loyola would later do, Dominic drew a group of men together. He taught them the rosary, how to preach the rosary, and how to live a simple way of life. They were very successful and eventually Dominic founded the Order of the Dominicans in 1215 to spread the rosary and preach the gospel. The Dominicans are known as the Order of Preachers. You typically see an O.P. (Latin for *ordo praedicatorum*) after a Dominican's name.

The Dominicans established schools of theology at universities in Rome, Paris, and in Spain. Their goal was to teach and train men the theology they needed to convert heretics. The order grew rapidly throughout Europe. For years, Dominic was very active and energetic in speaking the faith. But eventually, in July 1221, he grew sick with a fever and died on August 6 at age 51.

What is Dominic's legacy? Aside from the fact that the Dominicans helped renew the Church with solid teaching, he gave us the Rosary! The Rosary is a staple of our Catholic life. So often when our Blessed Mother appears, she says, "Pray the Rosary." Following Our Lady's command, pray the Rosary every day, even if you must break up the decades. Try to get it in each day! In short, always stay close to the Blessed Mother, who will always keep you close to her Son, Jesus Christ.

~St. Dominic, pray for us!