

The Year of Consecrated Life: Strengthening Our Shepherds

Introduction

Please accept my warmest thanks for your kind invitation to share a few reflections on how your charism as Dominicans can best serve the needs of the Church in the Eastern United States, and in so doing, lend strength to the shepherds of these local churches.

As has been noted, I have a long and wonderful relationship with the Province of St. Joseph going back to my priestly ordination 38 years ago. During much of that time, I was in the direct service of Cardinal James Hickey who had a special affection for the Dominican Order and for this Province. We were frequent visitors here at the Priory and at the House of Studies and it was largely through that association that I came to know your community. I might add that my parents live near Louisville, in Southern Indiana, and as long they were able to navigate the Ohio River bridges, they often attended St. Louis Bertrand for Mass and found solace in its confessionals.

You've given me a tall order which I'll try to break down into manageable parts. First, is to say a word about the Year of Consecrated Life during which we rejoice and give thanks for the vocation to consecrated life in its many forms. Second, is for me to speak (not without trepidation before an audience such as this) of my limited understanding of the Dominican charism. Third, is for me to offer a few thoughts on the pastoral challenges that face dioceses on the eastern seaboard. All this leads to a few reflections as to how your charism and state of life strengthen my ministry as a diocesan bishop and, by extension, the ministry of the diocesan priests with whom I serve.

Year of Consecrated Life

Let's begin with the Year of Consecrated Life. We have entered a season of anniversaries when Council documents such as *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* turn fifty. This year dedicated to consecrated life is an occasion for us to remember the teachings of the II Vatican Council on consecrated life, including

Chapter IV of *Lumen Gentium*, (nos. 43 - 47). This chapter speaks about the place of consecrated life in the Body of Christ, and about the mutual trust that should prevail between the hierarchy and those in consecrated life. It emphasizes as well the role of those consecrated to the Lord in manifesting Christ “with ever-increasing clarity” to believers and non-believers, if you will, the evangelical mission of those who profess evangelical counsels. This special year is a good time for you and me to revisit those seminal documents in light of the Church’s nearly 2,000 year tradition of consecrated life and in light of these five decades following the Council. In my view, this will help chart a course for a deep and continuing renewal of consecrated life.

This brings us to the next stated purpose of this Year of Consecrated Life, namely, a grateful remembrance of the history of the recent past. We recognize that these past five decades haven’t always been easy. They have been characterized by “lights and shadows”, as we like to say. Clearly, however, Pope Francis wants to strike a note of hope by inviting us to rejoice in the Lord and in the witness of lives consecrated to Him. He is inviting all of us to see the essential role of those in consecrated life in the Church’s mission of spreading the Gospel. Pope Francis, I believe, has called for this year also as a way of encouraging as many institutes and religious as possible to experience unity and joy deep in the heart of Christ and in the heart of the Church.

From my vantage, I see this Year of Consecrated Life as an opportunity for local churches to celebrate and give thanks for the gift of consecrated life and to honor the religious who serve in our midst. We honor them for the apostolates and ministries that they shoulder and sustain, often with heroic generosity and with that special something we call a charism. Even more so, we should honor religious for who they are, namely, women and men who, for all the confusion and mischance of our times, have undertaken to live the Beatitudes in a concentrated, communitarian way, and thus manifest to us the face of Christ in all his beauty.

The Dominican Charism

Let me now turn to the charism formed in the heart of St. Dominic Guzman by the Holy Spirit, a gift which has been writ large across the centuries in the Dominican Order, a gift which lights up Saints Philip and James Church in Baltimore, Johns Hopkins Campus Ministry, the hospital ministry at Hopkins, the Frassati Society,

and Mount De Sales Academy. I have long since given up hope of describing charisms with Cartesian clarity so let me dare to say a bit about what I see at the heart of your origins and history.

First, we recall that Dominic was born in turbulent times in the Church's life. The Albigensian heresy was making alarming inroads, especially Southern France. As we know, this was a neo-Manichaean heresy, thus with ancient roots, positing a principle of good and evil, relegating the body to the latter, and, thereby, in a strange kind of way, giving license for licentiousness, in the belief that, at the end of the day, every human spirit was destined to be liberated. Isn't it true, however, that a kind of dualism persists in our times when the human body is seen merely as an instrument of the will rather than an integral part of one's humanity with inbuilt meaning and dignity? We also live in a time when many simply presume that God, (if he exists and if there is afterlife) will see to their eternal happiness, no matter how they lived their lives, but I digress.

Dominic's early history was not nearly as colorful as that of Francis of Assisi. By all accounts he was devout, studious, and responded readily to his priestly calling. He became a member of the Chapter of Canons at the Cathedral of Osma where he prayed the Divine Office in common, studied the sacred texts, and led a life at once devout and apostolic. Dominic accompanied his bishop on missionary journeys during which he had contact with the Albigensians; along the way he came to a vivid understanding of what the Church was facing. He especially understood how pernicious this heresy was to people's souls and he was drawn to the mission of helping to bind up the spiritual wounds of those infected by a heresy which undermined true faith in Christ. He founded a monastery as a kind of "field hospital" for noble women who were recovering from the spiritual wounds inflicted by Albigensianism. Two things stand out in Dominic's approach: First, poverty, a love of poverty, perhaps not as dramatic as that of Francis of Assisi but nonetheless, a true renunciation of one's goods and a genuine simplicity of life in accord with the spirit of the Beatitudes. Second, his poverty was not a mere penitential exercise but a way of being emptied of self so as to be filled with the riches of Christ, that he might bear witness, study, and preach in an efficacious manner. Dominic quickly gathered companions who were attracted to the mission which he had discerned, reading accurately "the signs of the times".

His reading of these signs won the approval of his bishop, Bishop Fulk of Toulouse, (not exactly a household name but nonetheless pivotal in the founding of the Order). One senses great respect and mutuality here such as *Lumen Gentium* and *Perfectae Caritatis* call us to: on the one hand, a bishop who understood the urgent pastoral needs of his flock which being swept away by the heresy of the day and, on the other, a holy priest, obedient to his bishop, and offering to him the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in the depth of his heart. In fairly short order, the nascent Order came to the attention of Pope Innocent III and Pope Honorius III, who in 1216 approved the new foundation.

The next year, even as the Order was beginning to take shape, Dominic sent his friars on missionary journeys that were extraordinarily fruitful. Soon the friars would undertake extensive missions to Italy, Spain, and France and by the end of Dominic's life, the friars could be found all over Europe, and not long after in Northern Africa, the Middle East, indeed, as far as India & China. The Order grew rapidly, as indeed this Province is once again growing, and the makings of a new springtime in the Church's life was soon underway.

The "charism" entrusted to Dominic was a not a new version of the Gospel nor a departure from the Church's patrimony of faith and worship, but rather a life of poverty that aimed to attract others to Christ, that is, to open hearts so as to win over minds to preaching the true faith, not as a series or system of abstract truths but as words of spirit and life, aimed at bringing about the salvation of souls. What seems to me so characteristic of the Dominican Order is an ingenious combination of prayer, poverty, intellectual activity, and apostolic zeal, four things not always held together in the life of the Church. Thus, the friars were to be, in the words of the primitive Constitution, "like evangelical men following in the footsteps of their Savior, speaking with God or of God, either within themselves or with their neighbor...." It went on to say, that when they go forth to preach or for any other reason, "they are not to receive or carry any gold, silver, or coin or any other gift, except food, clothing, and other necessary equipment, and books..." An evangelical life aimed at contemplating so as to preach and thus to evangelize: that is how this observer sees your history, summed up in the wonderful phrase, "*contemplari et contemplata aliis tradere....*" Then as now an evangelical style of life taking the outward form of poverty, combined with deep prayer, contemplation, brotherhood,

and vigorous preaching leaves a deep impression on those searching for that truth which will set them free. Soon there was a Dominican pope, namely, Innocent V, who served briefly in 1276. Interestingly, his main concerns were the peace of the Church and the challenge posed by the advance of the Moslems.

Looking at the early history of the Order, I am also struck by the attention that the friars gave to forming lay persons, especially by means of spiritual direction, a missionary impulse that gave rise to “third orders”. I gather that the friars imparted to these lay persons something of their monastic spirit, not to take them away from their daily pursuits but rather to equip them ‘to live in this passing world with their hearts set on the world to come’ (Cf. Preface I, Lent).

St. John Paul II helped us understand that evangelization does not “take” unless the preaching of the Gospel engages not merely individuals but indeed the culture of which they are a part. If St. Dominic began the Order with an apologetic aim in mind, St. Albert the Great and St. Thomas Aquinas were true to St. Dominic’s intentions. They not only engaged and advanced the culture of their day but indeed contributed mightily to the development of Western civilization. Both studied the Scriptures deeply, both mastered the sources of the Tradition, both were conversant not just with ancient philosophy but with the contemporary thought of Arabic philosophers. St. Albert had what today we would call a keen scientific mind and St. Thomas left us, of course, a synthesis of the faith that more than stands the test of time. He was not only learned but indeed a mystic who encompassed and illumined the entire Tradition. True to Dominic’s charism, his apologetic did not assume a merely defensive posture but rather marshalled the sources with unparalleled mastery. His love of wisdom, which is at the heart of his theology, his love of charity, which is the soul of morality, and his love of peace, the fruit of charity made him shine forth in the Church’s life as a living image of Christ the Teacher and Redeemer.

Thank God, down through the centuries, your charism has flourished, and is alive and well on the eastern seaboard of the United States!

Pastoral Challenges and Opportunities of the Day

Let me now offer a few thoughts on the pastoral challenges of the day. Naturally

they will largely reflect my pastoral experience serving on the east coast, thirty-eight years as a priest and twenty of those years as a bishop. It is tempting for me to use this platform to rant and rave about my problems but I will spare you that recitation, speaking instead not only of pastoral challenges but above all about the joy of the Gospel and of the pastoral pathways that the Holy Spirit continually opens for the Church, but first the challenges!

First, let it be said that bishops, pastors, and religious superiors are burdened, now more than ever, with the complexities of church administration. The Pope himself is addressing the finances and bureaucracy of the Vatican. Bishops oversee a network of parishes, schools, social service programs, and an array of apostolates or ministries, some healthy, some not. Pastors tell me that parish administration has grown increasingly complex; for example, I am keenly aware of the structural issues facing Saints Philip and James, a beautiful church on North Charles Street in Baltimore built in 1929, with all the issues that a 86 year old building is bound to have. In older dioceses with a lot of buildings (such as mine) the toll of deferred maintenance, if it is known, is staggering. You have had the happy task of expanding the House of Studies but also the happy task of continuing to pay for it and to maintain it. We have good co-workers with real expertise, drawn mainly from the laity; we have clear standards of accountability and transparency; and we know that we have to keep trying to make progress on this front. All this is a good thing for the life of the church but it can also be all-consuming. Those of us, who, for better or for worse, are “in charge”, can fall prey to what Pope Francis calls a “grey pragmatism” whereby we strive mightily to be good administrators of our institutions whilst the mission of the Church to spread the Gospel suffers. In a phrase, the bottom line isn’t the bottom line.

This leads me to the next point. The Church’s mission in the east as elsewhere is facing new and ongoing challenges. For years we have witnessed a gradual decline in sacramental practice. When I was ordained nearly 40% of Catholics went to Mass each Sunday but today Mass attendance hovers around 18% to 20%. The number of baptisms, confirmations, and weddings is in decline whereas funerals are still going strong. Most dioceses, including mine, are facing the challenge of an aging clergy and even those with robust vocations programs will not be able to replace those who have recently retired or who will retire in the near future. Throughout the east

coast, almost every diocese must face the need to close or consolidate parishes, especially in urban centers. In many places, the backbone of the Church's support is aging and dying. Those whose generosity built our churches and schools are leaving us, some to meet their Redeemer and others to experience the Florida sun. Younger families who are connected to the Church often relocate as firms move out of the Northeast to more business-friendly climates. Sometimes such demographic shifts are blamed for declining participation but that argument is exploded every Christmas Eve when our churches are packed. On the whole, then, we seem to be losing ground in the Northeast.

It might actually be nice if we had a good healthy heresy to fight, a common enemy against whom we could unite, but instead we are facing the amorphous challenge of a growing secularism that has many root causes and takes on many different forms. Pope Paul VI put his finger on this challenge when he spoke of the split between faith and culture (cf. EN, no. 20) a split that seemingly continues to widen. That split was first apparent in the area of sexual morality wherein the Church seems hopelessly out of touch with the culture but now has widened to include the very notion of marriage and family, as well as end of life issues, not to mention doubt or outright rejection of foundational church teachings such as the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Further, no matter how gentle or open the Church's ministers may try to be, many regard the Church as unwelcoming and judgmental. And even if the church's social teaching might seem to be more in tune with the times, it is often overshadowed by more powerful cultural and political forces, especially in the new world of social communications in which we live. Not too long ago it was widely accepted that, while the church held some odd ideas about sexuality, its institutions did an awful lot of good and thus deserved respect and protection. Now, that too is changing. With the rising perception that so-called "same sex marriage" is a civil right, the Church's unwillingness to go along with the redefinition of marriage makes her seem bigoted not only to civil officials but also to many ordinary people, especially the young. And with the rise of Islamic extremists, many are questioning whether or not religion of any kind isn't a destructive force in all cultures. And let's face it, many well-educated people believe that the Church was and remains a bad actor in Western civilization. Thus there is now a growing tendency to regard even the Church's institutions of service as suspect and to insist

that if they continue to function they must play by the uniform rules of secular culture. Undeniably, those who minister in the name of the Church have contributed to this, by the severe scandals that have rocked the church in recent years, including sexual abuse of minors and misappropriation of funds. It does us no good to deny the ways in which we've anti-evangelized in recent years. Acknowledging the growing number of "nones", we need to examine our consciences.

But if there are challenges there are also opportunities, the first and foremost of which is the Person of Christ and the perennial attractiveness of the Gospel he embodies, coupled with the deepest desire of every person, whether acknowledged or not, to be loved by God with a love that is infinite, compassionate, and healing. Deep down the human spirit yearns to trade in the "fifty shades of gray" secularism offers for the brilliant hues of "the glory of God shining on the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Even if we may sometimes feel that the ecclesial ground is shifting beneath our feet, we should be grateful for Pope Francis' clarion call that we focus our entire attention and energies on the joy of the Gospel. He has not shrunk from identifying the challenges that face the Church but neither has he given in to pragmatism, pessimism, or a self-referential piety. His own simplicity coupled with his evangelical courage and pastoral love have won a new hearing for the Gospel and thus opened new pastoral opportunities.

There is another phenomenon evident in many eastern seaboard cities, namely, a small but growing number of young adults who are open to the Faith. You see this in your work at Providence College, campus ministry at Johns Hopkins, and the Frassati Society, as well as your increased number of religious vocations. I see it among other places at the Basilica of the Assumption, and I am happy to report that the nation's oldest Cathedral is getting younger as young adults move into the city and find their way to this parish community. As I walk my dog on Federal Hill and South Baltimore, I see that many young professional adults have moved into the city. Some are unconnected to the church but others are connected, as is evident in a thriving parish such as St. Casimir Parish in Canton. A growing number of young people are pro-life— perhaps they are not with us on marriage and family yet - but many, who have grown up with the culture of abortion, have recognized how destructive it is not only to innocent children but also to mothers and families. Let me add that immigration presents a great pastoral challenge and opportunity for the

Church in the United States, as indeed it always has. In Baltimore as elsewhere in the east, the Latino population is growing rapidly and when a parish opens its doors and goes out on mission, the results are excellent, as can be seen at Sacred Heart in Highlandtown, which is bursting at the seams. Pope Francis reminds us that diversity in the church is not a weakness but a strength. Thus we must have both the head and heart to welcome the newly arrived, not only from Central and South America but also from Africa, Asia, and other places.

Let me add a few other strengths before I come to the final part of this talk. First, I've served with three presbyterates on the east coast comprised of diocesan and religious priests. In each of these there are differences of style and approach between younger and older priests. That said, I have encountered so many smart and good-hearted priests, priests younger and older, beloved by the people that they serve, who continue to give their all to priestly ministry in season and out of season. The dioceses where I have served are enriched and enlivened by women and men religious, many in their advancing years, who serve with great generosity and joy. And along the way, I have met and worked with talented lay persons some of whom have laid aside well-paying jobs to work for the Church in areas such as finance, management, education, social services, development, communications, church planning, and public policy, to name a few. So as I look ahead, yes, I see headwinds and challenges but spurred on by the Lord 'who loves me, who gave his life for me', (cf. Gal. 3:20) I see also, as did the prophet Jeremiah, "a future full of hope" (Jer. 29:11).

How the Dominican Charism Strengthens My Ministry

Perhaps in this over-long talk you've been sitting there wondering when I would finally get to the point of addressing the central question, namely, how your charism strengthens my ministry and those of my brother bishops. As Larry King used to say irately to those who called into his show, "Get to the point!" Well, I'll try to take the foregoing and tie it together in the time remaining.

First, the Year of Consecrated Life has been a moment for me to count my blessings, the blessings of so many women and men religious who sponsor and sustain an array of ministries in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, from healthcare to schools to parish ministry, the list is nearly endless. The growing Dominican presence in the

Archdiocese is a great joy and consolation, especially with the establishment of a priory at Saints Philip and James – thank you! There is, however, a dangerous side to my gratitude. I could very easily welcome religious into the Archdiocese simply because you fill slots for which I no longer have diocesan priests and you sustain ministries that I no longer have the wherewithal to sustain. I must admit that such a consideration can creep into the calculus – please forgive me!

But the better angels of my nature urge me to take a closer look. The challenge confronting the Church remains the same as in the 13th century! It's the challenge of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In the 13th century it was Albigensianism combined with corruption and complacency and in the 21st century it is a newly aggressive secularism, even a practical atheism coupled with a growing distrust of religious institutions and the people who run them. Long before Pope Francis' exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* hit the newsstands, Pope Paul VI prophetically called the Church to evangelization as the 'deepest identity and mission of the Church' (cf. EN, no. 14), and St. John Paul II led us into the New Millennium calling for "a new springtime in the life of the Church" (cf. RM, no 86 f., NMA, 32) while Pope Benedict brought forth the depth and beauty of the Church's faith. In the meantime, the Church seems to be suffering in some measure from the fragmentation that is so characteristic of the culture we live in. The call of the Popes has been clarion and has produced much good fruit yet somehow many segments of the Church remain self-absorbed & unconnected. This is where you come in and where I rely most on your state of life and on the Dominican charism in particular and it's this:

Consecrated life, when lived robustly and joyfully, has a uniquely important way of cutting through the fog of secularism with its attendant mistrust of persons and institutions that claim in some way to represent God and the things of God in our culture. Pope Paul VI famously said that nowadays people listen more readily to witnesses than to teachers, and if to teachers it is because they are first witnesses. For me, the evangelical counsels are the heart of the Gospel in concentrated form; they are the Beatitudes lived in person and in community not only for the sanctification of those vowed to be poor, chaste, and obedient but above all as a living proclamation of Christ who was himself poor, chaste, and obedient. You are "evangelical men following in the footsteps of [your] Savior." You are called to lead

“transfigured lives capable of amazing the world” (VC, no. 20).

When you respond to that call wholeheartedly, you strengthen me and my ministry in a number of ways. First, you lead consecrated lives for others, including me and my brother priests. Amid the rough and tumble of diocesan ministry, we bishops can lose sight of “the one thing necessary” (Luke 10:42) – viz., to contemplate the Word of God prayerfully, to allow Him to transform us, and then to bear witness to the Word by lives, which even if not vowed, must be lived in the spirit of the evangelical counsels, just as St. John Paul II explained in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. And while I exercise ministry in the Person of the Head and Shepherd of the Church, your ministry goes out in front of mine, giving us all a foretaste of the beatific holiness, of those who stand redeemed “before the Throne and the Lamb” (Rev. 7:9) who are themselves poor, chaste, and obedient. No one who preaches the Gospel and ministers in the Person of Christ can forget that simplicity of life, purity of heart, and oneness with God’s will is the path to leading authentically human lives destined for beatific glory.

Your state of life and your charism cut through the fog in another way: people may be wary about religion and its role in our culture but they are more ready to listen to those who are not mere religious professionals but rather to those who have put their very lives on the line. Here St. Dominic’s stress on poverty is important. While you do not live poverty in quite the same way as the Missionaries of Charity, you have renounced possessions for the sake of the Gospel. It may take some doing to convince people that our chastity and celibacy is real but lives of evangelical simplicity and poverty opens minds and hearts. As we see with Pope Francis, it wins a fresh hearing for the Gospel and for the Church.

A third way your charism strengthens my ministry is your prayer. Those of us who say the Divine Office on I-phones while on planes and trains harbor a deep longing for the beauty with which you pray, not always with great solemnity but in community and with reverence. I felt that here at House of Studies many times or when I prayed with the Sisters at Mt. De Sales on the Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas. Somehow, I feel included in those prayers, supported by them, and supported by religious communities that are seriously pursuing holiness. Holiness is never siloed. Like goodness, it diffuses itself. The prayers offered for the local church and for its

shepherd greatly strengthen me in ways both visible and invisible.

Fourth is your charism to contemplate truth, the Word of truth and life, and to hand on to others what you have contemplated. I say this as one of a handful of bishops who owns the complete works of Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P., and who benefits from Dominican writers such as Fr. Servais Pinckaers, O.P.; who recently a bishops' retreat conducted by Fr. Peter John Cameron, O.P., and who has been kept out of canonical hot water by Sr. Elizabeth McDonough, O.P. From time to time you have helped me with projects or disputed questions but I think that your intellectual apostolate runs much deeper than practical help. As was the case in the days of Dominic, Albert, and Francis, the Church continues to stand in need of those who can bring forth from Tradition's storehouse "things both new & old" (Mt. 13:52), but to do so in ways that address "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish" of the people of our time (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1), including those who have decided that God, if he exists, does not matter. Similarly, your role in forming lay persons in the faith of the Church through study, teaching, and spiritual direction is even more important today than it was back in the 13th century.

Then, there is preaching and yes, I receive plenty of help from Dominicans when I am preparing to preach. But here I am thinking of something deeper than that. Whatever form preaching takes, whether in the church or beyond its walls, it must address the fragmentation of people's lives, their lack of joy, including so many marriages and families which appear broken and loveless. Consecration, Pope Francis tells us, should radiate joy, the joy of the Gospel. People do not expect those who have consecrated their lives to Christ to be leading fully human lives, lives that are made whole by love, but when they see this wholeness in you they are 'surprised by joy'. When they see you have encountered Christ so much that you are living like him, then your witness to Jesus becomes not only credible but attractive because Incarnate Love has found you and given definitive shape to your lives. Such preaching whether with words or not is persuasive and is essential to revitalizing the Church's mission to spread the Gospel.

Conclusion

You've been very kind to listen to me for so long a time. Thank you for your invitation to share these thoughts with you and thank you for your witness to the

Gospel. May this time of reflection bear lasting and abundant fruit for the Province of St. Joseph and for the Order of Preachers.

God bless you and keep you always in His love.