

In Praise of St Dominic

Jordan of Saxony

Letter of the Master of the Order¹

To all my beloved sons in Christ Jesus, the brothers in the province of Lombardy, salvation and a fervent spirit!

Since I cannot come to you in person, as I should like to, my love for you prompts me and my concern to be useful to you urges me not to neglect this opportunity to pay you a kind of visit in writing. So long as we are still in this place of pilgrimage, so long as human hearts are crooked and prone to sin, lazy and feeble in virtue, we need to be encouraged and roused, so that brother may be helped by brother, and the eagerness of heavenly love rekindle the flame in our spirit which our everyday carelessness and tepidity tend to extinguish.

This is why, my dearest sons, I beg you, with all the force I have, not to forget your holy purpose and your profession. By the precious Blood which redeemed you, by that loving death which restored you to life, I urge you to think of those "ancient paths" by which our predecessors hastened to their rest with all the intensity of their spirit, and now reign with the Lord, for ever comforted in bliss and response; all the days of pain with which God humbled them have now been turned to joy. When they lived on earth, it was for spiritual gifts that they were jealous; they thought little of themselves and scorned the world. It was the kingdom they longed for, and so they were strong to endure hardship, enthusiastic for poverty, on fire with love.

Surely our father Dominic, of holy memory, was one of these. When he was living with us in the flesh, he walked by the Spirit, not only not fulfilling the desires of the flesh, but actually quenching them at the source. He displayed a true spirit of poverty in his clothing, his food and his behavior. He prayed constantly, was outstandingly compassionate, used to intercede for his sons with abundant tears, because of the fervor of his zeal for souls. Difficulties did not daunt him, obstacles did not worry him.

We could see from the works he accomplished, from his virtues and miracles, what a great man he was on earth. Now that he is with God, his greatness has been made known to us in these last days, when we were moving his holy body from its previous burial place to a more noble tomb.

Praise to our Redeemer! Praise to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for choosing such a man as this to be his servant and for setting such a man over us as our father, to form us by his religious training and inspire us by the example of his resplendent holiness.

Not that I would want to deny that there are some among you, by the mercy of God, for me to rejoice over and thank God for; there are some whose aim is beauty, who do cultivate their consciences, who do seek perfection and who do work hard at their preaching, who are zealous in study, whose hearts catch fire in their prayers and meditations, who keep the Lord always before them, looking to him as the one who will reward and judge their souls.

¹ St Dominic's successor as Master of the Order, Blessed Jordan of Saxony, wrote this letter to the Province of Lombardy in the year 1233. The original may be found in the *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, XX (1952), pp. 182 - 185. It is read at the Divine Office for the Feast of All Dominican saints (7th November).

My dearest brethren, rejoice, if you are such as these, and seek to abound still more. But if you are not yet like this, work at it, devote energy and attention to it, so that you may grow towards salvation in him who called you to this state of grace in which you find yourself, not to make you lukewarm, but to make you perfect. He it is who is our Savior, loving and good, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to whom be honor and dominion now and for ever and ever. Amen.