



FRATRES ORDINIS PRÆDICATORUM
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Solemnity of our Father Saint Dominic

Letter to the brothers of the Order of Preachers

“You are all brothers”

(Matthew 23, 8)

My dear brothers, “*God’s helpers in spreading the Good News of Christ*”. (Cf. I Thessalonians 3, 2)

Before ending the term of office which you entrusted to me, I wanted to reflect on a topic vital to our vocation: we are friars and we are brothers. In addressing this letter especially to the friars, I know that my contemplative sisters, the religious sisters and the laity who belong to the Dominican Family may read these pages and apply them to their own life and mission.

I confess that, at first, when I was thinking about this exercise in preaching, I was tempted to escape in the opposite direction like a new Jonah. However, when meditating on various providential aspects of my own life, and having benefited during all these years from contact with so many brothers and sisters from all parts of the world, I was encouraged to write and share with you some things from my own experience. In fact, in the story of my own life there are pages that have been providentially texturing my own vocation as a friar, as a brother.

A brother among brothers

I was born the eighth son in a family of fourteen (13 boys and 1 girl), and I believe that this was a real introduction or *Introit* to community life, since from the beginning I have lived with brothers,

From when I was 6 until I was 18 years old, I studied at the College run by the Marist Brothers in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I did my Elementary and Middle schooling there. How much I learned from them! I can tell you that I have met Brothers who helped me discover the meaning of dedication, simplicity, and a love for Jesus and Mary. In short, I discovered religious consecration and holiness! Besides their presence in the classroom, I keep in my memory other images of their fraternal life in community: their joining us in sports, games and recreation; their silent dedication to study in the room where they prepared their classes; the praying of the Rosary in the evening at the end of each school day, while walking together in a long file in the enormous patio of the College (by that time empty of students and free from clamour and shouting).

I confess, as one who wants to extend to your hearts things that are rooted in my own, that during those years I experienced for the first time a certain vocational interest. When I was only 10 years old, I told my mother that I wanted be “one of them”: a Brother (but with capital letters!)! At that time I received my first “life of a saint” as a gift: “Fray Escoba – The Life of St. Martin de Porres.” Somehow, this Dominican brother also marked my vocation. Providence disposed that the Novitiate of the Dominican Province in Argentina, where I entered in February 1980, was housed in a priory that bore his name.

During this period marking the Jubilee of the 8th centenary of the foundation of the first community of Dominican nuns in Prouilhe, we are living a time that is full of hope, as we move towards the celebration of the 800th year since the confirmation of the Order by Honorius III (December 22, 1216).

When we read Saint Dominic's story we are reminded that in March 1206 the delegates summoned by Innocent III to preach against the "Albigensian" or "Cathar" heresy in the south of France gathered in Montpellier. There they met in council with other prelates and bishops of the region. They were already in the midst of their deliberations when they welcomed Diego, Bishop of Osma in Castile, Spain. Dominic de Guzman, sub-prior of the Cathedral Chapter of Osma, accompanied his bishop. Aware of the good reputation of the Castilian bishop, the papal envoys discussed with him the best way to confront heresy. When he saw their entourage, Diego proposed that they adopt the apostolic form of preaching in evangelical poverty, with austerity, while emphasizing the importance of leading by example. Diego and Dominic began to practice this way of life, renouncing any sign of external power. Jordan of Saxony tells us that "*From that moment Dominic began to be called, not sub-prior, but Brother Dominic.*"¹

As I am a brother among brothers, I would like to offer you these pages as one who is simply thinking out loud. I invite you to reflect a little more closely on "the pearl" or "the treasure" of the Order, like people who want to keep discovering "the breadth and the length, the height and the depth" of Dominican fraternity.

God is a triune God (the model of "family" and "community") and his being is manifested in a different way – through participation– in creation. However, this does not confuse or "dissolve" his Being in that of his creatures. God manifests himself in creation, in the history of salvation and in the economy of grace...in different yet similar ways, analogously!

In the Letter to the Hebrews we read: *In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.* (1, 1-2) The Son reveals the Father to us and teaches us to call him lovingly *Abba*, as he himself called Him. The Son reminds us: *You are all brothers* (Matthew 23, 8).

In our journey towards 2016, Providence invites us to commemorate next year, a fundamental event in our history: the 500th anniversary of the foundation, in 1510, of our first community in the Americas, on the island of *La Hispaniola*, an island that is shared today by the Dominican Republic and Haiti. There is no need to underline the importance of this foundation. We all remember the force of the sermons preached by the brothers, who were members of this community, together with their prior, Fray Pedro de Cordoba.

Our brother theologians in Salamanca had to reflect seriously on the many challenges that evangelization presented in this "New World". Our missionary friars in America accurately indicated and denounced these provocations and the professors brought to bear on them clear principles of discernment. All were brothers, each and every one of them without distinction. At the same time, this Dominican fraternity embraced not only those who were suffering oppression and violence (the original inhabitants of the new world who were enslaved) but also the disciples or students of the friars who were professors in Salamanca.

When we consider the ideals of the French revolution, which had such a great influence on the actions of those who fought for the independence of the American nations, we can sum them up in the well-known words: "liberty, equality, fraternity". We have to concede that, in spite of the strong

¹ Cf. B. Jordanus, *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Prædicatorum* n. 21 [Ed. H. C. Scheeben, *MOPH* (1925) t. 16].

anti-ecclesial context from which they emerged, they are – as John Paul II used to say – highly valuable expressions, even of a particular Christian value. This is a just and logical assessment since Europe nourished and shaped its culture based on the principles of the apostolic faith. Even though often in conflict with the Church, those promoting the French Revolution could not avoid being indebted to this spirit.²

From 1220 onwards, the Order has always sought to discern the sense of its fraternal life and mission in new cultural, historical and geographical contexts, in a world of constant change. The General Chapters have always desired to take the pulse of the world and of the life of the Order in contemplating the development of the countries in which the brothers were present, feeling with the Church and from the heart of the Church, because Saint Dominic always wanted his work to be planted *in medio Ecclesiae*. During the General Chapter of 1256 the friars, assembled in Paris, declared: *Quod fratres nostri vocentur fratres praedicatores et non aliis nominibus*.³

In recent decades the General Chapters, always inspired by the teaching of the Church,⁴ have dealt with and defined things concerning our religious life and our fraternal life in community.⁵ Recent Masters of the Order have also sent us letters or important messages inspired by this same theme.⁶

I do not intend to present a systematic treatise on “Dominican fraternity” here. The texts I quoted have served the purpose of outlining the development of this theme in our history. However, I would like to ask myself and you: “What does it mean to be a brother today?” and reflect on some aspects of our fraternity. I will do this by means of a “biblical icon” that will help us pray, meditate, reflect on and respond to this question. Therefore, I invite you to discover together with me certain features of the interior landscape of our fraternity, guided by a very special “brother”: Joseph, the son of Jacob, the “dreamer”.

Joseph

(The dreamer)

His story effectively depends on that of his father Jacob. His death is both the epilogue of the history of the patriarchs and the prologue to the great epic of the Exodus. His name is not included when God reveals himself or when speaking about God instead the formula “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” is used. There are no spectacular interventions from God in Joseph’s life. Joseph neither speaks intimately with God, like his ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; nor does he receive

² Cf. John Paul II, *Speech at the airport in Tarbes* (France) 14th August 2004; *Speech to a group of French bishops* (during their *ad limina* visit) 12th April 1997 and many other similar texts.

³ «That our brothers shall be called friars preachers and by no other name.». Cf. *Acta Capitulorum Generalium* 1256, Ed. B. M. Reichert, vol. I (*Romae* 1898) 81.

⁴ I point out the most important ones: II Vatican Council: *Lumen Gentium* (1964) *Caput VI – De religiosis*; *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965); Paul VI: *Evangelica Testificatio* (1971); John Paul II: *Redemptionis donum* (1984); *Vita consecrata* (1996). *Congregatio pro Religiosis et Institutis Saecularibus: Essential Elements* (1983); *Congregavit nos in unum Christi Amor* (1994); *Starting Afresh from Christ* (2002); *Faciem tuam, Domine, requiram* (2008).

⁵ Cf. *ACG 1977 (Quezonopoli) Caput IV - De vita nostra religiosa in mundo hodierno*; *ACG 1980 (Walberberg) Caput IV - De vita nostra religiosa in mundo hodierno, Caput V - De Vita Communi*; *ACG 1983 (Romae) Caput XIII - De gubernio et vita religiosa*; *ACG 1986 (Abulensis) Caput VII - De vita religiosa*; *ACG 1989 (Oakland) Caput II - De vita communi*; *ACG 1992 (Mexici) Caput III - De vita communi*; *ACG 1995 (Calarogae) Caput III - De Vita communi fraterna*; *ACG 1998 (Bononiae) Caput III - De formatione et vita communi*; *ACG 2001 (Providentiae) Caput IV - De vita contemplativa - de vita communi*; *ACG 2004 (Cracoviae) Caput IV - De vita communi*; *ACG 2007 (Bogote) Caput IV - Passion for the Dominican life - Life of the brethren*.

⁶ Fr. Vincent De Couesnongle: *La dimension contemplative de notre vie dominicaine* (1982–*IDI* n° 200); Fr. Damian Byrne: *The common life* (1988–*IDI* n° 262); Fr. Timothy Radcliffe: *Freedom and responsibility - Towards a spirituality of government* (1997–*IDI* n° 353), *Promise of Life* (1998 – *IDI* n° 361).

any new revelation or a confirmation of the divine promise. Nevertheless, God is present in every event of his life. In Joseph's life, God even made use of the sins of men for the good of this "brother" of ours. Furthermore, through Joseph's life, God secretly prepared the birth of his chosen people, a people composed of brothers; a people He will lead to freedom. Are not fraternity and liberty also fundamental characteristics of our vocation?

Our daily experience teaches us: sin separates us from and opposes us to God; it separates us from and opposes us to our brothers; it separates us from and opposes us to creation. This seems to be a photographic reflection of our present time. In the many realities in which we are present, this wound or separation extends to profound depths due to our human ignorance and blindness. How contemporary seem the presumptuous and vengeful words spoken by Lamech to his wives Adah and Zillah! "*I have killed a man for wounding me, a boy for bruising me. If Cain is avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.*" (Genesis 4, 23-24)

With the history of the patriarchs, the three separations I have already referred to gradually started "to reconnect" and those wounds began to be healed. Abraham's obedient faith restored the relation with God. Jacob was reconciled with his brother Esau. Joseph, living in a very simple way and in the daily presence of God, reconciled himself with his brothers and learned how to relate generously to the goods of creation in a way that was just, equitable, and wise. Indeed, Joseph was an honest man, loyal, incorruptible, and able to forgive. He tackled social and political issues with justice through the equal distribution of goods and by feeding everybody.

I. Joseph's Dreams

(Our own dreams)

Joseph is called "the dreamer" although often a little dismissively. His brothers seemed to hate him; they tried to ignore him and would not even greet him. Although Joseph dreamt and shared his dreams with his brothers they did not understand them. They laughed at him and rejected him.

I do not propose to speak to you as an expert in the interpretation of dreams or the study of the "oneiric". However, it is true that the word "dream" may also be applied to our own desires, expectations and hopes! Sometimes our daily life urges us not to pay too much attention to dreams. They tend to deceive us like mirages! They are vain and fleeting! Although we may be tempted to agree with this view, nevertheless, the Book of Sirach points to one exception: "*Unless it be a vision specially sent by the Most High*" (Sirach 34, 1—7)

We all entered religious life with our hearts full of dreams. However, as we look back over the journey we have made some questions may arise in our minds: What have we done with those dreams? Where did they end up? Why have we surrendered them so easily?

Let us return to the story. Joseph's brothers did not understand his dreams and were envious of him—he was his father's favourite. Joseph's dreams seemed rather like nightmares to them. The same happens to us, at times, in our communities. Joseph's brothers appeared to interpret his dreams in the light of "competitiveness". In our context this usually happens when we live our fraternal relationship solely in terms of "promotion" or "punishment". In this regard, we appear to be eager to know "who is the greatest", just like the apostles! (cf. Luke 9, 46).

Although Joseph was Jacob's favourite son, his father did not fully understand him either. Jacob simply *reflected on all those things* (as Mary, the mother of Jesus, did when the shepherds visited her after the birth of her son; or when together with her husband Joseph, also a man of dreams and nightmares, they found Jesus in the temple among the doctors of the Law).

Our community meetings, our conventual, provincial, or general chapters offer us occasions in which to question ourselves and to seek answers to those questions together. At the beginning of the history of salvation (after the original sin and after the first fratricide) God framed two questions, one addressed to Adam and the other to Cain. During this fruitful time in which we live, each one of us and indeed the Order as a whole should respond to these same questions: "*Where are you?*" (Genesis 3,9); "*Where is your brother?*" (4, 9).

The Order is about to celebrate a new General Chapter.⁷ Friars from all over the world will meet once more to answer these questions. The capitulars will receive from our communities what we might call a "mandate" (like the one Jacob gave to his favourite son): "*Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me.*" (Genesis 37, 14). Joseph, like many a dreamer, *was wandering about in the fields* disoriented. In the Genesis story someone seemed to bring Joseph back to reality by asking: "*What are you looking for?*" Joseph answered: "*I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are...?*" (Genesis 37, 15-16) Without trying to force the text too much, I believe that both questions offer us a framework that helps us understand more profoundly the life and the vocation of the "dreamer" (a life and a vocation that Joseph would discover more clearly, profoundly and realistically years later). I repeat, these are the questions that we are asking today and which the Chapter will try to answer.

His brothers saw him in the distance and said: "*Here comes the dreamer ... And 'We'll then see what comes of his dreams!'*" (Genesis 37, 19-20)

Religious life offers each one of us the possibility of sharing our dreams with others, because, "the rest" and "the others" are our "brothers"! Do we tell our brothers about our dreams? What is it that stops us from doing so?

Like so many other religious men and women, we have chosen a way of life which, although retaining certain "monastic" or "regular" observances (Cf. LCO 39 – 40), does not necessarily confine us to a certain role, office, place, mission, etc. We are itinerants and pilgrims, mendicants of truth. Itinerants, living according to the lifestyle of the apostles, know that they have been sent forth, and so they know where they are going. They trust the one who sent them, and for this reason they love the place where they are sent. When we arrive at a convent and "we cannot" or "we do not want" to relate our dreams to our brothers, we might tend either to become vagabonds (disoriented and aimless); fugitives (looking for somebody outside the convent to listen to us); or foreigners and strangers, guests in our own house (we lose our points of reference and we do not know how to behave).

Joseph suffered because he was rejected by his brothers. Although he did not understand what was happening to him, he gradually realized that God had not abandoned him. In fact, Providence was mysteriously guiding him.

Joseph was a shepherd like his brothers. We have the same vocation, too: we are all friar preachers. When we all do the same things, we sometimes find it hard to accept that somebody is different. This is a great challenge. It seems that in our days a certain "individualistic narcissism" has acquired "a gregarious mask". Groups are formed, such as gangs, bands, *maras*, or fans, supporters (*barras bravas*, *tifosi*, hooligans). In reality these are closed groups, even though they scrupulously evolve common customs and patterns of behaviour which create new social myths. They do not accept differences except when identifying themselves and in rejecting in different ways those who "do not

⁷ God willing, it will be the 287th General Chapter of the Order; cf. Innocentius Taurisano OP, *Hierarchia Ordinis Prædicatorum – Prima Pars* (Romæ 1916) 18-25; cf. Angelus Walz OP, *Compendium Historiæ Ordinis Prædicatorum* (Romæ 1958) 699-700.

belong to our group". This happened to the young and somewhat intolerant apostle John! (Cf. Luke 9, 49 and 9, 54).

In community life these attitudes are usually expressed in phrases like "here, it has always been done this way"; "if you do not like it, then leave". This is odd and even paradoxical. Religious vocations are presently lacking (at least in some places, countries or regions) and while we ask the Lord to send us many and saintly vocations, we examine one another as if under a microscope (I am certainly not referring, of course, to the necessary process of vocational discernment). We might even think that perhaps we would have been happier if "they" had not come to us with their baggage of questions, dreams, desires and ways of "being brothers".

In this context I ask myself: Why do we want people to become friar preachers today? At this point in our history, do we have the courage to welcome brothers like those we admired in times past because of their great passion for God and for the Gospel?

II. The Dreams of the Others

(The dreams of our brothers)

We know the story of Joseph and his brothers. They attacked him and sold him to some merchants... Nevertheless, *the Lord was with him*. In Joseph's life this phrase will be repeated as if it were a responsorial antiphon, like a litany.

Joseph was eventually sold to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials. Potiphar quickly appreciated Joseph's qualities and made him his personal attendant putting him in charge of his house and entrusting to his care the administration of everything he owned...

Woe to the dreamers who are called to be administrators! In this story, however, this appointment somehow helped our brother Joseph to learn how to "ground" his dreams. Note that I am not saying that one should "stop dreaming", but rather that one should "earth one's dreams", make them a reality, incarnate them! As the years go by, the different tasks entrusted to us by our communities and institutions help us to incarnate our dreams. Every meeting of the brothers (chapters) should help us to return to the question we have already posed: What have we done with the dreams we brought to religious life? What have we done with our first love? (Cf. Book of Revelation 2, 4)

Joseph's uprightness was not rewarded and he found himself once more involved in a lie. We know what happened with Potiphar's wife. I will not talk about the temptations that arise when sometimes our dreams, our first love, wane as the days go by, and when our work and our job confine us in our preoccupation with the daily grind! In this regard, I simply want to reflect on two aspects that are closely linked to the meaning of our Dominican brotherhood today.

When I visit provinces and communities, I am struck forcefully by the all too easy recourse to denunciation and accusation. This tendency is especially expressed when judging people and their intentions. We engage in this as a form of self-justification or to distance ourselves from real problems or from what is really happening. We thus attempt to put some degree of separation between ourselves and what is happening to a brother and even to what is happening to us! (We are no strangers to the mechanics of projecting our troubles onto others).

In this connection the words of the Book of Revelation describing the devil's task come to mind: "*the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night*". (Rev. 12, 10) On the other hand, the First Letter of St. John, always consoles and encourages us because it makes us aware that "*if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence — Jesus Christ, the*

Righteous One (1 John 2,1). What is our “role” in relation to our brothers: are we their accusers or their defenders?

Joseph ended up in prison. *However the Lord was with him and showed him His kindness*. The Lord provided that Joseph gain favour with the prison warden who put him in charge of all those held in confinement. From then on, he was responsible for all that was done there. The warden did not interfere in anything he had entrusted to the dreamer, because “*the Lord was with him*” and gave him success in whatever he undertook. It seemed that the dreamer had abandoned once and for all the “*role*” of dreamer in order to become a good administrator. We know what “to administer” means: to give to each person what this person needs, and not necessarily what “this person asks for”!

Joseph had not yet been justly rewarded. He had experienced his brothers’ hatred. Then, in Potiphar’s house, his loyalty was poorly paid. Nevertheless, Joseph was a just man. In the Old Testament this is the virtue par excellence, which also acquires the dimensions of “holiness”. It is worth reflecting further on the justice of Joseph.

The fundamental principles of the Book of Laws attributed to the jurist Ulpian⁸ are famous: *honeste vivere, alterum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere* (To live honourably, to harm no one, to give to each one his own). St. Thomas Aquinas, who was indebted to this classical Roman tradition, stated that a just person is one who practices justice. However, “to be just” does not mean to act according to justice only once in a while or in isolated cases. When we speak of the virtue of justice we mean the perpetual and constant will to give to each one his due (“his due” is “what belongs to each person” or “his rights”). One of the principal characteristics of justice, therefore, is “alterity”, the presence of the “other”. Justice always requires relationship with the other. This justice “*ad alterum*” is the manifestation par excellence of the person’s integral rectitude, which includes all his relationships with others, with the way he uses things and also with himself. This is what gives justice its meaning of “holiness”.

Brother Jordan of Saxony helps us translate this into the language and way of life of the Order. According to the *Vitae Fratrum* by Brother Gerard de Frachet, a lay person asked Brother Jordan about the rule he professed, and he answered: “The rule of the friars Preachers is this: *honeste vivere, discere et docere* (to live honourably, to study and to teach). These are the three things David asked from the Lord when he said: “*Teach me goodness and discipline and knowledge*”. (Psalm 118, 66)⁹

Returning to the story of the “dreamer” we see that when Joseph was still confined, two officials of the king of Egypt, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, were condemned to imprisonment. These were the officials charged with ensuring that Pharaoh received his daily bread and wine!

One night, both of them had a dream and each dream had its own meaning. It seems that Joseph had stopped dreaming for quite a long time (or at least, he did not have the courage to speak to anybody else about his dreams). The experiences he had to live led him to a painful reality: the lack of love of his brothers, the deceit of Potiphar’s wife, imprisonment ... so many lies, accusations and condemnations!

During my visits to the different provinces and communities and when I read the Acts of the Chapters, it is interesting to contemplate how the brothers transmit the realities they live. It is true that some situations look more like nightmares, while others transmit beautiful vocational experiences that expand the heart and make us dream of a better future.

⁸ *Eneus Domitius Ulpianus* († Rome 228)

⁹ Geraldus de Frachet, *Vita Fratrum* (ed. Reichert, MOPH t. 1), II pars, cap. XLV, III.

Joseph is an administrator. To administer “for others”, taking into consideration “the needs of the others”, makes Joseph also learn or discover at this stage in his life, although in prison, that others also are happy or sad, dream or have nightmares.

Joseph is a prisoner; he pondered a thousand and one times the meaning of his own story. However, he did not confine himself in his own thoughts, paralyzed in sterile isolation. Attentive and contemplative, and sharing the same prison, it seemed that he alone was able to perceive the dejected faces of Pharaoh’s officials. So he asked them: “*Why are your faces so sad today?*” (Genesis 40, 7) It is not a reprimand; it is rather an awareness which takes on special importance in a prison: Can one have another face when one is deprived of one’s freedom? Joseph sees further. In truth there is no simpler or humdrum question than this: “Why do you have such a sad face?” And yet, how much of life it may contain! Our everyday community life makes us familiar with such phrases, even the ones we use spontaneously almost without thinking, that are so charged with life. There are dialogues that start very simply and end up being very fruitful. We know the simple request Jesus made to the Samaritan woman: “*Give me a drink.*” (John 4, 7) Also the question he asked the disciples on the road to Emmaus: “*What are you discussing as you walk along?*” (Luke 24, 17) We know how both meetings ended. They are stories of vocation.

Joseph’s fellow prisoners answer him: “*We both had dreams, but there is no one to interpret them.*” Joseph humbly acknowledged: “*Interpretations belong to God. But tell me your dreams.*” (Genesis 40, 8) This episode in Joseph’s life seems to me profoundly meaningful. He is not the only one to dream. “The others” also dream their dreams (or nightmares!). It is not enough, as Joseph did in his youth (and we in ours), to expect that others stop to listen to our dreams... A time comes in which we need to discover the “existence” and/or “presence” of the brothers. It is of key significance for us to be engaged in what is actually happening; it is vital to know that our brothers also have dreams and projects.

It is very important to acknowledge the dreams of others! I am referring especially to the dreams of our brothers, the dreams of those who live with us and those of the people who somehow share our life, our colleagues or co-workers, those who to whom our preaching is directed and those who preach to us. I am thinking of the dreams of those we call “ordinary people”. In this way, the circle of relationship gets wider, and it is necessary for us actually to know the faces and the dreams of those we wish to serve.

It is true that “interpretation” belongs to God. We know, however, that He desires us to be his instruments. To understand, to realize, and to contemplate what happens to the brothers (their dreams, expectations, hopes, their fears, anxieties) demands of us silence and patience (peace and science/knowledge); listening and attention; prudence and docility; the sense of mystery and of the sacred, in the life of others.

Prudence is the principal moral virtue for it is a guide and a teacher. In order to be prudent one needs to be docile. “*Docilitas*”, which is part of the virtue of prudence, does not consist mainly in accepting what others tell us, but rather in “knowing how to let others tell us something”.

We know what happened to Joseph. The sometime dreamer now interprets the dreams of his fellow prisoners (for one of them it is a dream and he returns to life; for the other one it is a nightmare and death). These predictions came to pass. When the chief cupbearer left the prison, Joseph asked him not to forget him... but he forgot him. How easily dreams are forgotten! Once more, Joseph suffers in his flesh the forgetfulness of the others.

In our community and apostolic life many times we suffer various difficulties. They might be experiences of limited freedom arising from different situations in life such as certain tasks, works,

occupations, physical or psychological or spiritual infirmities, lack of understanding, misunderstandings, etc.

In the light of the difficult experience endured by Joseph, we can consider our own attitudes and their relation to our brothers. Joseph is a brother, like us. When facing his difficulties, he did not play the part of a victim licking his own wounds. Why are we in the habit of always accusing others for everything that happens to us as if they are the only ones responsible or who carry the blame for our fate? Neither does Joseph nurture a tragic sense of life. Do we not exhaust and stifle our fraternity when we utter interminable and sterile lamentations such as “Life has no meaning” or “Didn’t I tell you so?” Sometimes we seem to be prophets of doom, more interested in being right than in what might or might not happen. Joseph did not reduce the difficulties he faced to a question of “fault” (his and/or other’s) or “culprits”. Do we not usually blame ourselves for every failing or failure perhaps in a tortuous search for compassion from others? Do we not consider that what happens to us is “somebody’s” fault? Joseph does not cultivate in his heart a yearning for revenge or retaliation. This happens when we give in to the temptation of imitating Herodias, Herod’s companion, and ask for the head of our supposed enemies to be served up to us on a platter. Our enemies being those we consider obstacles to our own well-being or happiness! Is it not equally sad to display our own suffering, some physical or psychological violence, as a way of putting pressure on the community or even to punish it? ¹⁰ Joseph did not spend his day appealing to the authorities in order to gain their sympathy for what had happened. Sometimes, besides passing our days looking at our own selves, we expect others to look at us also. How comfortable it is to play the role of the “victim”! In short, in the situation in which he found himself, apparently without any way out, the beloved son of Jacob did not choose to harm himself so that everybody could pity him. He put his trust in God and made himself available to his fellow prisoners by helping them in every possible way. In this way God was purifying his heart and intelligence, his soul, his life!

It can happen that we play a kind of game of hide-and-seek with our brothers, with life, with God, by concealing ourselves behind different ways of self-commiseration or self-sufficiency, more or less disguised as humility.¹¹ Little by little these attitudes alienate us from everything (from reality) and from everybody (from the fraternal community).

Joseph’s story takes on a dramatic character that grows towards a *crescendo*. It happened that Pharaoh also dreamt, but the wizards and the wise men of Egypt were unable to decipher their meaning! The forgetful chief cupbearer then remembered Joseph; “the dreamer” was called upon to interpret the dreams of the highest authority in Egypt. Joseph again insisted: “*I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires*”. (Genesis 41, 16)

The life of a friar, a brother, without any pretensions other than being a brother, leads us to listen to the joys and hopes, sorrows and suffering of the men and women of our time.¹² How many children and young people, women and men, brothers and sisters have dreams for those close to them, for their families, their villages, their countries! The ministry of fraternity demands that we listen to, know and interpret these dreams. Why is it that sometimes we do not create the necessary space so that our brothers may tell us their dreams? What situations or attitudes make this difficult?

Pharaoh acknowledged Joseph’s prudence and wisdom and named him Prime Minister, putting him in charge of the whole territory of Egypt. Joseph was thirty years old. We could say that he had

¹⁰ Fraternal correction which Jesus taught in the gospel (Cf. Mt 7, 15; 18, 15-18) is not the same thing as to complain about something that bothers or hurts us. Fraternal correction consists of trying to emend the brothers through charity and not to punish them. St. Thomas considers this as one of the acts or effects of charity. (Cf. II-II, q. 31, prol. and q. 33).

¹¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, *Homily during the opening Mass of the 11th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*. (2 October 2005).

¹² Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 1

finished his formation and “is treated as an adult, competent to teach others and take on various responsibilities”.¹³

At this stage in his life Joseph did not let himself be driven by the dreams he had as an adolescent. He was able to turn a new page in his story and abandon a turbulent or tormented life, one that was, until then, sad and bitter. The name he gave to his two children illustrates this desire: *Manasseh* (God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household) and *Ephraim* (God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering).

The good administrator is par excellence a down-to-earth man: he sows and he harvests; he gathers and he distributes; he keeps watch and takes care; controls and administers; he taxes and measures; he pays and he charges. In the gospel, Jesus uses the image of the administrator in several parables in order to speak about fidelity. We recall especially the parable of the talents.

Joseph was a faithful man, and he showed this in his work as administrator. He was faithful in small matters as he would be in greater responsibilities. Up to this moment we seem to be seeing a happy ending which was to be widely expected. If in the Old Testament God's blessing showed itself mainly in good health, in offspring and in the abundance of goods, then we may say that Joseph was at last blessed by God! Joseph administered Egypt's wealth and he built a family in the land that accepted him as an adopted son. He was just and wise and he feared God. So he could definitively forget his sad story.

We know that, at least in biblical terms, it is not good to “forget”. The people, the just man who suffers, the persecuted ones, all of them beseech God: “Do not forget us”. God himself asks his people not to forget His Alliance and His Commandments, His work of creation, liberation and salvation. It is important to make/keep memory. We know the etymological meaning of the word “*recordare*” (*re*: to come back / *cor-cordis*: heart) and of the word “remember” (*re*: to come back / *member*: to organize or to unite what is separated or, precisely, “dismembered”). Joseph had to remember and to turn back and put together the loose fragments of his story, a story linked to that of his brothers.

When the years of abundance came to an end, the people were hungry and cried to Pharaoh for food. Pharaoh answered: “*Go to Joseph and do whatever he tells you!*” (Genesis 41, 55). These words are like the ones Mary addressed to the servants in Cana of Galilee, when facing a similar situation: wine ran short in the middle of a marriage feast.

III. God's Dreams

(Our vocation)

People from all over the world went to Egypt to buy rations of grain from Joseph, for famine had gripped the whole world. In his native land, also hit by drought and famine, Jacob admonished his sons: “*Why do you keep gaping at one another?*” (Genesis 42, 1) He had heard that in Egypt they were selling rations of grain and he commanded them: “*Go down there and buy some for us, that we may stay alive rather than die of hunger*”. (Genesis 42, 2) Knowing Jacob, we can guess from whom Joseph got this practical sense. His father was always very practical. He had in fact allowed himself to cheat several times in order to get his way... even though in this Joseph was quite different.

Can we limit our vocation to be “friars” or “brothers” to a question of “survival”? God wants us to live, and not simply to “survive”! Let us reflect on these things and visualize our presence in the

¹³ Cf. LCO I § VI.

world, our mission and our preaching and those who receive our preaching, all those who expect us to share with them the bread of the Word! The intuition of those who like St. Dominic de Guzman did not hesitate to give up their life, spending their life and consuming themselves for others, “for preaching and the salvation of souls” (Cf. 2 Corinthians 12, 15; LCO 1 § II) is more and more evident and prophetic. God loves life and wants us to have life, and have it to the full. (Cf. John 10, 10) During the Easter Triduum we commemorate the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. It is something definitively new. Sometimes we seem to be merely spokespersons for the resurrection of the young daughter of Jairus, or of the firstborn of the widow of Nain, or of the friend Lazarus from Bethany. They all returned to live “exactly as in the past”, “the life they lived before they died”. However, they died again! We dream of times gone by and we expect everything to return as it was before, because the past was a better time, when we were forty or during the forties! (For others, this might be the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties...).

I am sure I am not mistaken when I say that the most terrible insult reported in the story of the Passion of Jesus does not consist so much in the derision, the spitting or the blows he received; the flagellation or the crowning with thorns; or being condemned to crucifixion. The insult that really sums up the drama of the cross and of humanity is found in a short and excruciating cry, which is both ancient and modern: “*Save yourself!*” The religious authorities, the soldiers, the passers-by and those who were curious, the criminals by his side, all of them in one way or another challenged him with these words. It is like saying: “Sort it out as best you can”; “Have it your way”; “It’s your problem, not mine”.

Joseph had full authority in Egypt and he distributed rations to the whole population. Joseph was a just man. We know that besides “commutative” justice there also exists the type of justice proper to those who are entrusted with some sort of authority and which we call “distributive” justice. In fact, those in authority are not expected to demand the same things from all those under their care. They share or distribute, demand or ask for things “proportionally” and not simply “arithmetically” ($1 = 1$) according to the duties or needs of the “other”.

When we are at home or in a domestic setting we experience this distributive justice when somebody distributes plates of food to companions at table according to each person’s needs or tastes without risking being cited as unjust. In this way, the prior or the bursar demands or asks from each friar his share (what belongs to him), taking into consideration a measure of justice that is proportional (according to the abilities, difficulties, needs, etc. of each.). This does not mean being “partial” to a person (the parable of the talents is very graphic in this sense). Community living, fraternal life in common, we know, is not built solely on the basis of commutative justice (arithmetical) but also according to distributive (or proportional) justice.

Of course, merciful love is the root or the theological foundation, the heart that gives life, encourages and points out the final and supernatural goal of our vocation. This love perfects and surpasses justice; it establishes it and presupposes it.¹⁴

Saint Paul teaches us that God’s justice is manifest in the justification of all those who believe in Jesus (Cf. Romans 3, 25-26). The revelation of divine justice that makes us just (*justifying*), does not only lead us to a more complete vision of the relationship between justice and mercy in God.¹⁵ It demands a new type of fraternal living from us (Cf. 1 Cor 13, 4-7; James 2, 13).

Charity goes beyond justice. However it never lacks that justice, which prompts us to give to the other what is “his”, what is due to him by reason of his being and of his acting. I cannot “give” what

¹⁴ Cf. *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 21, aa. 3-4.

¹⁵ Cfr. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 43, q. 2, a. 2 ad 4.

is mine to the other without first giving him what pertains to him in justice. Charity demands justice, it transcends it and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving.¹⁶

Joseph was the administrator, a good administrator. He had finally got “everything under his control”. However, when everything seemed “OK”, his brothers arrived in Egypt! Without knowing the one who was receiving them, they knelt before him with their faces to the ground. Joseph, on the other hand, recognized them but treated them as if they were strangers. (We know the details, so I will not relate them here.)

In the Bible, the first words that man pronounced in front of the woman God had given him were: “*This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*” (Genesis 2, 23) These words are very oriental in tone, coming from the good Hebrew tradition. Images that are physical or material – flesh and bones – are used to describe realities that are more profound and spiritual: in this context we understand complementarity, a “suitable partner”. In these words we find a profound analogy, although in contexts which are at the same time different and similar. We can apply them to fraternity. Joseph stood before his brothers. They were flesh of his flesh, blood of his blood, “a chip off the old block”, we would say.

When Joseph thought that he could definitely turn his back on his past (which he wanted to control as he controlled the goods he administered), he came face to face with his brothers, with his history, with his own life. We cannot hide the different aspects of our life nor place them in parentheses even though we are sometimes tempted to do this. In doing this we would not truly be men, but only apparently so, a stub or remnant of humanity. This is why, I repeat, that the biblical “remembrance” or “memory” is important.

Joseph, then, *remembered the dreams he had about them.* (Genesis 42, 9). So he treated them sternly and put them to the test. Nevertheless, when he acknowledged them as his own brothers, Joseph began to heal his story, despite the grief their presence provoked.

We frequently recall the famous phrase of St. Gregory Nazianzus (329-391): “*What has not been assumed has not been healed*” (cured, redeemed, saved). We have also learned how to apply this Christological truth, by analogy, in various and similar fields: to our life before joining the Order and to our religious life; in our community experience and in the preaching ministry; we learned it in history and in our own story; in the daily life of our convents, provinces and in that of our Order. It is a daily discovery that touches the most varied aspects of our life: the physical and biological; the psychological and sociological; the moral and the spiritual. What we do not assume is not healed.

When the “dreamer” preferred to forget, God’s question to Cain came back to Joseph requiring a new answer from him: “*Where are your brothers?*” That question of his younger days – which emerged from a painful period of his life – returned with renewed drama: “*I am looking for my brothers. Could you please tell me where they are...?*” The response of divine providence, which never abandoned him and never abandoned its own, moved his heart deeply: “There they are in front of you! By your side!”. Something similar happens to us when we look around us and recognize [re+cognoscere] those who are our brothers. This is my brother! These are my brothers, and not the one / the ones I imagined! We cannot expect them to change so that we may accept them as brothers and love them.

When God asked him where his brother was, Cain avoided telling the truth and hid behind his own question: *Am I my brother's keeper?* In Christ, and based on the vocation to which we were called, we dare not replay this scene. In truth, we are not “keepers of our brothers”: we are nothing more and nothing less than brothers to our brothers!

¹⁶ Cfr. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n° 6.

There was much reconciliation to be achieved in the family of Jacob and Joseph family. We need time and patience in order to do this. In the Book of Genesis we see how we need to achieve this step by step. When we want to heal personal or community wounds, it is not possible to impose a “businesslike” rhythm on history. These wounds can only be redeemed through an eminently contemplative rhythm. In fact, we know how the story of Joseph and his brothers continues: their return to Canaan; their second trip to Egypt with Benjamin; a new meeting with Joseph; Joseph’s last test to his brothers; Judah’s intervention in favour of Benjamin; etc.

Let us move to the end of the story. Joseph could no longer control his emotion and said to his brothers: *“I am Joseph” ... “Come closer to me.”* When they had done so, he said: *“I am your brother Joseph, whom you once sold into Egypt” ... He then kissed all his brothers, and cried as he embraced them. Only then were his brothers able to talk with him.* (Genesis 45, 3-4. 15)

His tears seemed to have definitely purified the eyes of his heart. Through this real emotional *tsunami*, fifteen years after that terrible episode when he was sold by his brothers, he was able to discover the real meaning of his whole life and of all that had happened to him. He had to travel a long and tortuous path in order to purify, reconstruct and reconcile his fraternal story.

His words enlighten us: *“Now do not be distressed, and do not reproach yourselves for having sold me here. It was really for the sake of saving lives that God sent me here ahead of you. He sent me on ahead of you to ensure for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives in an extraordinary deliverance. ... It was not really you but God who had me come here...”* (Genesis 45, 5-8) This reaction is not simply the product of passing emotions. Later on, when they saw that their father Jacob had died, Joseph’s brothers said to each other: *“Suppose Joseph has been nursing a grudge against us and now plans to pay us back in full for all the wrong we did him!”* Then his brothers proceeded to fling themselves down before him and said, *“Let us be your slaves!”* But Joseph replied to them: *“Have no fear. Can I take the place of God? Even though you meant harm to me, God meant it for good, to achieve his present end, the survival of many people. Therefore have no fear. I will provide for you and for your children.”* By thus speaking kindly to them, he reassured them.” (Genesis 50, 15. 18-20)

Joseph the dreamer found difficulties with his brothers when he wanted to share his dreams with them. This marked his life. However this same life, little by little, made him acknowledge, or discover, that others also have dreams. Following this experience he listened to the dreams of others and also wanted interpret them in God’s name. However, he did not imagine that when he opened himself to this possibility (to feel as his own the needs of others, to listen to others patiently and to open a space for others in his heart) God was making him know His own dreams for him, for his brothers, for his people. They are dreams of salvation and liberation!

If our dreams point to our projects, hopes, ideals ... to listen to the dreams of others can open our hearts to the dreams, hopes, ideals and expectations ... But God’s dreams for each one of us and for all of our brothers point to the most profound meaning of our life, of our vocation! Is not our own vocation the concrete expression of the dreams God has for each one of us and for everybody? God’s “dreams” for each one of us are our vocation. Our brothers remind us of this. When God reveals his dreams to us (as he did to Joseph – betrothed to Mary – when the carpenter decided to repudiate her in secret) He shows us a vocational way that goes beyond anything we might have desired or thought for ourselves and for the others; everything that others might have dreamt for us... (Cf. Isaiah 55, 8)

Joseph’s story ends with a last “dream” – could it be otherwise? – but now it is understood as a “revelation”. *Joseph then said to his brothers: “I am about to die. God will surely take care of you and lead you out of this land to the land that he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”* (Genesis 50, 24) It is the prelude to the vocational story of a people, and not only that of Jacob’s

family. This story reached its highest point in the mission of the beloved Son who, also in search of His brothers, was sold for a few coins and was made the beginning of a new life through His death and resurrection.

Our lives and the life of our conventual and provincial communities and that of the whole Order also need to walk a path of reconciliation. The point of the journey is not to reach a happy ending through magic. Reconciliation demands that we “*put ourselves in the place of the other*” (Cf. Genesis 44, 33). This is what we brothers learn through a pedagogy that is far from easy. For this reason we have to learn how to read our own story and those of our fraternities (communities) and discover how Providence has worked and still works in us, with patience, humility and perseverance.

Every man is my brother

Joseph is the prototype of the just man, prudent and wise; a real brother. We have already spoken about justice. Prudence is the virtue of practical reason, which relates the principles of moral activity to reality as it presents itself here and now. Wisdom consists mainly in recognising what is important and necessary from what is ephemeral and secondary, what is substantial and what is accidental.

We have read the life and mission of Joseph in a new way. He would not have wanted to centre his story on himself. From this point of view we can understand the Prophet Isaiah when he said: *Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?*” (43, 18-19) ... for “*I make all things new.*” (Revelation 21, 5)

This story of fraternity, of joys and hopes interwoven with pain and grief, helps us understand what it means to live Easter, death and resurrection, in the light of the gospel. It is not about returning, as if by magic, to the past, going back to live as before. Everybody matured when they met Jacob (the father) again. In a very concrete sense and with much suffering, they learned how to love. Each person’s life was mysteriously linked to that of the others (and all of them received life from the same father). Through the vicissitudes of life they discovered the love of the father who made them brothers. There is no fraternity without filiation. The meeting of the brothers with Joseph around their father Jacob after so many misunderstandings, much jealousy and envy, opened the horizon of revelation to something bigger than a simple “domestic” peace. Fraternity is a gift which involves (calls us to) a universal mission: they shall form one people, the elected people.

These pages from the Book of Genesis help us to renew our commitment to the gospel: fraternity built through words of grace and truth, listening and mercy. We know by experience that our words can hurt or destroy the brothers. However they can also awaken what is most noble in us creating infinite possibilities of life! Words like those Joseph spoke to his brothers whom he *comforted, speaking words that touched their hearts.* (Genesis 50, 21b)

Joseph’s story teaches us that God is not deaf to what we tell Him. Joseph also learned to listen even in difficult situations such as in prison. We know the intimate relationship that exists between “to listen” (*audire*) and “to obey” (*obædire*). The Lord has sown in our hearts the ability to listen. How many human, family or community dramas arise from not listening! This is why we usually meet in community in order to listen to God’s voice together (community prayer) and to listen to it through the voices of the brothers (meetings and community chapters). We are also called as a community to listen to those who share our mission and to those to whom we address it (community mission).

When Joseph saw his brothers hungry in Egypt, he finally understood that God's plan had transformed the evil they had intended doing to him into something good. By opening his heart to the dreams of the others, God showed him His own dreams: God's dreams for Joseph, for his brothers and for his people. For this reason, in God's likeness, Joseph was merciful and forgave his brothers.

As friar preachers, we also recognise in Saint Dominic these same deep feelings of mercy and compassion. I think that the most beautiful words about our Father are those written by Blessed Jordan when he wrote in his *Libellus: All men were swept into the embrace of his charity, and, in loving all, he was beloved by all.*¹⁷

In our Constitutions we read: "So that each convent may be a fraternal community, everyone should accept and embrace each other as members of the same body, differing indeed in talent and work, but equal in the bond of charity and of profession." (LCO 4 § I).

That is why *the brothers, of one mind through obedience, and bonded together by a higher love, thanks to chastity, more closely dependent on each other, thanks to poverty, ought first of all to build in their own convent the Church of God which by their life and mission they must then spread throughout the world.* (Cf. LCO 3 § II).


Can we ever obtain this fraternity on our own? Our society, ever more globalized, might perhaps, bring us nearer to one another, but it does not necessarily make us brothers. "Reason, by itself, is capable of grasping the equality between men and of giving stability to their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. This originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, teaching us through the Son what fraternal charity is."¹⁸

This precious "pearl" that is our Dominican fraternity is *a proclamation that goes out through all the earth, a message that reaches to the ends of the world.* (Cf. Psalm 19, 5) Let it shine forth as our best praise, blessing and preaching, because "every man is my brother"¹⁹ and we are called to preach to all nations, to console them, speaking words that touch their hearts.

May God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ grant peace, love and faith to all the brothers. (Ephesians 6, 23).

In Our Father Saint Dominic




Bro Carlos A. Azpiroz Costa OP
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Prot. 50/09/675 – Lettere all'Ordine – MO

¹⁷ Cf. B. Jordan of Saxony, *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Prædicatorum* n. 107 [Ed. H. C. Scheeben, *MOPH* (1925) t. 16].

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n° 19.

¹⁹ Paul VI, *Message for the World Day of Peace 1971* (14th November 1970).