



ORDO PRÆDICATORUM
CURIA GENERALITIA

Solemnity of St. Dominic
Rome, 8 August 2020

Prot 50/20/382 Letters to the Order

Christus in vobis, spes gloriæ
Colossenses 1:27

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

O Spem Miram! O Wonderful Hope! This is our hymn to St. Dominic, the father and first brother of our Order.

The usual images that evoke hope are a new-born baby, a brilliant dawn, flowers and fruits of spring time, depictions of new life and new beginnings. In this time of a global pandemic, perhaps the image that would surely spell hope would be a vetted vaccine for COVID 19! Thus, it might seem strange to others that our song of hope commemorates the moment when Dominic passed from this world, a time when the brothers have tears on their eyes instead of a smile on their lips - *O spem miram quam dedisti mortis hora te flentibus*. Dominic stirred hope in their hearts because he promised to continue to be helpful to the brothers and sisters, he vowed to intercede for us, and, therefore, to abide with us by his prayers. But this is just one side of the story. The presence of the praying brothers at the hour of his death must have also given hope to Dominic. At that final moment of human finitude, Dominic was not alone. **The presence of the brothers and Dominic's promised presence beyond death gave each of them hope and consolation.** "The Latin word *con-solatio*, 'consolation'... suggests *being with* the other in his solitude, so that it ceases to be solitude" (*Spe Salvi*, 38).

The quarantine and lockdowns we experienced or continue to experience at different times and varied modalities threatened to bring us to despair and isolation. They seemed to contradict our pastoral instincts to be with the people. But we observed these measures for sound scientific and ethical reasons. Yet even with these restrictions, I am glad to hear of the creative ways by which we tried "to be together" and be "with our people". Surely, there is no substitute to personal presence, but we found other means to be present to others. We, in the general curia, were able to meet with the provincials from all regions, regents of studies, and some commissions without the hassle of passing through airport security! Our professors and students completed the academic year through virtual means. For many of our educational institutions, the coming semester will see the implementation of a blended learning system i.e., combination of personal and virtual presence in lectures. I saw a photo of friars in one university priory who were trying their best to be proficient with the Blackboard Learning Management System. The heroic efforts of these professors (some of whom are not so young) to become competent "digital migrants" for the sake of their students are a sign of hope!

There are friars who braved the danger of contamination by ministering to the sick, while observing necessary precautions in order to prevent viral transmission within their communities. Our brothers at Santa Maria Maggiore here in Rome continued, as a college of penitentiaries, to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation even during the first phase of the lockdown. Br. Chris Gault, a medical doctor before he joined the Order, was given permission by his superior to go back temporarily to medical practice to lend a hand to weary doctors treating covid-19 patients. There are brothers and sisters who offered words of encouragement and hope through phone counselling. I was on a phone

conversation with frère Bruno Cadoré on his birthday last April 14 when he gently told me that we had to end our conversation because, as a volunteer counsellor, he would soon receive calls redirected by a counselling hotline in France. Most of the brothers and sisters preached and prayed with the people through various digital initiatives. **Indeed, moments of crisis can become occasions of grace and moments of creativity.** It was during the time of the Italian plague (1629-1631) that friar Timotheus Ricci (†1643) established the *Bussola del ora perpetua del Rosario* at the Dominican convent in Bologna in the year 1629.¹ The *perpetual rosary* devotion was born in the midst of pestilence. I am grateful to you all for joining us in the International Dominican Family Rosary last 29 April 2020 organized by fr. Lawrence Lew, Promoter General of the Rosary.


Our brothers from all over the world have published theological and biblical reflections on the different facets of the pandemic, liturgy guides for the celebration of the Paschal Triduum at home, guidelines for a safe and worthy celebration of the sacraments etc. We recall what fr. Timothy Radcliffe wrote in *The Wellspring of Hope*: “To study is itself an act of hope, since it expresses our confidence that there is a meaning to our lives and the sufferings of our people. And this meaning comes to us as a gift, a Word of Hope promising life.” The intellectual mission of the Order and its mission to preach Veritas is an important antidote to another pernicious pandemic - fake news and half-truths which are in fact half-lies.

You, dear brothers and sisters are a sign of hope for the Church and the human family as you strove to feed the “hungers” intensified by the pandemic: hunger for the Eucharist (and sacraments), hunger for solidarity and compassion, hunger for food and drink. There are members of the Dominican Family who raised funds for the needs of the sick and those who take care of the sick. Our brothers and sisters in many countries are struggling to alleviate the suffering caused by the pandemic and, like in Brazil, to discern the social ills that exacerbate the spread of the contagion.

We have lost brothers and sisters in this pandemic. In “normal” times, we gather around the bed of a dying member. A young friar shared that he was sad and shocked that they were unable to say goodbye to a brother who was about to die in the hospital. Our hearts are torn with by the thought that while we were able to be present to the dying and their kin ; now, we are unable to do the same for a brother and a sister due to medical restrictions. Yet we remain hopeful. **Hope is grounded on the certainty that God will never abandon us. Hope is the assurance that God abides in the “mysteries of joy, sorrow, glory and light” of our lives.** A priest told the bereaved family of a teen who was murdered: “If you want to know where God is when such tragic things happen to us, I can only say He is there weeping, suffering, and dying with you”. Pope Francis reminds us: “Hope does not expire, because it is based on the fidelity of God”. **Hope is Christ in us** (Col. 1, 27).

O Spem Miram! Dominic boldly promised to be useful to us because he had great hope that he will be closer to Christ, in the communion of the blessed. We will celebrate next year the 800th anniversary of that promise. The difficulties we currently face prompted us to revisit the plan we sent last January 2020. We hope to communicate the revised one later.

Your brother,


fr. Gerard Francisco Timoner III, OP
Master of the Order

¹ Viliam Štefan Dóci OP, *Die seelsorgliche Tätigkeit der Kaschauer Predigerbrüder. Ein Dominikanerkonvent im Ambiente von Pfarrei, Stadt und Staat im 18. Jahrhundert*, Berlin-Boston 2018, p. 113 (Viliam provided me an English translation).