



DOMINICAN SISTERS OF ST CATHERINE OF SIENA
Via degli Artisti, 17 00187 Rome
-Prioress General-

C.L. 3/2024

Blessed are those who dwell in your house; and praise you without ceasing.(Ps. 84:4)

1

Dear Sisters and Laity,

I write to you on this day when we celebrate the feast of All Saints of the Dominican Family. Men and women of a bygone time, but whose lives continue to speak and work in our present time. Men and women of the Spirit who knew how to read and interpret the reality of their time and took charge of it¹, inhabiting it, assuming it, ardently seeking in it the face of God, giving it meaning, and committing themselves to transform it from within, from the Gospel. Undoubtedly, celebrating these brothers and sisters provokes us not only to remember and give thanks for our glorious history, but also challenges us to take up their torch and, passionately rooted in the present, to set our eyes on the future, to continue building history under the impulse of the Spirit who wants to continue to do great things with us (Cf. VC 110).

Blessed is the servant whom his master, on his arrival, finds engaged in this work (Mt 24:46).

This year too, our little Religious Family celebrates the missionary fruitfulness of her enlarged tents, extended *ad gentes* (to the peoples), and today, *inter gentes* (among the peoples) and *cum gentibus* (with the peoples): I am referring to our presence and mission in Latin America and Pakistan.

We are celebrating the 150th anniversary of the sending and arrival of the first sisters in Latin America (1876). We know, from what historians tell us, that our Congregation was not the only one to cross the ocean to announce the Good News and to embrace with the mantle of her own charism the 'new peoples' of the nascent American republics². These were the 'winds' of the times, but poor and illiterate Mother Gérine, moved by mercy, guided by Providence, knew how to interpret them, discovering in them the action of the life-giving Breath of the Spirit of God.

¹ The definition of Christian spirituality as a way of living the Gospel by the power of the Spirit, as the attitude/spirit with which we face the reality, WITH WHICH WE ACCEPT THE REALITY, of the history in which we live in all its complexity, seems to me very significant. Cf. Nurya Martínez-Gayol aci, *Spirituality of synodality* on www.uisg.org

² Cf. Susana Monreal, *The Dominican Sisters of Saint Catherine of Siena of Albi. Their installation in the Río de la Plata and Cuyo as a model of itinerancy (1874-1886)*, in *Itinerantes. Journal of History and Religion* 10 (Jan-Jun 2019) 77-98.



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We celebrate the 90th anniversary of the arrival of the first six sisters in the then English India (1934), the first missionary group which brought to Asia the insignia, the rules, the spirit of our Congregation, thus fulfilling the desire of our Father Dominic, the first missionary of our great Family and of St. Catherine who always felt 'hungry for the nourishment of the creature for the honour of God'³.

2

Let us give thanks to God for these pioneers who set out to the peripheries of the world and by their itinerancy, not only geographically but also culturally, spiritually and affectively, transformed the foreign land into a homeland and were the maternal face of the divine mercy.

How beautiful on the mountains are the footsteps of the one who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who announces good tidings, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion: 'Your God reigns! (Is 52:7).

Remembering these intrepid sisters, reflecting on our history, I asked myself: what 'winds' are blowing in these times dramatically marked by the horrors of war, of climatic disasters, of forced migrations ...? Can we perceive them? And in them, where and how is the Holy Spirit moving? Where is He calling and urging us? What are the 'signs of these times'?

In the Bull of Convocation of the Ordinary Jubilee that will open on Christmas Eve, Pope Francis reminds us that we are called to rediscover hope in the signs of the times that the Lord offers us, paying attention to all that is good in the world so as not to fall into the temptation of considering ourselves overcome by evil and violence. In this sense, the signs of the times, which contain the yearning of the human heart in need of God's saving presence, need to be transformed into signs of hope (cf. Bull 7).

Like Mother Géline and like so many sisters and brothers before us, we accept the responsibility to open our eyes, our intelligence and our hearts to grasp the signs of the times, to respond to the *call* they contain and to be and become a sign of concrete, tangible hope for all those who live in conditions of hardship (cf. Bull 10).

Blessed are your eyes, for they see; blessed are your ears, for they hear (Mt 13:16).

In this unceasing movement of life inspired by the Spirit, we too, the Family of Mother Gerine, are approaching another important anniversary, the 20th anniversary of her reunification, confirmed by a decree of the Dicastery for Religious Life on 14th June 2005.

³ Cf. Mother M. Chiara Apollonio in *Ave Maria*, bimonthly bulletin of the Dominican Sisters of St Catherine of Siena, teachers and nurses, (Sep-Oct 1934) 88-91.



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After 20 years of journey, it spontaneously arises to ask ourselves: what have these 20 years of journey, of new history, meant? What gift/gifts have we received with the reunification that made us a new Congregation? How has it transformed us, or has everything remained as before? What is the 'new humanity' born of the gift of *unity* brought about in and by the Lord (cf. Eph 2:14-15)? How have we appropriated, incarnated and inculturated our rediscovered charismatic identity as Dominicans, daughters of Mother Gerine Fabre, so clearly and profoundly described in our Constitutions? How are we transmitting to new generations the richness of a prophetic journey that they have not experienced in their own skin?

3

We cannot answer these questions individually and from a desk; we would be giving ourselves partial answers and very probably alien to our multifaceted reality, beautiful precisely in its complexity. Therefore, we want to start together, as a Family, a journey that will help us to reconnect with the nucleus of the charism and with the essential elements that emerge from it. That nucleus in which our multicultural Family is ONE (not uniform).

Thus, in the light of our charism and listening to the signs of the times, we want to begin to take steps in order to continue - ***in dialogue and listening to the different entities - the path of study and discernment with a view to the configuration and structuring of the Congregation, seeking to promote life and mission and considering our presences as a whole*** according to the recommendation of the last General Chapter addressed to the General Government (see Line of Action *Synodality*).

We realize that, precisely because it is a matter of promoting the life and mission of and in our entire religious Family, this journey of study and discernment towards reconfiguration and restructuring cannot be undertaken solely by the General Government with each entity separately. Rather, it must be the fruit of a process of dialogue, of listening that fosters the reciprocal knowledge of the entities among themselves and of the Congregation as a whole, which makes the 'we' of the one Congregational Body grow in each one, feeling co-responsible for the whole Family of Mother Gerine, in all its components and in every place where she lives the one Mission of Christ.

Certainly, this reconfiguration of our presences cannot be the result of our calculations, of letting something die or of preserving something according to criteria of convenience or feasibility, but it is a call to be 'born again', from within - from reality, from situations, from concrete persons - and from above through a spiritual and charismatic journey, carried out in an atmosphere of prayer, of listening to the Spirit and of sharing.

Two movements: reconnecting with our charism and reconfiguring our presences, which could seem to be movements inwards, looking at ourselves, but that which have the purpose and the inner strength to push us outwards, towards the mission, towards those



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geographical, cultural and/or existential peripheries, where there is a brother thirsting for truth and justice.

Two movements that we want to be a pathway, a school, a platform of *synodality*, of unanimity (living with one heart and one soul) and of *interculturality* (moving from 'I' to 'We').

4

The first steps of this stage of the journey will be taken during the Amplified Extended Council that we will soon be holding in Rome (from 23rd November to 2nd December), and then extend it to the whole Congregation. We have called this stage "*Go to Galilee*" (cf. Mk 16:7) because, like the Apostles, we need to return to where everything began.

Dear sisters and brothers, we are at the gates of the Jubilee which invites and exhorts us to be *Pilgrims of hope*. It is not by chance that pilgrimage expresses a fundamental element of every Jubilee event, for it greatly favours the rediscovery of what is essential (cf. Bull 5). We too, together with our brothers and sisters, set out on a journey of return and reconciliation to the original conditions in relation to God, to ourselves, to our neighbour and to Mother Earth, and on a journey ... towards our future.

Happy are those who find their strength in you, as they set out on their pilgrimage (Ps 84:5).

May the Holy Trinity bless us and may all the Saints of the Dominican Family guide and accompany us on our journey.

A fraternal embrace to each and every one of you.

Rome, 07 November, 2024, Feat of All Saints of the Order of Preachers.



Sr Viviana Sisack

Sr. M. Viviana Sisack
Prioress General