

How Current Dominicans Live Their Passion for Preaching

+ As a Dominican, I live my passion for preaching in three main ways. First, by who I am and what I prayerfully try to do, I try to be particularly attentive to sharing the unconditional love of God and the radical hope to which each of us are called, especially with my family, friends, those I meet, and those who read what I write. I also read widely about varying opinions on many topics in order to nourish my own spiritual life and as a necessary preparation in sharing the "Good News" with others. As an educator and writer, I share the "fruits of contemplation" by writing educational materials including formation materials for Dominicans and a written weekly on-line reflection on the Sunday Scripture readings as part of Preachers' Exchange.
...Dr. Elaine (Lanie) LeBlanc, OP, Lay Dominicans of the Holy Cross, Atlanta, GA 9/2012

+ I live my passion for preaching.....by reading widely and voraciously with an eye for narratives that dovetail with Scriptural narratives to help illuminate the Word made flesh who is dwelling among us. When preparing homilies, I seek the emotional center of readings and try to communicate that heart-of-the-matter in my preaching.....using Gospel songs and Spirituals to underscore the point. I also connect events in Salvation history with African American history.
...fr. Bruce Barnabas Schultz, O.P., associate pastor, Our Lady of Lourdes, Atlanta GA 9/2012

+ As a Dominican, I live my passion for preaching by always striving to find God "in the moment" I find myself occupying, recognizing His presence in that moment, and discerning if and how to share that experience with others. That sharing/preaching may be expressed in how I choose to/or not to act/react. I know this may sound complicated, but as long as I keep focused on being connected to the Dominican community through prayer and communication (doing my part), I find that the Holy Spirit responds generously by challenging me in those moments to recognize its presence and respond accordingly.
... Mr. J. Scott Farris, OP, Lay Dominicans of the Holy Cross, Atlanta GA 9/2012

+ The Word becomes flesh. Embodied preaching comes though
- community living and caring, simplicity and sharing, study and social analysis thus seeing the Gospel imperative as exemplified in the Beatitudes
- disputatio so as to come to a new place of transformed living
- openness to the things that rattle us and challenge assumptions.
God meets us where the immanent and transcendent intersect at a time called now.
The liturgical cycle continually renews us reminding us of the unacceptability of ennui and complacency in a world 'charged with the grandeur of God.' GMH For example, Advent takes on a bigger dimension than a mere season for we are called to be awake, live in joy, prepare the way, pay attention and listen up in each moment. Advent is a fleshy word. Taking it on requires courage, boldness, empathy, compassion, searching, celebration. Thus the Word becomes flesh. So be it.
...a Dominican sister, Atlanta GA 9/2012

+ My passion for preaching is rooted in my passion for caring for God's Creation. We are called to respect the integrity of Creation and all that has been entrusted to the stewardship of human beings. By sharing my resources, knowledge, writings and the wonder of the Creator of Heaven and Earth, I continue to encourage people of all ages to be careful stewards of the natural and renewable resources we have been blessed with. Upholding the dignity of all human beings, and

the diversity of the plant world and animal kingdom gives glory to God, as he has created all in his own image. As members of United Plant Savers Botanical Sanctuary network, we are clear about our role as plant stewards, but the world is changing at an accelerating rate, and we must ensure the survival of the delicate and complex balance of the web of life. It is our God given personal responsibility to act to protect the environment for ourselves and for generations to come. We can all make a difference in preserving the rich diversity of life, turn the tide and re-create an Earth that is honored, protected and sustainable.

...Mrs. Judy Farrell OP, Lay Dominicans of the Holy Cross, Atlanta, GA 9/2012

+ I live out my passion for preaching by my ministry as a full time itinerant preacher of parish missions, retreats and novenas and by preaching daily at my website <www.rbwords.com> (which is also available through FIRST IMPRESSIONS under "Daily Reflections"). Next December, I will become the Promoter of Preaching for the Southern Province.

...fr. R.B. Williams, OP, Southern Dominican Province, USA 9/2012

+ In the last several years I've focused my ministry of preaching through music. I also continue traditional pulpit preaching on the weekends and at daily Mass throughout New Orleans, but music has helped me preach the Word stirring people's emotions. I have composed music for Gerard Manley Hopkins poetry, 'Kingfishers' and 'God's Grandeur.' The message in these poems I set to music and then I explain the poetry and interpret it through music. I also have written, 'Martha's Song,' words and music and it is based on the story of Mary and Martha in Luke's Gospel. I conceive as Mary and Martha as two aspects of our personality that need to be integrated by Jesus. My music is available on my website: www.mburkeop.com

These are just some of the ways that I preach through music. Even if I am entertaining older retirees I use the romantic songs and their lyrics to relate them to the true romance with God. I'm always finding new ways to preach when I am at the piano and now that I am studying composition, I have even a broader scope. Last February 12th my first orchestral work was performed in the city, a trio for flute, viola and cello based on the Gregorian Chant melody, 'Ave Maris Stella.' That's how I fulfill my passion for preaching.

...fr. Michael Burke, OP, Southern Dominican Province, USA 9/2012

+ It begins with preparation, prayer and study; being fascinated with new insights and discoveries in the scriptures and in the interactions of real life. It is first listening to the word and to the potential hearer. Then it is taking on the discipline of spending time wrestling with what one hears. Finally it is sharing the fruits of this contemplation with a true compassion for those who receive it. In addition, it is also allowing what I hear to change me, to conform me to the Word, such that I might live what I preach.

...fr. John J. Boll, OP, Southern Dominican Province, USA 9/2012

+ "Why Preach Questions" by fr. Brian J. Pierce, OP, the Promoter General for the Nuns and friar of the Southern Dominican Province, USA, was written previously but is included here (on the following pages) with permission 9/2012

Dear friends in the Preaching,

I was recently asked about some of the essential elements in my life as a preacher. I've never really sat down to put these into words, but here is a first attempt.

I think that one of the most difficult struggles/challenges for anyone who wants to preach the gospel is leaving enough spaces of silence and free “nothing” time in our lives. I am speaking of time that we waste joyfully, without the need to be productive, time that is about just *being*, and not so much *doing*. This could all go under the heading of *contemplation*, but I hesitate to use that word because it frequently sounds like some kind of complicated prayer in which we have to be overly serious, sitting with our backs straight and our legs crossed! Of course, doing meditation is a great help for preaching, but that is not what I'm speaking of here. As a preacher I am constantly struggling to *not* fill up the open, free spaces of my life with too much *busy-ness*. The Word of God gets choked and strangled when we are *too* busy and consider what we're doing *too* important! Preaching requires *nothing time*: creative, joyful, pregnant emptiness.

Another important thing is that I believe it is important for a preacher to believe what he or she says. It's OK to say things about living the gospel that we are not yet living ourselves (we are all *in process*) – as long as we are honest. What is unacceptable, it seems, is to say fancy spiritual things that I don't believe in. Do we believe in the *truths* that we preach?

You ask me what I do to keep myself grounded as a preacher. I take a walk every day. Walking slows me down, keeps me in my body, opens my eyes to the world around me, helps me to hear the voices of children and people and birds and dogs and cities. Seeing and hearing and touching the world – *the real world* – keeps me grounded. Walking, sitting on a park bench, talking to a friend, shopping for groceries, etc. help me to remain connected to the incarnate Christ, the Word that became flesh and that *becomes flesh*. As a preacher I constantly need to keep coming back to the flesh, that is, to the real world. Newspapers are, of course, helpful, but unfortunately, news is owned and told today usually by people with lots of money. So I'm more aware of how important it is to read the news with a very critical eye. Reading alternative news and staying in touch with local projects and groups around the world also help me stay grounded. Silence, community prayer, *Lectio Divina* (prayerful, meditative reading of the Scriptures), poetry and real people who live in the real world keep me grounded and reveal the deeper heart of the Word to me.

And finally, I would add that staying grounded in the Gospel requires that we have friends who are poor. This is more than just reading about the poor, helping the poor, knowing about the problems of the poor, etc. We cannot really hear the gospel of Jesus, it seems to me, without friendship with the poor. Of course, the last thing I would want is for this to sound beautiful and romantic. It's everything but that! To have poor friends disarms us, humanizes us, sometimes scares us, usually questions us, and, when we are really lucky, it converts us. This keeps our feet on the ground (i.e., *humility*) and prepares us for preaching the gospel.

When St. Dominic founded the “holy preaching” in the early 1200s, he put the emphasis on preaching as a *community*. The “holy preaching” referred to the community of brothers and sisters living on or near the grounds of the church of Our Lady of Prouilhe in southern France

(this included Dominic, the first nuns, some companion preachers—who were not friars yet— and some lay families who joined the collective effort).¹ So, one thing that I think we really need to recover is the experience of reflecting on the Word *together* and preaching *communally*.

There are many, many ways to do this; the important thing is that we move beyond an individualistic, isolated preaching format. Praying the Scriptures together, in the context of silence and communal listening, followed by a sharing of our insights is, I believe, a great need in the church today. We need to broaden the circle of those who listen to God’s word, and we need to enrich that circle with a broader, richer, more harmonious group of voices that reflect and speak from their own experience (Acts 2: “We all hear them speaking in our own tongues...”).

To hear the Scriptures within the context of a faith community, and then to speak *communally* from that listening experience is, I believe, one of the greatest challenges today if we are to be faithful to the preaching mission of Jesus (and Dominic), who sent the disciples out to by two. And finally, the circle must include all different groups in society and “church”, if we are to hear *all* of God’s Word and if we are to speak a Word that will reach *all* men and women, then we need to keep widening the Circle. We need to welcome into the Circle people who know a lot about the Bible and simple people who know a lot about life; we need Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and people of other faith traditions, rich and poor, black and white and brown people, young and old, gay and straight, healthy and sick, “us” and “them.” Only when we hear together and speak in a harmony of many voices that blend together, can we be a *holy preaching*.

-brother Brian Pierce, OP

¹ For more information on this point, refer to the June 2006 issue of IDI, available on the homepage of the order: www.op.org (see IDI and link).