



Searching for truth and beauty, preaching through the transforming power of the arts

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Keynote Address – Sr. Sheila Flynn OP – Session One

Sr. Sheila said about creating art:

“The experience will always be creative, expansive, unconstrained, free, true, universal.”

Some of Sr. Sheila’s thoughts worthy of sitting with and contemplating:



We are only a tiny part of the story.

Story and beauty are always in the air.

Our Dominican Institute for the Arts has reached *Silver*.

She quotes Edward Schillebeeckx’s words:
“The charism of St. Dominic is a thread of gold (adapted to silver, henceforth in this

quote)

which his followers in every age must weave with the cross-thread of their own particular time and circumstances. The end result is the “Dominican Story.” The silver thread runs through the Dominican family story from Dominic down to present day. The silver thread is woven into our life story, however different it may be in content. It is a completely new rendering of an older Dominican melody. The story is not ended; the cloth is still on the loom. We are it!”

As Dominican art practitioners we identify the vision we have of our world, promoting a vivid expression of human inspiration and questioning.

This also breaks open to us the pain of the world, claiming our attention to be agents of hope to the most vulnerable and interrogate and change the structures that keep so many in shocking servitude.

Editor’s Note:

Our keynote speaker, Sr. Sheila Flynn, OP, from the Eastern Australian Province beautifully captured the dimension of preaching the Word of God through the Arts. She had many thought-provoking ideas.

In a shortened synthesis here are some key points that have spoken to me. Others may have different material from the keynote that touched their hearts. This is an attempt to whet one’s appetite to ponder and read the whole context. The full text of Sr. Sheila’s keynote was sent to DIA Membership in early August, because many asked to spend time and contemplate her words of wisdom. The full text of Sheila’s keynote address can be found on the DIA website, diartsop.org, under the Gathering section. This will give you an opportunity to read the keynote speech as well as explore the beautiful DIA website. Sr. Sheila’s passion for preaching the Word of God was so on fire that it enlivened those in attendance to a greater urge to produce art that preaches, whatever discipline. If you ever wondered about the power of preaching the Word of God through art, Sheila’s keynote address will convince you.

An artist takes it all in and lets the pain of the world touch one's heart and turn it into compassion.

Artists use every means imaginable through emerging technologies, through all the arts, all for the sake of "holy preaching" of conveying God's tender justice and love to a broken world.

Artists have a particular mission: to explain/clarify the yearnings, the incompleteness, the beauty, the horror, the conscience, the awakening, that brings truth to light.

Sr. Sheila quotes Pope Francis: *"The artist is a witness of the invisible and works of art are the clearest proof that the incarnation is possible."*

The artist has a particular nuanced vocation: through faithfulness we go beyond surface realities into contemplation, out of which beauty emerges, or its counterpart.

The artist operates out of contemplation and through the actual art form invites others to the act of sharing the fruits of one's contemplation.

As Dominican artists, we are imbued and gifted with this generative and creative Spirit, who is the heart and conscience of the universe. This confronts us with issues of integrity, dignity, and responsibility.

We preach through the prism of art.

St. Thomas Aquinas maintained that contemplation is not authentic unless its fruits reach beyond us. The art Dominicans create is tangible, and isn't reaching beyond us what we do in our creativity?

Art spills into the heart of all we are and do.

"The role of art is to touch the soul." (Quote from Kim en Joong, OP)

St. Catherine says: *"Be a vessel which you fill and drink at the fountain. Although you draw your love from God who is the fountain of living water, if you do not drink it continually in God your vessel will soon become empty."* (L49 & D64)

As artists we are doorways. To be faithful to this gift in our vocation we must cross the threshold, face ambivalence, and turn within and out, be contemplative and active.

Art takes us to the central reality of encounter; with God, with one another, with the world, with the very materials we use to give shape to life.

We are charged with being fully alive in the Spirit with the gifts we have been given; being bearers of light, agents for change, hope in the songs we sing, shape the spell in the wordscapes of our poems and stories we tell, to bring the truth of the Gospel and meet people wherever they are.

By staying with the tension and discipline of creating we can be a conduit for others.

When we live our core experience and values, we harvest our lives.

"To paint the things of Christ one must live with Christ." (Fra Angelico)

The job of the artist is to deepen the mystery (Francis Bacon)

Let us dance and sing and paint and shape and write in the empty spaces, let's be nimble and be quick, for we are on a mission to embrace this process of life in a particular way, being open to insight and encounter. The Gospel is not a lantern attached to a pole, but a fire and we have been entrusted with a particular form of preaching. What an awesome responsibility.

"We all exist solely for this – to be the human place God has chosen for God's presence, manifestation, and epiphany." (Thomas Merton)



Marc Chagall: *In our life there is a single color; as on an artist's palette, which provides the meaning of art and life. It is the color of love.*"

"God's work in us, drawing us into contemplative prayer takes us into experiences of quiet, of suffering and compassion through: Longing....Desire.....Holding.....Beholding.....Trusting.....Believing.....then propels us out again to be agents of compassion in our fractured world. That is the grace that sustains us."

Session 2 – Creativity and the Divine

Dominic requires of his followers, us, a contemplative gaze, and a fast-knit relationship with God so that our words, our doing of theology and witness be authentic.

The cause of the existence of our world is the Divine inspiring, longing, and outpouring of the mystery of life itself.

The Spirit infuses every creative potent act in our world and in ourselves from the dawn of creation, from the first flaring forth of energy and life bursting upon the universe.



Our human experiences of love, triumphs, and failures, give witness to the abiding life-giving Spirit.

The creative love of God abides in the natural world. We realize that God's love is universal, all encompassing, all-inclusive, and all "human, planetary, and cosmic (force), enfolds the natural world into the vibrant practice of faith" (Elizabeth Johnson, ***Abounding in Kindness***)

Through our lens as artists, we have a particular focus to reflect the numinous (awe inspiring) quality of life by beauty, or by expressing its counterpart. Beauty is the type of resonance that pulsates within the bigger picture of what holds our world together.

We are remarkably made of stardust. Life begets life – that is the initial thrust of Divine inspiring. Every single filament is dependent on the other for survival and for flourishing in the web of life.

Whenever we experience life as tight, predictable, dumbed down, we cease growing. If this is life, we have to ask the serious question of what makes up our environment or systems.

The leitmotif (short reoccurring theme) of the Spirit within us will always be creative, expansive, unconstrained, free, true, universal.

When we are consciously caught in the extraordinary thermal stream of creativity, we will experience abundant, flourishing life. It can be a messy endeavor requiring both vision and discipline and a level of vulnerability – not for the fainthearted.

Consciousness and creativity are inextricably linked in this always discovering, ever new world. We are on an adventure. What is our vision? What sustains us?

The mystery of God engulfs every person. As part of the Dominican family, we seek to articulate this reality.

Dominic's creative legacy: his intellectual coherence, his impulse for the whole that echoes to our age where we celebrate astounding advances (in knowledge) of our universe, quantum physics, dynamic nature patterns, and patterns in chaos theory that propel us to embrace the whole, even as we are humbled by it.

Artists are about the bigger, deeper picture. Artists are both beggars and begetters in the pursuit.

God saw all that had been made, and indeed it was very good. (Genesis 1:31)

Catherine could not muster enough metaphors to describe the goodness of God and the dignity of every human person, including creation. She exclaimed:

O Eternal Trinity, I have seen your very depths, and in them I have seen the beauty of your creature, for seeing myself in you I have seen that I am your image...

You, Eternal Trinity, are the artist, and I your handywork have come to know that you are in love with the beauty of what you have made. (D187)

We were born to be creative. We codetermine the conditions of one another's existence, the choice is ours for flourishing or demise.

Life does not pursue parsimony, it pursues extravagance and abundance.

Anticipating floods birds build their nests higher.

Animals migrate to different places intuiting weather patterns.

Animals show empathy around the elderly, lonely, sick, and sad.

In harsher climates animals grow thicker fur.

Think of the complexities of beehives, migration, transforming butterflies.

"In one short lifetime a Monarch changes its shape and wardrobe, how it moves, what it eats, from solids to liquids, its habitat, and loses nothing of its integrity. It transcends but includes all the previous stages."
(Biderback, Save the Fire LCWR papers)

If we are alive, we are subject to multiple changes.

If only we could say one thing at the end of our lives and it is "Thank you," it is enough. (Meister Eckhart)

We are not the center of the universe, though we sometimes act as if we were. What would happen if we could harness the ability to reach for the potential to adapt to the readiness and necessity to survive. We have an awesome responsibility to deeply care for the earth's resources for future generations.

Change is all around us. Our DNA is actually equipped to embrace change in order for us to be transformed into our fullest God-given selves, but we resist because it asks for more than we are prepared to give.

"Thrusting his companions out on the road to bear the Gospel, St. Dominic said, 'Go, the Lord is with you.' When they resisted, he said, 'You will receive what you need.'"

The Providence of God stretches us beyond the sphere of control into the arena of wonder and mystery to where we are called to let go into the unknown.

The Christ journey from life, death to resurrection is the most creative sign of hope for our world and its future, the Beyond of our Midst, the Ground of our Being. (Tillich, The Courage to Be). Jesus is our story and the meaning-making of our vastly beautiful world of which we are an interrelated, interdependent, tiny part of a web of Being.

Creativity will never be found in conformity or compliance. We need to welcome creativity, change, and possibility in order to thrive. When we lose sight of this reality, we end up institutionalizing what we yearn for and fossilize potentiality. Art externalizes this reality.

The natural sciences declare the fecundity of the earth, its wonder and its mystery, its interconnectedness and our awesome responsibility to steward its resources for future generations.

Being an artist is being an educator, historian, interpreter, and prophet with a vision. The performing, auditory, written, and visual arts render another form of Divine handwriting indicative of the yearning of the human spirit for relationship, wholeness, and beauty.

“Art should be understood as a custodian of a people’s cultural history, its aspirations as well as its protest – it’s not-yet-fulness.” (Manaka, M. Echoes of African Art)

Artists provide a “third eye” that lead us beyond surface realities into paradox, confrontation, and contemplation, urging us forward to what we might yet become. Beauty and goodness, tragedy and suffering, communion, and aloneness, coalesce under artist tutelage, revealing God breaking through our limits, creating a dialogue between intuitive spirit and matter in concrete form.

The pursuit and discipline of art are about aligning ourselves to the Holy in life, a sacred affirmation of God’s resounding and unconditional “YES” to the whole of creation.

Poetry is another confronting, creative tool to bring us up short and challenge us. Artists, wordsmiths, challenge us to “live in the light” in the integrity truth.

“Poetry speaks truth, it compels a confession. It is generative, incarnational, Spirit-imbued and transformational.” (Paul Getty Trust – Discipline-based Art Education and Cultural Diversity”)

Poetry is reminiscent of the energy of expanding evolutionary, quantum and chaos theories where... out of disarray emerges from within nature itself, adapting to ever newer conditions. This could be the inspiration, the compulsion of an artist, caught up in creating, revealing new spheres of understanding in concrete, visual form.

Visual and Performing artists are driven by a need to fashion inert and sometimes incompatible substances into objects radiant with energy, conflict, challenge, or protest.

Trauma and inadequacy often lie at the root of much of the creative life. Many artists died in abject poverty struggling to pass on what they deeply intuited and felt compelled to share in visual form.

Van Gogh is a clear example. His letters to his brother Theo are one of the most moving testaments of the human spirit trying to make sense of his life and the world around him through the tangible means of his art. He writes:

“I have a terrible need... shall I say the word? Of religion. Then I go out at night and paint the stars.”

Art deals with undercurrents, things below the surface. It implies dissent, Divine dissent, explicating the fragmentation of life. Artists give voice to this reality, though it is not always received as a welcome voice.

St. Catherine says (letter to Cardinal Pedro de Luna): *“No more silence. Shout out with a thousand tongues! I am seeing the world go to ruin because people are not speaking out.”*

Truth seeking, truth bearing can reveal dichotomies, incompleteness and (the) wounds of our times. (Raku San Francisco Ballet)

The creative journey is often the result of unconscious, unsought-for epiphanies. We as artists wait on such epiphanies. Life.... unfolds. Bring on the challenges, creative risk-takers! Lead us to more life. This creative energy is the best hope we have for a better world.



None of us can control the creative forces that bring the stars to form and the God that continually abides, loving us and calling us deeper. Nature systems, the web of connection with all that pulses with life, are the stuff of those who embrace the creative impulse, the power of the Spirit in our world.

This is potency. This is vision. This is God's shaping in us that creative, ever transforming, ever converting call to wholeness and mission through the prism of art and life itself. We are invited to deepen the mystery with the visual, contemplative gaze that renders our world sacramental. We are stardust and sacramental. We are all that God has. The gift is not ours; it is given – for sharing. Continue to use it.

Comments from the Gathering

(Editor's Note: A Survey was sent out to a group of Gathering participants who responded with the following comments. All are taken to heart, and efforts will be made to improve, and be more inclusive of all art forms, in the coming Gatherings.)

Joeann Daley: Sinsinawa – *As I reflect on the celebration of our 25th Anniversary Gathering in Florissant, Missouri during the HEAT WAVE of 2023, the memory of those days are not of the external heat but that of the energy felt in the room as we gathered at our Circle tables. These words come to mind as I reflect on our time together-SHEILA FLYNN,OP and the ASSOCIATES! I still hear the words and virtual expression of Sheila's presentation and her presence with us. I remember the conversations with associates at meals, our Meeting tables and all the times in between. I became aware of the great breath, depth, experience, energy and enthusiasm that they bring to our organization celebrating its 25th year! Yes, the energy generated inside these walls produced enough fuel to send us off to the next fueling station at ADRIAN, MICHIGAN , JULY, 2024!*

Joe Kikelivice, OP: Central Province – *Our 25th DIA anniversary, "Silver Weavings from Gifted Hands" was a gathering that we created together with the help of our Board and planners to celebrate, inspire and encourage our preaching as artists. We affirmed and inspired one another, and remembered with gratitude the Dominican Family of Artist Preachers who came before us. Those honored with the Fra Angelico award blessed us from behind their photographs as we walked to our meeting room through a corridor of recognition. With warm welcomes and renewed friendships, we simply enjoyed being together again and savored a feast of prayer experiences, workshops and presentations that celebrated our heritage of the Four Dominican Pillars of Prayer, Learning, Community and Preaching Of special*

note was our Dominican sister, Shelia Flynn whose every sentence came from her contemplative spirit. Our attentiveness as Artist Preachers heard her beautifully prepared presentation. I found myself wanting time to pause and receive the wisdom that came of her life as a Dominican artist-preacher. I will return to her words as a resource of rich resources found through our DIA Newsletter.

Sister Jane Rudolph, OP: Mission San Jose – *What a JOY, what a DELIGHT and a BLESSING our Gathering was! Celebrating 25 years, celebrating the many Artists of the DIA who, inspired by the Divine, gave expression to their dreams in their various works of art! What a JOY it was to connect with each other, to listen to our stories, to be fully alive and spirit filled by being with each other! Mutual appreciation and delight was tangible! Sister Sheila Flynn, Dominican of East Australia, I believe, invigorated the fire within us for self-expression and freedom to be! Her presentation totally resonated with my beliefs and my spirit in how I want to live daily— and all of us, Artists, I think, want to be! "To believe and to see abundance! To see possibilities! To embrace negativity positively! To choose life, to be generative! To be a bearer of light, to be an agent of Hope! To grow with intention, exploring boundaries! To accept personal responsibility to make a difference! To remain in a stage of creating! Stand with pain— not fix it! Adapt, adjust, change! Our DNA is equipped for us to CHANGE! Let go of resistance! Embrace change and creativity! No limits!"Yes, I am on fire and want to continue to create and I have been living that out since last December as I am "birthing" our Congregation's Holiday Boutique "—its Annual Fundraiser. What a freedom I experienced at our Gathering to declare "I AM an Artist!" and to experience assent and such JOY! May we SEE abundance.*

Ann Eigenbauer, OP: Sparkill – Congratulations for a great job, well done. A big Thank you to Pat Daly and all her team members. The 25th Anniversary design logo was most interesting and the number of present and past members (570+) participants over the years was truly overwhelming. A credit to all for wanting to preach through their artistic talents, while working together with others, weaving of threads from one to another creating something beautiful." The Virtual Gallery was great to watch. Seeing so many old friends with their many NEW Creations. CONGRATULATIONS to all. Thank you for the Zoom opportunity.

Liz Sully, OP: Sinsinawa – This 25th Anniversary was something of that experience, all present, shining like the sun in appreciation, giftedness, spirit, and more. Even though we all didn't know each other, the bonds between and among us shone, radiating care and gratitude out beyond to a world of interconnectedness while basking in Holy Energy all around us. As we walked through the hallway "stations" of past Fra Award recipients we were mindful, as Pope Francis states in *Laudato Si*, "At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God " (243). The exuberant/subtle/infectious remembered presence of Sisters Elaine de Rosier and Elizabeth Michael Boyle was so missed. In the meantime, the creative surge, urge and appreciation of those gathered was palpable. The meticulous care given to every detail by our DIA President Pat Daly, the St. Louis twosome of Elizabeth Slenker and Ann Marie Stanten, the DIA Board, those heading up the presentations and the Staff at The Pallottine Center remains embedded in my heart surrounded by delight and gratitude. With Meister Eckhart, I say, "Thank you." Art on!

Barbara Schwarz, OP: Amityville – It was good to be together. I hadn't been except on the zoom since pre-covid. I was really surprised by the pin celebrating 25 years of membership. It was fun to be with our membership. I was especially honored to give the homily at Mass celebrating our story. The night of memories beginning with Adele Rowland was fun and special.

Marty Washburn: Racine Associate – I so enjoyed this year's gathering for the opportunity to meet and talk with fellow artists. There is something about creative people - they're full of stories about their art which is so enriching. The keynote by S. Sheila Flynn was just wonderful. Her use of technology during the presentation enhanced its meaning for me. My congratulations to all those who not only planned but

were involved in the presentation of this gathering. Well done. I look forward to next year in Adrian.

Donna Brunell, OP: Hope – This was my first in-person experience of the DIA Gathering. I felt "in my niche" as I got acquainted with so many Dominicans who preach through a variety of art forms. Sheila Flynn's presentation was truly inspiring, affirming, and encouraging as well as challenging. Activities opened new doors to contemplative prayer. I'm already looking forward to next summer's gathering!

Nathalie Meyer, OP: Grand Rapids – My deepest thanks to DIA for the 2023 gathering at the Pallottine Renewal Center in Florissant, MO. From check-in on July 25th to departure on July 28 it was a celebration of the 25th Anniversary lifting up all the Dominican men and women who formed and contributed over the years. The overall theme of "Silver Weavings from Gifted Hands" rang clear throughout the days from the cover of the program to the symbolic offerings of artistic pieces at the liturgy on July 27. Fr. Jim Marcionda, OP and Fr. Rudolf Loewenstein, OP, con-celebrated with their gracious and musical gifts. It was a glorious celebration, followed by a most hospitable reception with a little saxophone and clarinet improvising. It was my first experience of the DIA in person even though I have been a member for several years, but my schedule was such that I could not attend. Of all the gatherings I have attended in all the years of my ministry, this group was the most welcoming I have ever experienced, and I am looking forward to the next gathering. The hospitality of DIA and the importance of seeing the beauty in one another and in our world is such a blessing and I look forward to reconnecting at the next gathering in Adrian.

Anita Smisek, OP: Sinsinawa – It is the re-connection that is so life-giving upon arriving and participating in the DIA annual Gatherings. Twenty-five years of doing so has truly generated an understanding of the power of preaching through the arts via as many mediums as there are artists. It's always fresh and interesting to see how God has gifted each person to be a unique artist-preacher. For me, it has been through the medium of music—gathering folks together for liturgy to learn to sing-prayer of DIA members. This year's efforts brought me and DIA members a profound experience of beauty through the involvement of clarinetist Jim Marchionda, OP and Lornetta Hooks, Associate, as they accompanied music written by Magdalena Ezoë, OP, for a psalm responsorial, hymn and Mass Ordinary. The singers were those who signed up for my workshop on the aging voice. They sure were good scouts as we had no choice

but to utilize our workshop to prepare for the liturgy after sharing about our experiences with our aging voices. No other time was provided or available. Singing a song at the beginning or/and end of sessions enabled me to share the music of members which I happened to have published throughout the years.

Sharing DIA's Silver Sparkles

A brief presentation and sharing of the DIA's 25th celebration was shared by Sr. Irene Mary with the Sisters of St. Martin's Residence and other sisters and employees at the Motherhouse in Mission San Jose, California. Irene Mary has been ministering at St Martin by conducting **"Art from the Heart"** Highlights of the experience. Shared were photo shots and video clips of the silvery displays and environment, prayers, talks, table art sharing, socials and gala celebrations with spontaneous instrumental entertainment, blessings and more. In conclusion, Sister Andre Marie who was unable to attend, personally received the DIA Spirit Award that was presented at the gathering.

Post Gathering Celebration at Grand Rapids



Srs. Catherine Anderson and Nathalie Meyers who were in attendance created a special ceremony for the Grand Rapids Celebration of DIA Members who could not attend the Gathering. Francetta McCann a 25-year member received the celebratory pin, and the others a bag of "surprises sent by Pat Daly.

Nathalie Meyers pinning the 25 year pin onto Francetta McCann a 25-year member. .



Catherine Anderson inviting members of Grand Rapids Dominicans to receive their bags of "surprises" from the Gathering.

From Sr. Nancy Ann Turner

Dear Dominican Artists and Friends.

Thank you so very much for blessing me with this year's Fra Angelico Award.

Regretfully, because of recent surgery and some complications I was unable to be with you in person. I surely was with you on zoom!!

I am so grateful for our faithful commitment to the arts. Without our creativity we are surely less than our best self. We use the arts over and over to heal, to pray, to serve and to bless—and bring life to ourselves and to others.

The Fra Angelico award reminds me of our summons as Dominicans and as artists—to be deep into the ministry of healing, creating and celebrating. We need so much creativity and commitment to rise above the violence and greed that surround us. May each of us do everything possible to stretch people's imagination and stir their creativity so that beauty is created and peace is more possible.

(I know this group has the power of beauty and goodness and will use their gifts well as instruments of preaching and healing. May we continue to bring the sacred to as many people as possible.)

Fra Angelico belongs to all of us. I hope you ponder his paintings often and remember to place yourself in those sacred mysteries of Christ as he did.

Lots of love,
Nancyann