



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

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Urbi et Orbi – Preaching to the City and to the World

In October the Dominican Order held an International Preaching Conference entitled ***Urbi et Orbi — Preaching to the City and to the World in a time of Pandemic***. This Conference was sponsored by three Dominican Schools of Preaching: Aquinas Institute of Theology (USA), the *Institut für Pastoralhomiletik* (Germany), and the Institute of Preaching (Philippines). To access the content listed below, visit www.ai.edu/urbietorbi. To view the speakers, click on the link for each day, then select which speaker you wish to hear for yourself. For the videos presented by three

of the DIA Family, click on the video links for each day.

As members of the Dominican Order, in whatever we are affiliated to the Order, our Charism is to Preach. As members of the Dominican Institute for the Arts, we are called to preach through our artistic endeavors, in the variety of disciplines we practice. Four keynote preachers from different areas of the world addressed the topic of the Dominican Order's mandate to Preach. Four speakers, **Father Gerard Timoner OP, Master General of the Dominican Order**, from the Philippines,

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Sister Barbara Beaumont OP, a Dominican Nun from the Monastery of Pius XII, in **Fatima, Portugal**, **Sr. Margaret Mayce OP (Amityville)**, **Coordinator of Dominican Sisters International Confederation**, in Rome, and **Ann Garrido D.MIN, Professor at Aquinas Institute of Theology** in St. Louis MO addressed ways in which Dominicans preach. Following is a "Readers' Digest" version on their thoughts about preaching, and some insights to incorporate into how we, as Dominican artists can enhance our preaching through the arts.

Sr. Elizabeth Slenker

The first keynote speaker was Fr. Gerard Timoner OP, Master of the Order. Fr.

Gerard was edified by all the Dominicans who stepped up to preach by action serving



those stricken by Covid-19, whether they tended the sick and dying, provided food for the hungry or gave of their resources to aid the afflicted. Fr. Gerard noted that Covid-19 not only threatened the world, but it has brought into stark focus some of the other

pandemics we are facing – faithlessness, half-truths, indifference, clericalism, and hopelessness. He spoke about how Dominicans are a sign of hope for the human family. Our mission is to preach the Gospel, not only the ordained from the pulpit but all members of the Dominican family. He spoke of various ways noted Dominicans have used memorable forms of preaching, other than the pulpit. He highlighted St. Catherine of Siena's writings; the enduring art of Fra Angelico, St. Rose of Lima's service to others, and Saint Margaret of Castello, our newest canonized Dominican saint, who gave herself as gift to her neighbors. Fr. Timoner stated, "We are

not an Order of homilists, but an Order of Preachers.” He stated that the “fake news” we have heard lately, is used to misinform, cause confusion, and mislead. Dominic founded the Dominican Order to combat “fake news.” He preached the “mercy of truth.” He sent the Friars to Universities. St. Albert and St. Thomas are Dominican Preachers whose confidence and harmony produced an abundant harvest for the philosophical and theological heritage of

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~ Father Gerard Timoner OP

the Church. Fr. Gerard spoke of the hope of St. Dominic at his deathbed, when the brothers gathered around him. He said, ***“Hope is grounded on the certainty that God will not abandon us. Hope is the assurance that God abides in the mystery of JOY.”*** Fr. Timoner concluded with a passage from St. Paul’s letter to the Colossians, *“Hope is Christ in us. Hope is God’s abiding presence in us.”* Our preaching in whatever form needs to carry the message of hope.

Second keynote speaker, Sr. Barbara Beaumont OP, is a Dominican Nun from the Monastery of Pius XII, Fatima, Portugal.

Sr. Barbara Beaumont’s talk was entitled: ***“The Preaching of the Nuns, The Secret Fruit of Contemplation.”***

Her question was how do those who spend their lives in a cloister preach? Her premise is



that the purpose of preaching is to evangelize, and the purpose of evangelization is the salvation of souls. Preaching means to proclaim in public using words to preach the Word. Nuns don’t preach in conventional terms.

Cloistered Dominicans live out the dimension of preaching because they have received the commission of prayer, the prayer to praise and intercede as total gift to God in the heart of the Church. The nuns are to be *“love at the heart of the Church”* (St. Therese). For nuns to see the fruit of their preaching is rare as their lives are discrete and secret. Sr. Barbara explained that nuns preach through prayer and study. The Dominican Second Order is unique in that Study is an important component of their lives, as well as Prayer, Community, and Ministry. Other cloistered orders, for example, the Carmelites or Benedictines emphasize prayer as their primary apostolate. Dominican monasticism is

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~ Barbara Beaumont OP

exclusively feminine. There are no Dominican monks. The Dominican nuns are the first members of the Order established in 1206. Friars came into the Order ten years later in 1216. Sr. Barbara states that in the Monastery preaching is not an individual but a collective contribution in prayer and study. The Dominican nuns preach by their example, through prayer, in writing, by creating art, and translating spiritual writings into local languages. At

Fatima, Lourdes, and Prouille the nuns render hospitality services for pilgrims in guest houses where people are offered places of respite, prayer, and silence. Silence is not muteness but provides nourishment for prayer which is to the Monastery the means of becoming a center of charity to all. Monastic life requires a transcendence of self.

Dominican Nuns have always been active artists. Monastic art is often associated with a mystical dimension. Monastic art seeks to communicate something of the experience of God as lived by the artist in the monastery. From the 13th Century nuns have been engaged in artistic and intellectual pursuits that are considered an integral part of the preaching mission of the Dominican Order.



Dominican nuns were considered the best educated women in Europe at that time and were

far more active in artistic and intellectual pursuits than the average lay person of the day. Dominican



nuns did their share of illuminating manuscripts. In the 14th and 15th Centuries creating art was an important spiritual practice as well as a source of income. From this time came the "Sister Books" which increased illustrative and illuminative skill and revenue for the Dominican Monasteries.

During the Renaissance an Italian Nun, Sister Plautilla Nelli (1524-1588), became known as the "Painter Prioress of Renaissance Florence." She was the first woman to achieve painter fame in Florence. She is featured in the art history account in *The Lives of the Artists*. by Vasari. Her Monastery was next to San Marco where Fra Angelico had painted a hundred years earlier. Her art provided a leading role, and was used by Girolamo Savonarola OP, in his



attempt to establish moral and political reform. Savonarola exhorted artists to eliminate all elements that were a distraction to sacred themes or departures from the

truth. Sr. Plautilla's most famous work is the "*Lamentation of Christ*." This work most clearly illustrates the artistic style and purpose that Savonarola promoted. Plautilla depicts the body of Jesus lying on a stone with St. John holding the body. Mary Magdalene embraces Jesus's feet and Mary his mother kneels on the ground nearby. There is nothing to detract from the intensity of the moment. Her art illustrates that we imitate Dominic as he faithfully imitates Christ. All members of the Dominican family have responsibility for each other.

The third speaker on the topic of Dominican Preaching was **Sr. Margaret Mayce OP (Amityville), Coordinator of Dominican Sisters International Confederation**. She based her talk on her personal experience during the pandemic.



Her talk was entitled: ***“The Mystery of Grace; In My Weakness Is My Strength.”***

Sr. Margaret said, ***“We will have nothing to offer in this time of pandemic***

unless we allow ourselves to tap into our own depths and touch into our own vulnerability.” Sr. Margaret had a fall and surgery on her cervical vertebrae. In the process, half her vocal cord was paralyzed. She wondered how she could preach with half a voice. As a Dominican Preacher she asked these questions:

1. What do I have to offer?
2. Is who I am enough to provide a word of encouragement and hope to those who are suffering?
3. Is who I am enough to provide a word of challenge to those who turn a blind eye to the human condition?

She pondered a quote from an article called *“Speechless,”* written by someone who had also suffered the loss of her voice (she did not identify this person) at a critical time when she was to present a lecture to a group of 300 persons. *“When I think about myself and what might happen, I suffer. When I stopped and noticed the people around me, I felt alive and energized. The fear might still be present, but I noticed I*

was part of life that contained unknown possibilities.”

Sr. Margaret posed three bits of wisdom and how they might apply to us as we preach.

A. She stated that before Covid we were aware that we are not what we were. When we wake up in the morning, we might notice something different, missing or changing such as a diminishment of excellent health, boundless energy, drive and determination. As we age, we ask the question: *“Can I really make a difference?”*

B. After Covid the questions are much more fundamental:

1. Why did this (Covid) happen?
2. Where is God in all of this?
3. What is the meaning of all the suffering and death around us?
4. What is the meaning of my life in a world that has changed so dramatically?

“It is often when the worst happens that real life pours in. Some might call this real-life GRACE. Grace meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us.”

~ Margaret Mayce OP

5. Do I really have anything worthwhile to say in the face of all this human tragedy?
6. Am I speaking with my true voice?

The author of *Speechless* wrote: *“It is often when the worst happens, when hopes and dreams are dashed then real life pours in. So, it’s really very important to experience what is really happening without trying to resist or run away.”*

C. Sr. Margaret then asked these thought provoking questions:

1. How were you during the height of the pandemic?
2. What were your spirits like during the weeks/months of quarantine?
3. Did you just take it in stride and tough it out, assuming that it would end at some point?
4. Were you absolutely overwhelmed, listless, depressed, not quite believing this was happening?
5. Were you upset and angry that your fine-tuned plans were disturbed?
6. Did you have a sense of just not knowing exactly what you should do, or where you should go?
7. Were you affected by the knowledge that so many, many people were dying absolutely alone?
8. Were you relieved to learn about the availability of a vaccine?
9. Were you appalled at how slow the roll out was for the poorest countries?
10. Did you try to reset the turmoil both inside and outside?

It is often when the worst happens that real life pours in. Some might call this real-life GRACE. Grace meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us. The pandemic has held out to us an unexpected source of grace. Many Dominican religious around the globe became “essential” workers, a part of the huge outflow of love that has encircled Planet Earth. These Dominicans preached eloquently indeed. Their vulnerability in the face of this world

crisis led them to discover their own true voices. Sr. Margaret spoke of Pope Francis words about Covid as causing displacement, fear, uncertainty, and loss. Perhaps each one of us has experienced a sense of displacement and disorientation. The pandemic has spared no one. We have all been affected in some way. We have been challenged and hopefully have gained some insight, wisdom and humility in the process. Maybe we’ve acknowledged what needs to change which means loving our neighbors in an interconnected world.

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~ Margaret Mayce OP

The Pandemic highlighted the gross inequities in health care, access to vaccines, the greed of governments and pharmaceutical companies. The pandemic will continue to have effects far into the future:

- on global property levels
- on the condition of migrants and refugees worldwide
- on global economy
- on the condition of women
- on mental health
- on domestic violence
- on education
- on the environment

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The challenge to the preacher moving forward is how to communicate the message that being part of the global community is in fact who we are and not simply an idea that needs to be momentarily revived during a crisis. The silver lining in this is the reminder that we are better together than we are alone. How we respond will prove whether we've learned anything or that it becomes just another tragedy from which we've learned nothing.

Sr. Margaret asks:

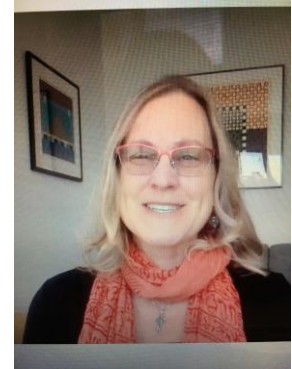
- What do you hear when you stand closer to God's conversation with humanity during this time?
- How does what you hear inform your preaching to the city and to the world?
- Where do Dominicans need to make their voices heard and how do we do that?

She quotes from *Speechless*: *"Maybe the Universe is trying to tell you something. Being without a voice in a wordy world is oppressive. But not being able to speak can also help you listen deeply and observe."*

Maybe God is inviting us to listen deeply to our own experience of the pandemic. Maybe God is inviting us to observe the glimpses of Grace, the mystery of Grace that meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us. Maybe it will be our willingness to lean into this tragic but grace-filled moment that will help us know and embrace our true voice for the sake of the world.

The fourth speaker was Professor Ann Garrido D.MIN, Aquinas Institute of Theology. Her talk was entitled **"Preaching from a Lay Perspective."**

There is this idea that preaching is done by priests, at Mass, and maybe sometimes by a special dispensation a lay person may be asked to speak. Professor Ann believes that the entirety of the people of God, with their lives at all times, and where fitting in their daily speech are to be preachers. She quotes 1 Peter 3: 15: *"Always be ready to give an accounting to anyone who asks*



you the reason for your hope." She spoke of the charism for preaching, which is a natural gift for communicating with other people, the gift with words. A charism comes from God, but the person gifted with the charism needs to do their part in developing that charism so it can give service to the Church. Her criteria for "doing their part" means getting specialized training, having guidance by experienced mentors, and tending to one's on-going spiritual formation and life of prayer. Ann spoke of the Church as having the

"Always be ready to give an accounting to anyone who asks you the reason for your hope."

1 Peter 3: 15

responsibility to order and organize charisms for the common good. Preaching is a charism that benefits from development, training and ordering. Preachers need to be those who have a natural gift, but who also commit to ongoing learning and study formation in the ministry. This includes priests and deacons.

She poses these questions:

- How shall we organize in a holy healthy way the preaching ministry of the church?
- How can we order those whom we have identified as having a charism for preaching?

Her premise is that Bishops should have a relationship with those who are speaking about doctrine and matters of faith in the name of the Church whether at Mass, in schools, on the street corners, in prisons, or wherever. Covid-19 caused churches to close and people to stop attending services. The aftermath is that many have not returned. Instead, people shopped around online and found unordained preachers. The majority of preaching now being experienced online is by those who are not ordained, nor organized or not ordered. These preachers have little theological or ministerial preparation and are subjecting to unprepared preaching. The world suffers when there is a lack of good preaching. The church suffers when it doesn't tap into its full resources. Preaching isn't about the individual, but about the Word finding its way. In many ways the Spirit of God compels those with the theological and ministerial preparation to preach. It is up to those with the charism of preaching to develop their gifts. Each individual will be held accountable for what one did with the gifts God has given. Dr. Ann poses these questions:

- How did we develop our skills to preach effectively and impact-fully?

- Do we live lives fully immersed in the Scriptures?
- Are we faithful to prayer?
- Do we take classes, study, practice, be mentored and ask for feedback?
- Do we continue to try to grow in our ministry?
- When a door opens, do we say "yes" to the preaching?
- Are we open to preach the good news whenever or wherever a path opened for us?
- Do we speak our words with care and charity – whether in a church pulpit, online or in a blog?
- Are we faithful to the task?

Sometimes you can do only what you can do in an un-ordered system in which you find yourself. Even then it turns out that you can do quite a lot in the circumstances.

In your charity, study, creativity, ingenuity, and devotion to the Word of God be as one who is boundless because every "NO" is really a "NOT YET." There is always hope that other adventures lie just around the corner.

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***These four speakers, each giving a different facet of the art of preaching, might inspire us as members of the Dominican Institute of the Arts to preach more fervently through our artistic endeavors. We can preach the Word of God in truth in the variety of disciplines we practice, and to hold to the guidance provided by these speakers on preaching.***

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