



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Piazza della Libertà, Castel Gandolfo

Wednesday, 8 August 2012

[\[Video\]](#)

Memorial of St Dominic Guzmán

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today the Church celebrates the Memorial of St Dominic Guzmán, Priest and Founder of the Order of Preachers, known as the Dominicans. In a [previous Catechesis](#) I have already illustrated this distinguished figure and his fundamental contribution to the renewal of the Church in his time. Today, I would like to shed light on one of the essential aspects of his spirituality: his life of prayer. St Dominic was a man of prayer. In love with God, he had no other aspiration than the salvation of souls, especially those who had fallen into the net of the heresies of his time; a follower of Christ, he radically embodied the three evangelical counsels by combining the witness of a life of poverty with the proclamation of the Word. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance he made headway on the path of Christian perfection. At every moment prayer was the power that renewed his apostolic work and made it ever more fruitful.

Blessed Jordan of Saxony († 1237), his successor as head of the Order, wrote: "During the day, no one was friendlier than he... conversely, at night no one watched in prayer more diligently than he. He dedicated the day to his neighbour, but gave the night to God" (P. Filippini, *San Domenico visto dai suoi contemporanei*, Bologna 1982, p. 133). In St Dominic we can see an example of harmonious integration between contemplation of the divine mysteries and apostolic work. According to the testimonies of people close to him, "he always spoke with God and of God". This

observation points to his profound communion with the Lord and, at the same time, to his constant commitment to lead others to this communion with God. He left no writings on prayer, but the Dominican tradition has collected and handed down his living experience in a work called: *The Nine Ways of Prayer of St Dominic*. This book was compiled by a Dominican friar between 1260 and 1288; it helps us to understand something of the Saint's interior life and also helps us, with all the differences, to learn something of how to pray.

There are, then, nine ways to pray, according to St Dominic, and each one — always before Jesus Crucified — expresses a deeply penetrating physical and spiritual approach that fosters recollection and zeal. The first seven ways follow an ascending order, like the steps on a path, toward intimate communion with God, with the Trinity: St Dominic prayed standing bowed to express humility, lying prostrate on the ground to ask forgiveness for his sins, kneeling in penance to share in the Lord's suffering, his arms wide open, gazing at the Crucifix to contemplate Supreme Love, looking heavenwards feeling drawn to God's world.

Thus there are three positions: standing, kneeling, lying prostrate on the ground; but with the gaze ever directed to our Crucified Lord. However the last two positions, on which I would like to reflect briefly, correspond to two of the Saint's customary devotional practices. First, personal meditation, in which prayer acquires an even more intimate, fervent and soothing dimension. After reciting the Liturgy of the Hours and after celebrating Mass, St Dominic prolonged his conversation with God without setting any time limit. Sitting quietly, he would pause in recollection in an inner attitude of listening, while reading a book or gazing at the Crucifix. He experienced these moments of closeness to God so intensely that his reactions of joy or of tears were outwardly visible. In this way, through meditation, he absorbed the reality of the faith. Witnesses recounted that at times he entered a kind of ecstasy with his face transfigured, but that immediately afterwards he would humbly resume his daily work, recharged by the power that comes from on High.

Then come his prayers while travelling from one convent to another. He would recite Lauds, Midday Prayer and Vespers with his companions, and, passing through the valleys and across the hills he would contemplate the beauty of creation. A hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God for his many gifts would well up from his heart, and above all for the greatest wonder: the redemptive work of Christ.

Dear friends, St Dominic reminds us that prayer, personal contact with God is at the root of the witness to faith which every Christian must bear at home, at work, in social commitments and even in moments of relaxation; only this real relationship with God gives us the strength to live through every event with intensity, especially the moments of greatest anguish. This Saint also reminds us of the importance of physical positions in our prayer. Kneeling, standing before the Lord, fixing our gaze on the Crucifix, silent recollection — these are not of secondary importance but help us to put our whole selves inwardly in touch with God. I would like to recall once again the need, for our spiritual life, to find time everyday for quiet prayer; we must make this time for ourselves,

especially during the holidays, to have a little time to talk with God. It will also be a way to help those who are close to us enter into the radiant light of God's presence which brings the peace and love we all need. Thank you.

To special groups:

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims present at today's Audience, especially those from England, Macau, Japan and the United States. Today we celebrate the feast of Saint Dominic, the Founder of the Order of Preachers. In his life, Saint Dominic was able to combine constant prayer and zealous activity in the service of the Lord and his Church. By his example and intercession, may all of us rediscover the importance and beauty of daily prayer, and bear joyful witness to our faith in Christ the Saviour!

I extend a warm greeting to the Italian pilgrims, especially to the Sisters of the Most Precious Blood and to the *newlywed* couples. Thank you! In thanking you for coming, I am happy to invoke upon each one of you an abundance of the Holy Spirit's gifts for a renewed spiritual and apostolic fervour. Thank you for your presence and for your attention; have a good day and a good week. Thank you and a happy vacation, as well, to you all.

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