

CHAPTER TEN

THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF JORDAN OF SAXONY

INTRODUCTION

This letter was recently discovered by the Rev. Thomas Kaeppli, O. P. among the sample letters which Albert of Tortona, O. P. assembled to guide medieval scribes and notaries in carrying out their profession. Probably written on May 25, 1233, the day after the transference of St. Dominic's body to its new tomb, this letter deserves reproduction here because it presents the life of the friar preacher in tableau. First it describes his life as ideally projected by St. Dominic; then it shows how the ideal was put into practice by his first disciples. The Latin text is found in *Archivum fratrum Praedicatorum*, XXII (1952), 182-85.

TEXT

THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER OF JORDAN OF SAXONY

To my very dear sons in Christ Jesus, all the brethren living in the province of Lombardy, Brother Jordan, their unprofitable servant, wishes health and fervor of the spirit.

Charity invites me and practicality persuades me that, since I cannot be present with you, as I would like, I should visit you at least by some sort of letter, the opportunity now offering itself. Indeed, in the place of our pilgrimage [Ps. 118:54], so long as the heart of man is depraved [Cf. Ps. 100:4; Jer. 17:9], inclined to vices, and indolent and languid in relation to the virtues, we need exhortations. So thus a brother may be helped by his brother [Prov. 18:19] and the attentiveness of charity may inflame, from on high, the ardor of the spirit which the daily lukewarmness of one's own negligence depresses. That is why, my most beloved sons, calling upon Him Who redeemed you by His reverend Blood and restored you to life by His pious death as witness, I beseech and admonish you with all my might not to be unmindful of your profession and your purpose, but to recall the paths of old [Jer. 6:16], along which our ancestors hastened to their rest [Heb. 4:11] with a vehement wind [Ps. 47:8] and now reign with the Lord perpetually consoled by blessed repose, rejoicing for the days in which God humiliated them all, in which they saw evils [Ps. 89:15]. While they lived here, they strove for spiritual gifts [I Cor. 14:12], despised themselves, contemned the world, desired the kingdom. They were strong in patience, in voluntary poverty, and in fervent love.

We think that our venerable father Dominic, of holy memory, was one of these. While he lived with us in the flesh, he walked in the spirit. Not only did he not fulfill, but rather extinguished the lusts of the flesh [Gal. 5:16], exemplifying true poverty in his food, dress, and way of life. He was incessant in prayer, remarkable in compassion, fervent in shedding tears for his children, that is, in his zeal for souls, courageous in undertaking difficult things, strong in overcoming adversity. His greatness among us here on earth was proclaimed by his deeds, testified to by his virtues and miracles. What he is now before God was made manifest by signs and shown by

miracles during these recent days, when we transferred his sacred body from the place where it was first interred to a venerable place, as, I trust, will become more fully known to you from other sources.(39)

For this reason we must praise our Redeemer, the son of God, Jesus Christ, who has designed to choose such a servant for Himself and make him a father to us, so that his institution of the regular life might mould us and the example of his luminous holiness inflame us. O how great is the value of true humility of heart, accompanied by voluntary poverty, in the sight of Him Who weighs the spirits [Prov. 16:2]! O how beautiful before God is the chaste generation with glory [Wisdom 4:1]! God's servant Dominic was mighty in these virtues. He was humble in his own eyes, frugal towards himself, jealous of all with the jealousy of God [II Cor. 11:2], pure and undefiled from the womb of his mother.

This is not true of those who glorify themselves, who, greedy for their own praise, are the more proud [I Tim. 6:17] the more they have received grace to serve their neighbors. Nor is this true of those who seek luxuries for themselves observing poverty by profession, but not in practice. Although they should have contempt for all things, they are nervously busy about small and even unworthy matters and do not suffer anything to be lacking among all the things their impudent will demands. Nor do these, indeed, observe the rule of paternal charity, who, though living among us, hide under a bushel [Luke 11:33] the grace of preaching or counsel which they have received from the Lord, and keep the talent of the Lord "laid up in a napkin" [Luke 19:20]. Meriting censure, if not malediction from the people are those who hide the corn [Prov. 11:26] and have not given the family of Jesus Christ their measure of wheat in due season [Luke 12:42]. To this is added an already considerable negligence of very many [brethren], as many superiors, having no care about study, very often send out gifted and capable brethren or assign them to every other kind of duty so that they cannot study. In some places even the lectors carry out their functions of presenting courses so rarely and poorly that there is little wonder that, lecturing half-heartedly, they are listened to with even less enthusiasm. But when lectors are, perchance, diligent in their office of teaching, there still remains a third danger on the part of the brethren, namely, the students who devote themselves to studies carelessly, are seldom in their cells, lazy in repeating [what they have learned], uninspired in the question exercises. This is, perhaps, in order to give freer exercise to their indiscreet devotions, or, again, because of a pernicious and miserable love of idleness, so that, not only do they neglect themselves and cause their professors to become disgusted, but also rob many souls of the opportunity of salvation, whom they could have established on the road to eternal life if they had studied, not carelessly, but industriously. "Therefore are there many weak among" us, and many of the superiors of doctors are sleeping [I Cor. 11:30], or even perishing by reason of their own negligence.

In all these matters, however, happy is he who observes moderation and does not abandon the mean, who so turns aside from both pusillanimity of spirit and a storm [Ps. 54:91] that, while he edifies many persons, he does not depart from a most useful consideration and an alert and frequent judgment about himself. The breeze of human favor does not toss him about, but charity urges him and the spirit of God compels him to do whatever he does. He does not say or do anything without purpose, nor does he run as at an uncertainty [I Cor. 9:26]; but in all things he seeks, purely and simply, God's glory, the edification of his neighbor, or his own salvation.

Brethren, this is a word which not all take [Matt. 19:11]. Oh, how often the foul and uncertain course of our affections proceeds through devious routes, lacks direction in the truth [Ps. 24:51, and fails to contemplate our due purpose. We say many things, perform many deeds, and suffer very many things through which, if charity were abundant in our hearts, directing and ordering all things to God, our true end, we would indeed become much more fruitful in merits and far richer in virtue. Now, however, while we very often think of vain things, are more vainly affected, and do not fully purify the intentions of our hearts [Isaias 1:25; 48:10], it is not surprising that we are slow in accomplishment and are extremely tardy to do what is perfect.

I should not say, however, that I do not see some among you who are, by God's mercy, a source of joy to me and for whom I give thanks to God, [namely], those who, studying beautifulness [Eccli. 44:6], develop their conscience, strive for perfection, labor in preachings, study eagerly, and grow fervent in prayers and meditations [Ps. 38:4]. They keep the Lord, always in their sight [Ps. 15:8] as the rewarder and judge of their souls.

You who are such as this, rejoice, beloved ones, and seek to abound the more [I Thess. 4:10; I Cor. 14:12]. You however, who are not as yet [so inclined], set yourselves to the task and become industrious, so that "you may grow unto salvation" (I Peter 2:2) in Him Who has deigned to call you, in the grace wherein you stand, to perfection, not to lukewarmness, our good and pious Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to Whom is honor and dominion now and forever. Amen.