

# Excerpts from the *Libellus of Bl. Jordan of Saxony* and the Canonization proceedings of St. Dominic

*From St. Dominic: Biographical Documents.* Ed. Francis C. Lehner, O.P. (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1964). Accessed from <http://opcentral.org/resources/2012/08/23/the-libellus-of-jordan-of-saxony/>, July 2016.

## Introduction

*The process of St. Dominic's canonization involved two boards of inquiry, one at Bologna and the other at Toulouse. Both sets of texts represent authentic, eyewitness reports on his holiness. In fact, these accounts are the chief sources of the world's knowledge about Dominic's holiness.*

*Certain principles and facts must be noted in order that a twentieth-century reader understand and appreciate what a thirteenth-century witness is relating. The chief principle to remember is that these persons did not record their memories of Brother Dominic so that someone might use the information to construct a biography. Their primary purpose was to present the remembered facts and experiences concerning Dominic which would establish proof of his holiness. The depositions were presented upon their solemn oath before an ecclesiastical board of inquiry, somewhat similar to the modern grand jury. The first board of commissioners heard the witness of the Bologna area at Bologna in August, 1233, exactly twelve years after Dominic's death.*

## From the Prologue to *A History of the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers* by Blessed Jordan of Saxony

1. To the sons of grace and co-heirs of glory, all the brethren, Brother Jordan, their unprofitable servant, sends greetings and prays that they may attain joy in their holy Profession.
2. Many of the brethren have requested an account of the beginnings and institutions of this Order of Preachers, through which God's plan has provided against the perils of these latter days, as well as a description of the first brethren of our Order, as to how they grew in number and became strengthened through grace. . . .
3. Therefore, having put all the facts into right order, it has seemed to me fitting to put them down in writing. Although I was not one of the very first brethren, yet I enjoyed their companionship and frequently saw, as well as intimately knew, the Blessed Dominic, both outside and within the Order, since I went to him for confession and, on his advice, accepted the office of deacon and, four years after he had established the Order, I received this habit. It has seemed to me I say, that the things I personally saw and heard, as well as learned from the first brethren, about the life and miracles of this saintly man, our Father Dominic, as well as the lives of certain other brethren, should be set down in writing, as occasion brought them to the fore of my memory. In this way, the children who will be born and spring up will know about the first beginnings of this Order. Otherwise, as time rolled by, if no one could be found to relate anything definite about these beginnings, their desire to know its history would be frustrated. Therefore, dearly beloved brothers and sons in Christ, since the following facts have been gathered in one way or another for your consolation and edification, accept them in a spirit of devotion and stir up a desire to emulate the first charity of our brethren. . . .

## **Blessed Dominic and the Character of His Youth**

5. During this time a boy named Dominic was born in this diocese in the town of Caleruega. Before his mother conceived him, she saw in a vision that she would bear in her womb a dog who, with a burning torch in his mouth and leaping from her womb, seemed to set the whole earth on fire. This was to signify that her child would be an eminent preacher who, by "barking" sacred knowledge, would rouse to vigilance souls drowsy with sin, as well as scatter throughout the world the fire which the Lord Jesus Christ came to cast upon the earth. From infancy this child was carefully reared by his parents and a maternal uncle, an archpriest who lost no time training him in the practices of the Church. In this way the child, whom God had destined to be a vessel of election, was from his earliest years pervaded with an odor of holiness which always clung to him.

### **His father's name was Felix and his mother's Jane. . . .**

6. In due time he was sent to Palencia for instruction in the liberal sciences, which flourished there in those days. When he was satisfied that he learned them sufficiently, he abandoned them for something on which he could more profitably spend his limited time here on earth and turned to the study of theology. Now he began to have a strong savor of the word of God as of something sweeter than honey to his mouth.

7. To these sacred studies he devoted four years, during which he learned, with such continual eagerness, to drink from the streams of Sacred Scripture that, in his untiring desire to learn, he spent his nights with almost no sleep at all and the truth which he heard made its way into the deep recesses of his mind, where it was held fast by his memory. Indeed, the things which he easily understood were watered by the pious bent of his mind and blossomed into salutary works. In this he was blessed, according to the statement of Truth in the Gospel: "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." For, whereas there are two ways of keeping God's word, namely, one whereby we store in our memory whatever we hear, and the other whereby we put into practice what we have heard (and none will deny that the latter is more commendable, inasmuch as it is better to sow grain than to keep it stored in the barn), this happy servant of God failed in neither. His memory, which was a storehouse of divine things, fruitfully spilled out from this to that, and his external words and character clearly bespoke what lay hidden within his sacred breast. Because he embraced the Lord's commandments with such burning love and listened to the Spouse's voice with the very pious approval of his good will, the God of the sciences increased his grace, so that he became able, not only to receive the milk of doctrine, but also to make a deep penetration of difficult questions through the humble understanding of his heart and consume the more solid food of mystery with sufficient ease. . . .8. . . .

9. Even during Dominic's childhood, God, Who knows the future beforehand, was pleased to intimate that something remarkable was to be expected of this child. In a vision he was shown to his mother as having the moon on his forehead, to signify that he was destined to be a light to the gentiles, to illumine those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, as later events proved. To his spiritual mother at Baptism it seemed that the infant Dominic had a star on his forehead . . . This woman was of the nobility

### **What He Did for the Poor During a Famine**

10. While he was a student at Palencia, a famine arose and almost all Spain was stricken. Being moved with pity for the poor at the sight of their misery, he resolved at once to put into practice our Lord's

counsel and do all he could to relieve the wants of the dying poor. He sold all his belongings, even his books, which he very much needed in that city. Establishing a center for almsgiving, he distributed his goods and gave them to the poor. This example so stirred the souls of his fellow-students and masters in theology that, seeing how stingy their own help had been in comparison with this young man's liberality, they began to give alms in greater abundance.

### **The Vision [Dominic] Saw at Rome in the Basilica of the Apostles Peter and Paul**

45. Once when the servant of God, Dominic, was at Rome in the Basilica of St. Peter, where he was praying fervently in God's sight for the preservation and growth of his Order, which the right hand of God had raised up through him, he saw the glorious princes, Peter and Paul, coming toward him in a sudden vision wrought by the power of God. Peter, who was first, seemed to be handing him a staff, and Paul a book. Then they spoke these words: "Go and preach, because you have been chosen by God for this work." And then, in a moment of time, he seemed to see all his children dispersed through the world and going two by two preaching the word of God to the people (C. 25).

### **Dominic's Prayer and Zeal**

#### **Excerpts from the *Libellus* of Blessed Jordan of Saxony (#12 – 13, 35)**

...God gave [Dominic] the singular gift of weeping for sinners, the wretched, and the afflicted, whose sufferings he felt within his compassionate heart, which poured out its hidden feelings in a shower of tears. It was his custom to spend his night-watches in prayer and, having shut the door, to pray to the Father in secret. At times during his prayer he betrayed the feelings of his heart with groans and sounds which could not be stifled and could be heard from a distance, His frequent and special prayer to God was for the gift of true charity capable of laboring for and procuring the salvation of men, since he deemed that he would be a true member of Christ only when he could devote himself entirely to winning souls, like the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all men, Who offered Himself completely for our salvation.

...He was not lacking in that charity greater than which no man hath that he lay down his life for his friends. Once he was exhorting an unbeliever to return to the bosom of Mother Church and the latter pleaded that temporal necessity bound him to the heretics, who gave him all he needed for a living, because he could not get them in any other way. Deeply moved by compassion for this man, Dominic resolved to sell himself and use the money to relieve the poverty of this soul. And he would have done so, had not the Lord, who is rich towards all, provided another means of supplying that man's needs.

### **On Blessed Reginald and The Mother of Mercy's Intercession, and Her Protection of the Order**

#### **Excerpts from the *Libellus* of Blessed Jordan of Saxony**

56. This same year, while Master Dominic was in Rome, Master Reginald, dean of St. Aignan in Orleans, arrived in the Eternal City en route to a journey across the sea. He was a man renowned for his knowledge and celebrated for his authority, especially in Canon Law, which he had skillfully taught at Paris for five years. In Rome he fell gravely ill and was visited a number of times by Master Dominic, who persuaded him to imitate the poverty of Christ and join the Order. The result was that he freely and fully bound himself by vow to enter this religious state.

57. After that, he recovered from his serious illness, but only in virtue of a miracle occurring after his condition had become desperate. For during the height of one of his fevers the Queen of Heaven and Mother of Mercy, the Virgin Mary, visibly appeared to him and anointed his eyes, nose, ears, mouth, chest, hands, and feet with a soothing ointment and said these words, "I anoint your feet with a holy oil in preparation for the gospel of peace." Then she showed him the complete habit of this Order. At once he became well and so sudden was his cure that the physicians, who had almost given up all hope, were at a loss to explain his evident recovery. This miracle was later revealed by Master Dominic to many who are still living, and I myself was present when he once related it to a group assembled for a conference in Paris...

*[One of the early brothers had been suffering harassment from an evil spirit]*

120. This cruel [demonic] harassment of Brother Bernard was the first occasion that moved us to establish the custom of singing the *Salve Regina* after Compline at Bologna. From there the practice spread through the province of Lombardy and eventually became general throughout the Order. How many tears of devotion have sprung from this holy praise of God's venerable Mother? How many hearts of those who sang or listened has it not melted, how often has it not softened bitterness and installed fervor in its place? Do we believe that the Mother of our Redeemer is pleased with such praises and moved by such cries? A certain man, both religious and trustworthy, has told me that, in spirit, he often saw the Mother of our Lord prostrate before her Son praying for the security of the whole Order, as the friars were singing: "Turn, then, most gracious advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us." I mention this so that the brethren reading it may be inspired to even greater devotion in praising the Virgin.

**Excerpts from the testimony of Brother Bonvisus (#20 – 21; 24)  
at the Process of Canonization at Bologna**

On August the ninth, Brother Bonvisus, a priest of the Order of Preachers, stated under oath that he had entered the Order of Friars Preachers a little over fourteen years ago. He lived with the blessed Brother Dominic for about ten months in the monastery of St. Nicholas in Bologna; then at Rome and Milan. Together they traveled to Rome. He also took care of him when he was sick.

In order that he might pray after Compline the blessed Brother Dominic had the custom of hiding himself in the church when his brethren had left to go to bed. Since the witness wanted to know what the blessed Brother Dominic was doing in the church, he often hid himself there, and so heard him praying to the Lord with great vociferation and tears, as well as with heavy sighing. When asked how he knew that it was the blessed Brother Dominic, he answered that he saw him, since there was a light in the church. He also recognized him by his voice and so is quite certain that it was Brother Dominic. That the blessed brother often devoted the entire night to prayer was a fact well known to the brethren and firmly believed by himself.

Although he wanted to know where he slept, he could not find that he had any place of his own, as had the other brothers. Sometimes he was found to have slept on a bench, sometimes on the ground, and sometimes on a chair or bed without any mattress. At night, he slept dressed just as he went about during the day. When asked how he knew all this, he answered that he saw it and it was common knowledge among the brethren...

...Sometimes the witness served his Mass. He would then watch his expression, and he used to see so many tears running down his face that the drops ran in a stream. He saw the same thing happen when he sang the Psalms...

... When the witness was a novice and had no skill in preaching, since he had not yet studied Sacred Scriptures, Brother Dominic ordered him to leave Bologna and go to Piacenza to preach. He tried to excuse himself because of his inexperience. But with great gentleness he convinced him he should go, and said to him: "Go confidently for the Lord will be with you, and He will put the words in your mouth." The witness obeyed, went to Piacenza and preached there. God blessed his words with so much grace that three brothers entered the Order of Preachers when he spoke.

**Excerpts from the testimony of Bonaventure of Verona (#5, 6, 11)  
at the Process of Canonization at Bologna**

[Bonaventure] testified that Dominic passed the greater part and frequently the whole of the night in prayer while weeping freely. When asked how he knew this, the witness answered that he very often found him in the church weeping and praying, and sometimes dozing after having been overcome by sleepiness. On account of the many vigils he frequently nodded at table.

...He testified that Dominic was so zealous for souls that he extended his charity and compassion, not only to the faithful, but also to infidels and gentiles and the damned in hell. He wept freely for them and was very fervent in preaching and in sending preachers, so much so that he wanted to go and preach to the gentiles. Again asked how he knew this, he replied that he heard it from him and from other brethren. And he was often present for these conversations and conferences.

**Excerpts from the testimony of Brother John of Spain (#25, 26, 27) at the Process of Canonization at Bologna**

... Filled with compassion, he most ardently desired his neighbor's salvation. He himself preached constantly and frequently, and, in every way he could, exhorted the brethren to preach. He sent them out to preach, begging and urging them to be solicitous for the salvation of souls. Confiding greatly in God, he sent even the ungifted ones to preach, saying: "Go confidently, for the Lord will give you the word of preaching and be with you, and nothing shall be wanting to you." They went out and it happened to them just as he had said...

... Brother Dominic was friendly to all, rich and poor, Jews and pagans (who are very numerous in Spain). As [the witness] noted, he was also loved by all men, with the exception of heretics and enemies of the Church. He used to pursue these persons and refute them in debates and sermons. However, when he argued with them, he lovingly exhorted them to repent and return to the faith — as [the witness] saw and heard.

**Excerpts from the testimony of Brother Ralph (#32, 33)  
at the Process of Canonization at Bologna**

... Whether the brethren were out on their journeys or in the house, [Dominic] wanted them to speak only of God or the salvation of souls. The witness never heard Dominic himself speak an idle or harmful word of detraction. He noted all these things, since he lived with Brother Dominic day and night; thereby he observed him speaking and acting.

He was much occupied in his devotion and faithfulness of preaching and hearing confessions. When he preached, he often wept, moving his hearers, also, to tears. At the time of the first chapter of the Friars Preachers in Bologna, Brother Dominic said to the brethren: "I am worthy only to be deposed, for I am useless and remiss." He humbled himself greatly in all things. Although the brethren would not remove him, they satisfied him by selecting certain deputies. While the chapter met, these would have power over him and the entire chapter to institute, define, and impose legislation.

**Excerpt from *Saint Dominic and His Times* by M.H. Vicaire**

Vicaire, M.H., O.P. *Saint Dominic and His Times*. (Trans. Kathleen Pond). Great Britain: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd, 1964, p. 235.

For Dominic's first brethren were not all outstanding men. In general they were simple and for the most part without much learning. There were some who were afraid of sacrifices; others who lost their footing in material difficulties. The special genius of a founder, however, is to bring the best out of all those who come under his influence. Dominic made apostles of mediocre men of good will. This was because he placed his trust in the man each of them might become and above all in the grace with which God would inspire them and in the Providence which was guiding them. He trained them by example. He raised them to the supernatural plane by prayer. Then he launched them into full activity, ready to correct them severely, but not without charity, in their false steps or their discouragement. One has the right to be weak, but not faint-hearted when it is a matter of saving souls.