

Preaching at Morning Prayer
Constitutions Day
November 25, 2009

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In each of our lives, certain days stand out with so many memories. Today is one of those days for our Congregation. Our first Constitution, our *Vade Mecum*, was confirmed by the highest authority ROME on this in the year 1922. I want to read Mother Pia's letter to you that expresses her joy and thanksgiving when she notified her sisters of this good news. Before reading it, let us look back to that time in history when this document was written.

It was one hundred years -- 1900. Pope Leo XII had just decided to allow religious women who were not under solemn vows to have special approval from Rome. One kind of approval placed the congregation under papal authority; another placed the congregation under diocesan control. This was a new course of action. But it was 60 years before Vatican II and the voice of women was not as effective as it has become today.

Imagine transportation in its beginning stages; communication was almost entirely by mail -- slow mail—as in months. Practically all communication was in person or by letter, letters that took months to go from California to Rome. There was no e-mail, fax machines, copy machines. A small item like a ball point pen was unknown.

Our Pia, with such limited resources managed to secure for us a document that would be strong enough to withstand two revisions and still define and declare the essence and purpose of our life. When she chose the expression "God Alone" she must have known the real meaning of alone. As I read this letter, join with me in wonder and amazement at the gift we received. Understand her happiness and pride; rejoice with her as she describes some of the difficulties she overcame and some of the plaudits that she experienced. Let us pray with one another that we may have her great faith and convictions as we try to carry on the charism and mission which she passed to us.

As this day draws to a close let us look at the opening chapter of our present Constitution. It starts with a quote from Ephesians: God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

We, the Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of the Queen of the Holy Rosary, a religious congregation of pontifical right affiliated to the Dominican Order, give thanks to God for our call to praise, to bless, to preach.

Believing that Christ is the center of our lives, we search for the Lord together—one soul one heart in God.

We gratefully honor our foundress, Mother Maria Pia Backes, who—like Dominic before her—left us a legacy of devotion to God and to the Church. She gave to our prayer life a

strong liturgical orientation and chose the young, the poor and the vulnerable of this world as her special concern.

Time passed and we needed to grow with it. We thank God for the women who have been our leaders and guides as we wrote our first and then second revision of our Constitution. Sister Mary Thomas Lille, Sister Renilde Cade, Sister Rosemarie Hennessy, and Sister Gloria Marie Jones afforded all of us an opportunity to put our desires and understanding into this precious document. We owe them and one another much love and appreciation. Rejoicing let us now sing Psalm 150 with joy as we express our thanks to an ever loving God and to one another.

GOD ALONE
Instruction on the "Final Decree of Approbation"
of our Beloved Constitution

Originally three decrees are given.

First, a decree of praise of the pious end and general plan of the Institute or General Congregation, without any particular mention of the Constitution; second, after the lapse of some time, a Decree of praise and approbation with the correction of the Constitutions, for seven to ten years; third, a final Decree of Approbation.

This process is similar to that of canonization, for which there are three issued: First, a decree which confers the title of "Venerable", second, the Decree of Beatification; and third, the Decree of Canonization.

So we can see that our Constitutions have been declared at once "Venerable" and "Blessed" at the first approval in 1907 and now in 1922 on the feast of St. Catherine the Martyr, Protectress of Our Holy Order, they have been "Canonized" so to say.

We have been informed by several of the Consultors of the Sacred Congregation of Religious that our Constitutions were praised by the Sacred Congregation and also by the Cardinals as among the very best proposed for approbation.

No wonder, for no less than four theologians worked at them in order to arrange and revise them according to the New Code of Canon Law.

You, dear sisters, have no idea of the care and work on our Constitutions at home (apart from our years of worry and sleepless nights) even after the Constitutions had been arranged and ready for approval.

Thirty copies had to be printed for the Consultors of the Sacred Congregation and thirty more copies for the Cardinals, for inspection and examination. After the Sacred Congregation of Religious had examined them and corrected them, the Constitutions were placed before the Cardinals for their inspection and sanction. After they had sanctioned them conformably to the Laws of the Church, our Cardinal Protector, His Eminence,

Cardinal A. Fruwirth was commissioned to place them before His Holiness, the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, Pope Pius XI, who vouchsafed to signify His approval of our beloved Constitutions formally and finally, which means for all times.

This dear Sisters, is the greatest blessing which the Vicar of Jesus Christ upon earth could have bestowed upon our beloved Congregation. Therefore let us thank our good God from the bottom of our hearts, and ask Him to give us the grace to reproduce in our lives a faithful copy of our sacred laws.

The authority of our laws is so real and incontestable that the obligation of keeping them follows as a necessary consequence. Therefore we must put heart and soul into them, meditate on them, study them well, and always refer to them when in doubt regarding one or other point pertaining to our office and the like. (This we must remember especially in regard to the vow of poverty, which seemingly, some of our good sisters do not understand. Constitutions approved by the Holy See are indisputably of greater authority than those which have received Episcopal approbation.

Several Bishops and Mother Generals, not only from the United States, but even from far off Africa have applied to us for copies of our Constitutions. The Apostolic Delegate of South Africa, His Excellency B.J. Gijlawijk, O.P. who happened to be in Rome at the time when our Constitutions were approved took a typewritten copy along with him, as he was getting the Constitutions for his Dominican Sisters ready for approbation, and ours, as he said, were a great help to him in this matter.

We have received many congratulations from Prelates and priests all over, who read the account of the final approbation of our Constitutions in the Vatican Edition, the Ecclesiastical Review, the *Analecta*, which is the official paper of our Holy Order, printed in Rome, and other periodicals. We are informed from Rome that our finally approved Constitutions will in future serve as a model and basis for all other Constitutions of the Sisters of the Third Order of St. Dominic, which are to be sent to Rome for approbation. Of course, each Congregation must arrange theirs according to their work and conditions, for instance "hospital" etc. but must take ours as a basis.

Again I say, let us thank God each and every day for this great blessing and ask him for the grace of holy perseverance.