

**Feast of the Translation
of Our Holy Father St. Dominic
May 24, 2005**

This feastday of the Translation of St. Dominic is a good day to indulge in a little history and to ask ourselves what this day means.

In 1221 our Holy Father Dominic died and was buried under the floor of the friars' Church of St. Nicholas in Bologna. While the preaching mission consumed the friars' attention, members of the faithful would go to the church to pray day and night at the tomb of Dominic. They tried to adorn the grave, and some friars were bothered by this; (I think we can imagine their upset!) In the next few years the community outgrew the church. A new church was built (think of Chapel renovation!) and the new design left Dominic's burial site outdoors subject to the rain and elements. Friars who lived with Dominic were distressed to see his tomb in such condition.

Meanwhile, a great revival of preaching was taking place in Lombardy. Both Dominicans and Franciscans were involved. The Franciscans preached the virtues of their canonized founder Francis and their brother, Anthony of Padua. Francis had been named a saint two years after his death, and Anthony in just one year (perhaps amidst cries of "*Santo Subito*"). This prompted the Dominicans to act.

In 1233 before the General Chapter, Jordan of Saxony, Master of the Order and Dominic's successor, agreed that the body of Dominic would be opened and moved to a fitting burial place in the new church. But the decision caused great tension. Would the friars find evidence of sanctity? What about the people who had been venerating Dominic? Furthermore, the matter would be public and involved notification of public authorities and the Pope.

Friar Ventura, prior of the community at Bologna, will now continue the story as he told it in his testimony for the canonization of Dominic. The story begins the year that Dominic died:

That year everybody noticed an extraordinary fragrance in the whole church, especially near the tomb, and the witness in particular says that he noticed it himself. There were also a lot of miracles worked that year and in the following years for people who came to the tomb of the blessed Dominic bringing wax images and all kinds of things. When several people tried to present silk cloths to cover the tomb of the blessed Dominic, the brethren would not allow them to, for fear they would be accused of greed.

When the body of the blessed Dominic was due to be moved, for several days, the *podesta* of Bologna and many noble citizens guarded it to prevent it being stolen. When the tomb was opened, in the presence of the *podesta* and many citizens of Bologna and other noble men, including religious, bishops and laymen, the

brethren found a wooden coffin, shut with iron nails; and such a fragrance came out that they were all amazed, saying that they had never smelled anything like it. So the tomb, and the extraordinary fragrance remained the whole time. Master Jordan held the holy body in his hands and gave it to the three hundred or so brethren who had come to the General Chapter to kiss. When the witness was asked how he knew all this, he said that he was present at all of it.

He also said that the blessed Dominic had such charity that he wanted to extend it to everybody, even the damned, and used sometimes to weep for them. (*Early Dominicans* p 69.)

Friar Ventura ends his memories recalling Dominic's charity. Jordan of Saxony concludes his "little book" *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers* describing Dominic's charity. Dominic himself ended his life speaking to his brothers about charity: "Have charity one for another."

It is this heroic charity of our Father Dominic that points to the deepest reason that we celebrate this day. It was charity that drew the humble to his grave in death. It was his preaching and the example of his life lived in charity that drew men in record numbers to the Order in his life. Today 800 years later it is the holiness of Dominic, his charity, that with 'joyful accents' we proclaim and with humility try to imitate.

--Sister Mary Catherine