

The Divine Office and the Dominican Life

The liturgy gives shape to the lives of Dominicans and allows their apostolates to flourish.

by Innocent Smith, O.P.

Introduction

As we begin our reflections today on “The Divine Office and the Dominican Life,” I’d like to start off with a quotation from Raymond of Capua’s *Life of Catherine of Siena*, that captures the essence of the place of the Divine Office in our life as Dominicans:

Our Lord appeared to her very often, and his visits lasted longer than before. Sometimes he brought with him his glorious Mother, sometimes Saint Dominic, and sometimes both together. . . . But for the most part he came alone and held long conversations with her like one intimate friend with another. . . . Our Lord would even recite the Psalms with her as they walked to and fro in her room, like two religious or two clerics reciting their Office together.¹

¹Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*,

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This beautiful passage captures two fundamental points that we must grasp when considering the meaning of the Divine Office for us as Dominicans:

First, the public liturgy of the church, including the Mass and the office, is essentially a participation in the prayer of Christ. As the church teaches,

Christ is always present in his church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. . . . He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the church. He is present, finally, when the church prays and sings.²

tr. Conleth Kearns (Washington: Dominicana Publications, 1994), pp. 103–104.

²Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶7; cf. Pope Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*, ¶20. The theme of Christ’s instrumental presence in

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As your congregation’s *Constitutions* state, “By the Divine Office Christ continues through his church his priestly work of praising God and interceding for the salvation of the world.”³ In the experience of St. Catherine, Christ’s presence is experienced in prayer in an especially vivid way. Although most of us do not have the privilege of sensing that Christ is beside us as we pray the psalms—indeed, we might sometimes feel quite the opposite depending on who we’re sitting with in choir!—we are assured by Christ himself that “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20).

Second, this story of Catherine’s encounters with Jesus reminds us that the public

the performance of the liturgy has a rich tradition, particularly in the works of St. Augustine.

³*The Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Saint Cecilia of Nashville, Tennessee Approved November 22, 1985 Feast of Saint Cecilia*, §48, p. 33; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

liturgy of the church, as exalted and wonderful as it is, does not take away the necessity of a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus that extends beyond the communal worship of the Mass and office. “For the most part he came alone and held long conversations with her like one intimate friend with another.” The church clarifies that “the spiritual life . . . is not limited solely to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is indeed called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father, in secret.”⁴

At the foundation of the Order of Preachers, St. Dominic instituted both communal prayer and the necessity of preserving time for what was then called “secret prayer”—a term which a recent general chapter of the Dominican friars decided to restore in place of the more modern term “private prayer.”⁵ Humbert of Romans, who can hardly be called a detractor of the official liturgy, makes the wry observation that although the office is instituted by the church, secret prayer is instituted by God!⁶

Although we won’t fully explore the

⁴*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶12.

⁵*Acts of the Elective General Chapter of the Order of Preachers: Rome, 1–21 September 2010, Celebrated under Fr. Bruno Cadoré* (Rome: Santa Sabina, 2010), §78, p. 44: “[Petitio] We ask that the term *oratio privata* (LCO 40 et 66 § I) be replaced by the term *oratio secreta*, in conformity with our Dominican tradition.” Cf. Antolin Gonzalez Fuente, “From ‘Secret’ Prayer to Meditation,” trans. Tomás Martín Rosado, *Dominicana*, 55:1 (2012), 90–107.

⁶Humbert of Romans, “Expositio in Constitutiones,” in *Opera de vita regulari*, ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier (Rome: A. Befani, 1889), vol. 2, pp. 1–178. For further reflections on Humbert’s understanding of the liturgy, see Innocent Smith, “Dominican Chant and Dominican Identity,” *Religions*, 5 (2014): 961–71.

connection and distinctions between communal and individual prayer in this context, it should be recalled that individual prayer both flows from our communal prayer and helps us to approach communal prayer with greater devotion. In other words, a discussion of the Divine Office in the Dominican life does not exhaust everything that could be said about Dominican prayer.

I will now focus on two aspects of the Divine Office in Dominican life: first, the relationship of the liturgy to study and the apostolate; second, the meaning of the Divine Office as an *officium*, that is, a duty or office.

Laudare, Benedicere, Prædicare

One of the mottos of the Dominican Order is *Laudare, Benedicere, Prædicare*—to praise, to bless, to preach. I'd like to suggest a somewhat unusual interpretation of this phrase that might help us to consider the place of the office in the Dominican life, connecting the three words *laudare*, *benedicere*, and *prædicare* with liturgy, study, and the apostolate.

In the first case, the church is fond of speaking of the office as a “sacrifice of praise.” As Pope Paul VI eloquently wrote:

The sacrifice of praise is the offering of lips honoring the Lord in psalms and hymns, devoutly consecrating the hours, the days, and the years as times of worship, with the sacrifice of the Eucharist at its center, like a shining sun, drawing all the rest to itself.⁷

⁷Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Letter, *Sacrificium Laudis* (August 16, 1966); cf. International Commission on English in the Liturgy, *Documents on the Liturgy* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1982), p. 1080.

In the second case, consider the literal meaning of “*benedicere*”: “to speak well”—and what is study, but the effort to grasp the meaning of reality, to be able to speak well or to articulate the truth?

In the third case, as Dominicans we should be sensitive to the fact that preaching is an analogous concept: we can think of God the Father speaking or rather *preaching* the Word, who is himself the fullness of revelation; the preaching of Christ, revealing the Father by his words and deeds; the preaching of the apostles, instituted by Christ; the preaching of bishops and their priestly delegates; and finally, the forms of Christian teaching, life, and worship that transmit to each generation all that the church herself is and all that she believes.⁸ In this broad sense of the concept of preaching, Dominican apostolates such as teaching play an integral role in the transmission of the faith.

How do these three dimensions fit together?

Inherent to the Dominican life is a certain tension between the active and contemplative aspects of our vocation. Leaving aside for the moment the specific vocation of cloistered nuns within the Order of Preachers, Dominican friars and Dominican sisters are called to develop a balance between the apostolate of preaching and teaching and the contemplative dimensions of communal prayer, regular observance, and the common life. Throughout the history of the order, there have been some moments at which the balance has been lost, and it is thus a con-

⁸Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (November 18, 1965); ¶8, “the church, in her teaching, life and worship, perpetuates and hands on to all generations all that she herself is, all that she believes.”

stant duty of Dominicans to examine and renew their own fidelity to this balance. As the great historian of the Dominican Order William Hinnebusch has written, “Every reform and every restoration of the Order of Preachers has been accomplished by a renewal of the contemplative apostolic spirit.”⁹

One central text for understanding this balance is St. Thomas Aquinas’s reply to the question “Whether a religious order that is devoted to the contemplative life is more excellent than on that is given to the active life?” In this article, Thomas concludes that a mixed life of contemplation leading to apostolic preaching and teaching is the ideal: “For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others the fruits of one’s contemplation than merely to contemplate.”¹⁰ It is important to note that for Thomas the two dimensions are intrinsically joined: it is not just a matter of fulfilling one’s prayer quotient and fulfilling one’s apostolate, as if these were both necessary but unrelated aspects of the religious life, but rather that contemplation will bear fruit in the apostolate.¹¹

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⁹William A Hinnebusch, *Renewal in the Spirit of St. Dominic* (Washington, D.C.: Dominicana, 1968).

¹⁰St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benziger, 1947), II-II.188.6 (Second Part of the Second Part, Q. 188, Art. 6), Vol. 2, p. 1998–99.

¹¹Thomas makes an important distinction between activities that flow from contemplation, such as preaching and teaching, and activities that consist entirely in external operation, such as almsgiving and hospitality.

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although they possess an inherent dignity, but in addition prepare us for and sustain us in the apostolate. In turn, the fruits of the apostolate flow back into prayer and study: we have the opportunity to pray for those we encounter and praise God for the blessings we receive in our apostolate and have a renewed motivation to study so as to address the questions and problems we encounter in our apostolate.

Here we might consider a passage from St. Catherine’s *Dialogue*, in which God the Father addresses the problem of self-serving contemplation:

These people find all their pleasure in seeking their own spiritual consolation—so much so that often they see their neighbors in spiritual or temporal need and refuse to help them. Under pretense of virtue they say, “It would make me lose my spiritual peace and quiet, and I would

not be able to say my Hours at the proper time." . . . But they are deceived by their own spiritual pleasure . . . For I have ordained every exercise of vocal and mental prayer to bring souls to perfect love for me and their neighbors, and to keep them in this love.¹²

In Fr. Hinnebusch's view, the love of God and love of neighbor are balanced in what he describes as the "vertical" and the "horizontal" dimensions of the Dominican life. The vertical dimension concerns our relation to God, and the horizontal concerns our relation to other people—both our brothers and sisters in community, and those who we encounter in the world. For Fr. Hinnebusch,

It is the vertical phase which primarily produces the Dominican; the horizontal permits him to develop further discharge into the world of the love of neighbor which he has learned when grace opened his soul to God.¹³

As Fr. Hinnebusch further states, "The vertical phase of Dominican life creates consecrated persons—men and women committed to the things of God." And yet, it is important to emphasize that this "creation" of consecrated persons is not a one-time thing—liturgy, after all, is not just a matter of initial formation, but something we continue to participate in throughout our lives as Dominicans. Through the liturgy, then, we are continually being created

anew as Dominicans—we continue to be *formed* in the image of St. Dominic.

In the treatise on sacraments in the *Summa Theologica*, St. Thomas uses the evocative phrase "the rite of the Christian life." In a sense, every aspect of the life of a Christian has a liturgical character. The sacraments, ranging from baptism to the anointing of the sick, accompany us at every moment of our lives as Christians, from birth to death,¹⁴ and in the Eucharist the faithful are exhorted to offer up all of their joys and struggles along with the sacrifice of the Mass.¹⁵ As Dominicans, in addition to the sacramental rites that are the privilege of all Christians, we have a proper set of liturgies that are suited to our life as religious. Just as baptism *makes* us Christians, we are *made* Dominicans through our vestition. We are strengthened in our Dominican identity through our daily round of prayers and community observances—and here, the sacramental economy and the Dominican liturgy intertwine in our daily participation in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We are confirmed in our Dominican vocation through the rite of Profession. Finally, we are commended to God through the last rites and funeral observances that are proper to the dying and departed Dominican. When we take this wider view of the Dominican liturgy, we can more fully understand that it is a life-long practice that informs our whole Dominican experience. As Fr. Hinnebusch observes, "Dominic chose the liturgy as the chief ingredient of the Dominican envi-

¹²St. Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, tr. Suzanne Noffke (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), §69, p. 131.

¹³Hinnebusch, *Renewal*, 17.

¹⁴Cf. St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, III.65.1.

¹⁵Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, (November 21, 1964), ¶34; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶48.

ronment.”¹⁶ This is not because it is the sole purpose of the order, but because it is the liturgy which makes us Dominicans; it is the liturgy that gives the shape to our lives and allows our apostolate to flourish.

Officium

Having considered the role that the liturgy plays within our lives as Dominicans, we’ll now focus on the place of the Divine Office in particular within the liturgical life of the order.

In the middle ages, the Dominican Order used the term *officium* or office to refer to the whole of the liturgy, including both the hours of the liturgy and the Mass. One advantage of this terminology was that it showed very clearly the interconnected reality of the Mass and Divine Office as a duty and privilege of the church.¹⁷ Both the Mass and the Divine Office are forms of the “sacrifice of praise” spoken of in the psalms. In the words of the Second Vatican Council, Christ

continues his priestly work through the agency of his church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the divine office.¹⁸

As we go forward, we will focus on the

¹⁶Hinnebusch, *Renewal*, 4.

¹⁷In the medieval Dominican liturgy there was a particularly sophisticated set of cross-references between the Mass and Office within the readings, antiphons, and prayers employed in each part of the liturgy.

¹⁸*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶83.

Divine Office in the contemporary sense of the term, but it is important to bear in mind that the office flows from and into the Eucharist in a way that is analogous to the relation of the active and contemplative life.

It may be that we have become so accustomed to hearing the words “Divine Office” that we might not think about the basic meaning of the words: what is an “office” in the first place? The word “office” has several different meanings: apart from the obviously inapplicable meaning of a room or building where one does one’s work, an office can be “a position of authority, trust, or service, typically one of a public nature,” or “a service or kindness done for another person or group of people.”¹⁹ The Latin word, *officium*, likewise denotes either a freely undertaken service or the fulfillment of a duty.

For Dominicans, the Divine Office fulfills both of these senses of *officium*, for it is a *duty* that is freely undertaken as a *privilege* of our state of life. The Divine Office is indeed a *duty* of religious, but it is also an honor, for it affords us a special mode of access to the Lord as official representatives of the church. The Second Vatican Council describes the role of religious praying the office in exalted terms:

when this wonderful song of praise is rightly performed by priests and others who are deputed for this purpose by the church’s ordinance . . . then it is truly the voice of the bride addressed to her bridegroom; it is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His body, addresses to the Father.²⁰

¹⁹New Oxford American Dictionary.

²⁰*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶84.

According to the council fathers, it is this very dignity that gives to the office both the sense of duty and privilege:

all who render this service are not only fulfilling a duty of the church, but also are sharing in the greatest honor of Christ's spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God's throne in the name of the church their Mother.²¹

It is worth pausing to consider the ways in which the Divine Office is both a duty and a privilege of us as religious. We might begin by considering Psalm 116: "I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people" (Ps. 116:14). As religious who are called by our constitutions to perform the public prayer of the church—that is, to pray in the presence of the Lord's people—our participation in the Divine Office is done in accordance with our vow of obedience.²²

All human beings, as creatures of God, are obligated to pay God honor and reverence by worshiping him. But as religious wholly dedicated to God by the vow of obedience, our worship has a special character. We should recall here St. Thomas's teaching that "it is better and more meritorious to do one and the same deed with a vow than without."²³ Because a vow is an act

of religion, it gives all of our actions performed under obedience a deeper purpose and meaning as being directed to God, to whom our obedience is ultimately due. When we exercise the virtue of religion under obedience, our prayer itself is more deeply consecrated to God, and we are sustained in our fulfillment of the general human duty of divine worship.

The obligatory character of the office also helps us recall that the meaning and value of the liturgy extends beyond our momentary feelings or desires. Individual prayer requires a good deal of spontaneity on our part and is often legitimately focused on our present preoccupations or joys. The liturgy, on the other hand, invites us to participate in the prayer of a wider community. One consequence of this is that the liturgy doesn't always express our personality or our feelings at a particular moment. Sometimes we have to pray a psalm of thanksgiving, for instance, when we are personally experiencing struggles that seem overwhelming. A related issue is that sometimes we don't happen to enjoy the music we're asked to sing, or the decorations in the chapel, or whatever it may be. All of these issues are real and should not be ignored. Given the centrality of the liturgy in our lives, tensions such as these can sometimes seem daunting.

At the heart of a personal response to these difficulties is the recognition that the liturgy transcends our personal preferences, allowing us to worship God together in the official liturgy of the church. The recollection that we are fulfilling our obligation to pray with the community helps us to remember that the community itself is fulfilling its duty of participating in a form of prayer that extends beyond its own boundaries.

²¹*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶85; cf. ¶98.

²²We should recall that according to the Constitutions of your congregation, "Neither the sisters nor the community are required under pain of sin to recite the office." (*The Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Saint Cecilia*, §54, p. 34).

²³St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.88.6, Reply 3.

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The liturgy is not just my prayer, or my community's prayer, but the prayer of the whole church. This is actually a tremendously liberating fact. The obligation of the office, far from rendering our participation toilsome, in fact frees us from the tyranny of the moment. This means that even if I don't *enjoy* praying the liturgy at this particular moment, I'm still participating in the prayer of the church. I don't have to say "I like this," when it comes to a particular hymn or mode of singing. After all, obedience is in the will rather than in the intellect. Nevertheless, these moments present us with the opportunity to internalize the action of prayer. When we take part in the liturgy of the church, the burden is not only on me—I am a part of a whole community at prayer. "Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2). Despite being an obligation, the communal office helps remind us of Christ's words that "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).

Divine Office as Privilege

In addition to its obligatory character, it is important to also emphasize that the Divine Office is a privilege of our religious

life. This is so for several reasons: first, it gives us a place of honor in the worship of God, allowing us to fulfill a public role in the church's praise; second, it gives us a special share in the heritage of our Order of Preachers; and third, it delegates to us a particularly effective power of prayerful intercession.

According to the Second Vatican Council,

In the earthly liturgy we take part in a foretaste of that heavenly liturgy which is celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem toward which we journey as pilgrims, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God.²⁴

When we consider the heavenly character of our earthly worship, the following passage from Psalm 68 captures the place of honor we have through our deputation to the Divine Office:

They see your solemn procession, O God, the procession of my God, of my king, to the sanctuary: the singers in the forefront, the musicians coming last; between them, maidens sounding their timbrels. (Ps. 68:25–26)

Through the privilege of being called to recite the hours, we are given a place of honor in the meeting place between the earthly and heavenly liturgy. Nevertheless, this honor is not intended to puff us up, but to bring us into closer contact with Jesus. As the Master of the Order of Preachers, Bruno Cadoré, wrote in a Letter on the Liturgical Celebration of the Hours,

²⁴*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶18.

We do not go to the choir primarily to fulfill an obligation which we have assumed; but rather we assemble in choir to await together Him who comes, to welcome Him and, above all, to learn to recognise Him.²⁵

In the office, we are deputed to act in the name of the church, performing the public liturgy in the presence of the faithful. Fr. Bruno observes that

Dominic asked his friars to celebrate the Hours publically. During the course of each day our communities are invited to open their prayer to the world. . . . Liturgical celebration is thus a compelling part of our mission of evangelisation (to spread the church to the ends of the earth). It is an aspect of our office of preaching.²⁶

An anecdote from the early days of the order reveals the value that was placed on the public celebration of the liturgy. When the friars first established the Priory of St. Jacques in Paris, the new priory fell within a territory controlled by the canons of Notre Dame Cathedral. Fearing perhaps the loss of revenue that would come from the faithful flocking to the Dominican church, the canons refused to permit public worship at St. Jacques—the friars could celebrate the office, but had to do so with the doors locked. St. Dominic became aware of the situation and informed Pope Honorius III,

²⁵Fr. Bruno Cadore, “Laudare, Prædicare, Benedicere: Letter on the Liturgical Celebration of the Hours,” May 31, 2012, p. 2 <http://www.op.org/sites/www.op.org/files/public/documents/fichier/cadore_letter_hours-en.pdf>.

²⁶Cadore, Letter, 5.

who in November 1219 intervened in favor of the friars’ right to celebrate the liturgy publically as part of their apostolate to the city of Paris.²⁷ Among the first fruits of this liturgical apostolate were the vocations of Jordan of Saxony and Henry of Cologne. As Blessed Jordan describes the occasion,

The three of us met at Saint-Jacques and, while the brethren were chanting “Immutemur habitu,” we presented ourselves before them, much to their surprise, and, putting off the old man, we put on the new, thus suiting our actions to what they were singing.²⁸

It may be the case that in practice some community chapels are inaccessible to the public. At times and places when the laity *are* able to be present, there are sometimes delicate questions that arise concerning the participation of people who are not used to our particular modes of singing or praying. This in fact is an issue that goes back to the early days of the order—in Humbert of Romans’s essay on the Office of the Cantor, he notes that one duty of the cantor was to “rectify” the mistakes that were made when visiting clerics attempted to sing with the brethren!²⁹ The question of how to make our celebrations of the liturgy truly public without diminishing the distinct character of communal prayer is one

²⁷William Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: 1. Origins and Growth to 1500* (New York: Alba House, 1966), p. 63.

²⁸Jordan of Saxony, *On the Beginnings of the Order of Preachers*, tr. Simon Tugwell, Dominican Sources (Chicago: Parable, 1982), §75.

²⁹William Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order: 2 Intellectual and cultural life to 1500* (New York: Alba House, 1973), p. 242.

that must be approached with prudence and sensitivity. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the public nature of the liturgy of the hours does not depend on the presence of outside guests, but on the nature of the action itself, even in the case of an individual religious praying the breviary alone.

The public nature of the liturgy is partially a result of our status as human beings with soul and body. The document on religious freedom from the Second Vatican Council has a striking teaching on the relationship of the liturgy to the body:

The exercise of religion, of its very nature, consists before all else in those internal, voluntary and free acts whereby man sets the course of his life directly toward God. No merely human power can either command or prohibit acts of this kind. The social nature of man, however, itself requires that he should give external expression to his internal acts of religion: that he should share with others in matters religious; that he should profess his religion in community.³⁰

For Humbert of Romans, there was a profound unity of the heart, the mouth, and the body in divine worship.³¹ According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the use of the body and the voice in divine worship helps to arouse devotion in the heart of the worshipper, and allows one to “serve God with all that he has from God, that is to say,

³⁰Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae* (December 7, 1965), ¶3.

³¹Humbert of Romans, *Expositio in Constitutiones*, in J. J. Berthier, ed., *Opera de vita regulari* (Rome: Typis A. Befani, 1889), vol. II, p. 160.

not only with his mind, but also with his body.”³² The voice, in particular, helps to “excite interior devotion, whereby the mind of the person praying is raised to God.”³³ As Thomas clarifies, “Vocal prayer is employed, not in order to tell God something He does not know, but in order to lift up the mind of the person praying or of other persons to God.”³⁴ As Thomas writes elsewhere,

we employ words, in speaking to God, not indeed to make known our thoughts to Him Who is the searcher of hearts, but that we may bring ourselves and our hearers to reverence Him. Consequently we need to praise God with our lips, not indeed for His sake, but for our own sake; since by praising Him our devotion is aroused towards Him.³⁵

Thomas points out further that “the use of music in the divine praises is a salutary institution, that the souls of the faint-hearted may be the more incited to devotion,”³⁶ although he makes a characteristically Dominican clarification by pointing out that “to arouse men to devotion by teaching and preaching is a more excellent way than by singing.”³⁷

A further privilege of the office that might be mentioned is that it affords us a special mode of intercession to God. In the Divine Office, we join our voice with Christ

³²St. Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II.83.12, Response.

³³Ibid., II-II.83.12, Response.

³⁴Ibid., II-II.83.12, Reply 1.

³⁵Ibid., II-II.91.1, Response.

³⁶Ibid., II-II.91.2, Response.

³⁷Ibid., II-II.91.2, Reply 3.

who “continues His priestly work through the agency of His church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world.”³⁸ We could rephrase this in starker terms by saying that when we pray the office, we are playing a role in salvation history, for the church has entrusted this intercessory role to us as consecrated religious.

The office is also a privileged mode of praying for the deceased. One indication of this fact is the insistence in the constitutions of your congregation that the Office for the Dead be offered each time a sister dies, in addition to the celebration of a Mass for the Dead.³⁹ A confirmation of this practice is found in St. Catherine of Siena’s *Dialogue*, in which God tells Catherine about the importance of praying the office for those in purgatory: “By giving alms and having my ministers say the Divine Office, by fasting and praying while you are in the state of grace, you can by my mercy shorten their time of punishment.”⁴⁰

Fr. Bruno’s letter on the Divine Office includes a striking treatment of the intercessory character of the office:

Humbly receive the grace God gives us to intercede with Him for the world and to speak to him of those whom we commend in our prayer. Accept as well that grace by which God touches our lives when we ask Him for the world’s salvation. Dare to believe that day after day through intercessory prayer the Spirit conforms us to the

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true image of the Son’s praying to the Father, despite the clumsiness and indignity of our words.⁴¹

Conclusion

To conclude briefly: For Dominicans, the office is a duty and a privilege that plays a central but not exclusive role in our life. It prepares us for the apostolate, helps us to stay rooted in a life of prayer, and most of all establishes us in a close communion with Christ. Although we might not sense his presence in the way that St. Catherine was privileged to experience, we may nevertheless be assured that when we pray the Divine Office, Our Lord is reciting the Psalms with us. ♦

³⁸*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, ¶183.

³⁹*The Rule of Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of the Sisters of Saint Dominic of Saint Cecilia*, §66, p. 37.

⁴⁰St. Catherine, *Dialogue*, §149, p. 313.

⁴¹Cadoré, Letter, p. 5.