

Homily based on the readings from August 8, 2026 (Habakkuk 1.12-2.4; Matthew 17.14-20)

Today, as you are probably aware, is the Memorial of Saint Dominic – a Spanish saint who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries, who is primarily remembered for founding the Dominican Order – more formally known as the Order of Preachers – as well as for popularizing the Holy Rosary. Over the years, the Dominicans – his spiritual children – have included such incomparable saints as Louis de Montfort, Rose of Lima, Catherine of Siena, and Thomas Aquinas. To this very day, the Dominicans oversee educational institutions across the globe, from Albertus Magnus and Providence Colleges here in New England to internationally renowned universities such as the Angelicum in Rome. (Incidentally, the Angelicum has trained many of the world’s finest clergymen, including both Pope Leo and Father Castaldi.) On a personal level, I owe the Dominicans a special debt of gratitude, as I was actually received into the Catholic Church, many years ago, at a Dominican parish in Virginia.

While recognizing Saint Dominic's incredible contributions, many people are only dimly aware of the mission that occupied him throughout most of his life. At that point in history, the southern part of France was being ravaged by a horrendous heresy known as *Albigensianism* – sometimes also called *Catharism*. Among other grievous errors, the Albigensians maintained that God and Satan were equal in power and majesty – locked in an endless battle for all eternity. They believed that the material world was created by Satan, and thus intrinsically evil. For this reason, they taught that suicide – typically by starvation – was the noblest end for any holy man or woman. They also asserted that marriage was immoral, actively encouraging their followers to abandon their spouses. As demented as these teachings were, they spread like wildfire at the time, threatening to overthrow the entire religious order of western Europe.

Although Saint Dominic possessed many noteworthy gifts and talents, the main way he combatted Albigensianism was through the simple *joy* of prayer. Back in the 1960's, there was a Dominican sister from

Belgium, known in this country as “the Singing Nun,” who released a remarkably popular folk album. Her signature song, which some of you may remember, began with the line “Dominique, nique, nique.” In the interest of charity, I will refrain from either singing or speaking in French, but here is an English translation of two of the verses:

At the time when John Lackland was king of England, our Father
Dominic fought against the Albigensians.

One day a heretic leads him through the briars, but our Father
Dominic through his joy converts him.

Speaking somewhat more formally, Pope Leo XIII made a similar observation back in 1883:

There is none among you, venerable brethren, who will not
remember [the] great trouble and grief God’s Holy Church
suffered from the Albigensian heretics, ... who filled the South of
France and other portions of the Latin world with their pernicious
errors Our merciful God, as you know, raised up against these

most direful enemies a most holy man, the illustrious parent and founder of the Dominican Order. Great in the integrity of his doctrine, in his example of virtue, and by his apostolic labors, he proceeded undauntedly to attack the enemies of the Catholic Church, not by force of arms; but trusting wholly to that devotion which he was the first to institute under the name of the Holy Rosary, which was disseminated through the length and breadth of the earth by him and his pupils.

Whenever we become discouraged by the sorry state of the world, it is helpful to reflect on the life and times of Saint Dominic. While the Albigensian heresy – like any false teaching – was incredibly harmful to the people it entrapped, if Dominic had not been forced to combat it, it is possible we would *never* have developed the worldwide devotion to the Holy Rosary. In other words, while evil is always evil, God can still use it as a catalyst for creating good. That is an important lesson for *all* of us to remember, as we seek to fulfill whatever roles and responsibilities the Lord has entrusted to our humble care.