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Passing the Torch Opening Preaching
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A reading from the second letter of St. Paul to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Before God and Christ Jesus,
who will judge the living and the dead
in the light of Christ's appearing and reign,
I charge you:
preach the word persistently,
whether welcome or unwelcome,
correct, reprove, encourage,
teach with all patience.

For there will be a time
when people will reject sound teaching,
and, having itching ears,
they will seek out teacher after teacher
who will feed their curiosity,
and they will turn away from listening to the truth
and turn toward cleverly contrived tales.

You, by contrast, be well balanced in everything;
do the work of a preacher;
endure the suffering it entails;
carry out your ministry fully.

The Word of the Lord.

Homily

Upon his election as the new Master of the Order, fr. Gerard Timoner said, "We are preachers.' It is not what we do. It is who we are. Mission is not what we do. It is who we are. And if that is clear, everything will just follow. We are preachers even when we are not preaching. We are preachers even if in our old age, we can no longer speak. We are preachers even if we are not ordained. We are preachers even if we are sick. We are preachers even if we are doing serious research alone in our rooms. We are preachers when we are helping the less privileged. We are preachers. That is our identity."

Isn't a gift to be preachers?! For some of us, it is a gift we never imagined for ourselves or sought out; for others we were drawn to it by the example of another preacher; and for still others we knew inside the marrow of our bones that this was the dream of God for us. However it is that we came to this gift, it has been bestowed upon us by the Holy Spirit, and we give thanks to God for it.

Being preachers, we have a responsibility and a privilege to birth God's Word wherever and however we find ourselves.

As preachers, though, we can get caught in the web of our culture allowing the various persuasions of teachings and politics to tickle our ears and divide us – whether they are of church or society. If we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that there have been times when we as a Dominican Family have been entangled in such webs pitting ourselves one against the other: women / men, ordained / lay, vowed / committed, liberal / conservative, Democrat / Republican, gay / straight, black / white, sister / brother, younger / elder, and any other platform that humanity can contrive to separate us one from another instead of being united. We are less than who we are called to be when we get so entangled. For our sake, and for the sake of the church and the world, we are to guard against such confusion and division. It is enough that the world is so ensnared in such a web. The world needs our witness of common purpose, of common life, of our being the Holy Preaching.

In his letter, Paul was encouraging Timothy, urging him, reminding him of his call to be a preacher. His words are no less pertinent for us today. "Do the work of a preacher," he says, "Endure the suffering it entails. Carry out your ministry fully."

We know there is risk in doing the work of a preacher. In this era of "fake news," people are looking for truth. We are called to give witness to the truth of the gospel. What is that truth? That God so loved the world that he became one of us in the incarnation. That God so loved the world that he died for us in the crucifixion. That God so loved the world that he wouldn't allow death to have the last word and Jesus rose from dead in the resurrection. That God so loves the world even today that he continues to send the Spirit to be among us.

The work of a preacher is simply and profoundly to love the world as God loves the world. The work of a preacher is to love God's Word, Jesus the Christ. The work of a preacher is to love God's People as Jesus did. This will come at a cost for us in one way or another – for it asks everything of us – our time, patience, understanding, our nights, our days, our very lives.

The work of a preacher demands that we are to be immersed in the Word of God. In our study and prayer, we are to walk around inside the Word and let the Word walk around inside us, so that we might be transformed by and into this Word of Love. And so transformed, we are to be immersed in the lives of God's People. In our common life and ministry, we are to walk alongside the people, so that we might know their cares and concerns, their hopes and their dreams. Otherwise, how will we know what word needs to be preached?

The Dominican Family recently lost one of our brothers, Jim Barnett, whose very life was a preaching. More than any homily he ever gave, Jimmy is remembered for the way he lived, for the way he loved God's Word and God's People. At his funeral, our brother, Brian Pierce, preached, "Jimmy loved his neighbor with an unbelievable mixture of wit and radical love, compassion, and mercy. He loved with a huge heart, a heart as big as planet Earth, which is why he reminds us so

much of God.” Jim’s preaching came in many forms: holding a baby born HIV+, protesting the School of the Americas, fasting for peace, accompanying those in prisons and in barrios. As Brian said, “Jim knew how to weave radical Gospel compassion with a joy that left no soul untouched.”

The work of a preacher: to love in such a way that others know they have encountered Jesus. This is who we are called to be. This is the gift given to us. It is meant to be shared widely and extravagantly for the life of the world.