

Interview with our Sister Maria of the Eucharist, OP

Would you please share a few thoughts on prayer?

Sr. M. Jesus taught us to pray: "Our Father ... ", so prayer, first of all, is a response to the love of God for each of us. In prayer we acknowledge our relationship of love with God Our Father. The words of St. John Vianney, on this question are simple and pure: "Man has a noble task: to pray and to love. Prayer is nothing else than union with God ... We had deserved to be left incapable of praying; but God in His goodness has permitted us to speak with Him: Prayer is a foretaste of heaven; ... it never leaves us without sweetness ... our hearts are small but prayer enlarges them and renders them capable of loving God."



Holy Mass, Divine Office and Rosary comprise the most important part of your prayer life as Dominican Nuns. Can you please say a few words about each of these?

Sr. M. The Liturgy is the most sure way to contemplation because through it we relive the mysteries of our salvation. The celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours are the most efficacious nourishment of contemplation. In the Rosary we also meditate on these same mysteries celebrated in the Eucharist and the Divine Office. When we remain in prayer, pondering them before the Blessed Sacrament exposed on our altar, the Rosary becomes a way of expressing our love for Jesus and Mary. The Rosary is a prayer of love!

Today, many young people are responding generously to the great humanitarian needs around the world. Isn't this more important than living apart in the cloister?

Sr. M. It is heartening to know that this is happening because the social needs throughout the world are so very great today. Yet, any kind of apostolate has to be supported by strong prayer. An apostolate can be truly valid only when it is the fruit of contemplation. Without an interior life the apostolate risks being fruitless and dying for lack of nourishment or becoming merely a social service. Also, there is the necessity for some to dedicate their entire life to prayer and contemplation in order to obtain, from the Lord, as He Himself said, many labourers for His vineyard.

What does it mean to be an enclosed Nun - materially and spiritually?

Sr. M. Living in the enclosure, which is a material separation from the world, is a way of attaining true freedom in order to give ourselves totally to God. To withdraw from the normal cares of the world and from our family can be difficult. It is a real cutting away but one which attains a greater end. The family is like a plant from which the Lord cuts a little shoot and replants it in the cloister. But when we are here, our love for the family and friends we have left, grows deeper and is lifted to the supernatural level. Now, we love them in God!

Spiritually, each one of us has to constantly make the effort to have a true silence within ourselves, so that we can be aware of the presence of God, of His life within us.

You mentioned silence, in a world so filled with sound, where and how does one find silence?

Sr. M. Remember that after Jesus had been preaching to the multitudes, He said to His disciples: "Come away and pray awhile." We must go apart with Jesus into the quiet of our room, before the Blessed Sacrament in Church or perhaps, in a prayer group. Deep in the heart of every human being there is the voice of God, the voice of conscience. To be able to hear this voice a person has to separate himself or herself from the sources of sound. A Dominican priest who teaches children to pray the Rosary also explains to them that when they watch TV, for instance, their thinking becomes filled with what they see. He tells them that if they see violence on TV they should leave this and go instead to their room and pray their decade of the Rosary. Francisco, the little shepherd of Fatima, only 10 years of age, also went apart to pray the Rosary or just "think about God" as he used to say. If we truly desire silence, we will find the way to obtain it.

The Perpetual Rosary Nuns were founded by Fr. Damien Marie Saintourens, O.P. What is the outstanding quality of your Founder?

Sr. M. The most outstanding quality of Fr. Damien Marie was his intense love for Our Lady which he lived out in the spirit of St. Louis de Montfort. In our time we could compare it to the spirit of Pope St. John Paul II - *Totus Tuus*. Mary is the most perfect way to Jesus.

What significance has the Fatima Message in your contemplative life?

Sr. M. The Message of Fatima is the message of the Gospel repeated for our time with the request for conversion, prayer of the Rosary, and penance. In answering the requests of Our Lady we answer also the demands of our religious life which is the following of Jesus in a total way according to the charism of St. Dominic.

What is meant by 'Dominican hospitality'?

Sr. M. A life of union with God calls for a complete openness to others. Each person has a unique value in the sight of God. When we receive others, in their needs etc., we open ourselves to Jesus living in them. As Dominicans, our openness to others should cause them to feel welcomed by God Himself. They should be able to see that it is Christ Who loves them through us.

Can you say a few words to the young people who may be reading this interview?

Sr. M. Allow yourselves to be loved by Jesus, don't be afraid. Only when we are united to Jesus can we know ourselves and truly fulfill our personality. With Jesus, we discover our dignity as children of the Father and in so doing we begin to recognize this same dignity in others. Keep in mind that as you develop your intellect through education you have to nourish and grow also in your heart. Speak with Jesus in your heart and be ready to listen. In prayer you get to know the Person of Jesus; you

form an everlasting friendship with Him. If Jesus calls you, only when you say YES will you find your happiness. With Him alone will you become all that you were born to be.