

AUGUST 8 2025, FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

The end of the 12th century was blessed with a set of three famous saints in a span of just 25 years. In 1170, St. Dominic De Guzman was born in Spain. He would be the founder of the Order of Preachers, commonly known to us as the Dominicans.

Ten years later, in 1181, Francis of Assisi was born in Italy, and he would found the Franciscans. Fifteen years later, in Portugal, St. Anthony of Padova would be born. He would preach in Italy and be known as a renowned preacher.

St. Dominic, or Dominic, as soon as he finished philosophy and theology, looked at the Church which he loved so much and held so dearly. He realized that in France there were many clergy who were badly educated and prone to errors. So, he went from Spain to France in order to work with the clergy.

One of the big heresies at that time was the Albigensian Heresy, which claimed that the flesh was the source of all evil. Therefore, they denied the fact that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. They said that since the flesh was the source of sin, the Word of God could not be born in sin. Dominic went to teach philosophy and scripture to show that the Incarnation was at the very core of our salvation. Unless the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, suffered, died, and rose from the dead, we would not have salvation.

Four years ago, we celebrated the eighth centenary of the death of Dominic, and the Master General of the Order of Preachers, Father Gerard de Monnaire III from the Philippines—the first Asian Master General of the Order—gave a wonderful declaration. He spoke about one of the treasures of the Dominican Order, called the Muscarella Table of Bologna. He described it through four different charisms that are part

of the Dominican tradition—charisms that are worthwhile for you and me to celebrate.

### What is the Muscarella Table?

The Muscarella Table is a painting on a table created two years after Dominic died. It shows Dominic at the centre of the table with his fellow monks. He wanted to show that just because he was the founder of the Order, and wrote the rule for the Order, he was no better or no worse than the rest. He was just like one of them, sitting at the table. There was an equality—very much like St. Alphonsus Liguori, who we celebrated only last week. St. Alphonsus was washing dishes when a man came up to him and told him, "You're being appointed the bishop." He said, "Just put it on the table by the side while I complete my task over here." In a similar way, Dominic followed—though he lived four centuries before St. Alphonsus Liguori. He himself also said, "I am just like one of you, an equal." That was the first charism of the Muscarella Table.

It was a table that was stolen, vandalized, restored—and there's a whole story behind it.

### The Second Charism: The Table of Miracles

Dominic lived a very simple life, a poor life, and so did his followers. They ate at a common table and very often did not have money even to buy food. Sometimes, one of the Dominicans would come up to St. Dominic and say, "Father Prior, we don't have any money for food," and he would simply say, "Go and pray, and the Lord will provide." That is why it's called the Table of Miracles—because the Lord was always providing them with something. They never went hungry as long as they trusted in the Lord.

### The Third Charism: The Table of Fraternity

This was the table where they would sit together and share their stories—their joys, their sorrows, their difficulties in being part of the Order of Preachers. It involved a certain sense of trust. They had to trust

their fellow Dominicans sitting around the table—that they would not use what was shared against them, or spread it to the wider community, but keep it as a treasure.

It also required a sense of vulnerability. “I am going to share my deepest sorrows, my deepest weaknesses, my successes—but I want you to take it as a treasure, something very precious.” That fraternity still carries on today. Imagine if the whole world were to have that same trust and that same vulnerability. We wouldn’t have to lock our doors or have prisons and police around us. We would be trusting one another.

#### The Fourth Charism: The Table of Diversity

This table, which still exists in Bologna, represents the Table of Diversity. Marty Haugen wrote that beautiful song, *\*All Are Welcome in This Place\**. And so, all were welcome at the Muscarella Table. There were people with different cultures, traditions, languages—but everything was important.

This was the first example of synodality—something that many people don’t like to talk about. The word comes from the Greek *\*syn\**, which means *\*with\**, and *\*hodos\**, which means *\*on the road\**. It means people accompanying one another on the road, which requires an acceptance of diversity—different people, at different times, coming together to share what was so precious among them.

If you go to a restaurant and enjoy something very much, you’d definitely want your friends to enjoy the same thing. You would come back and share. And that sharing would show a diversity—a different way of looking at life—which made everything so beautiful.

St. Dominic, St. Francis, St. Anthony, pray for us.