

E A S T E R 2 0 2 1

The Southern Star

ISSUE #24

Newsletter for the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui

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“Souls who love God ought to run eagerly in the path of Christ crucified... they do not slacken their pace on account of persecutions, injuries, or pleasures of the world.”

The Dialogue of Saint Catherine of Siena

LETTER FROM MOTHER prioress GENERAL

Mother Mary Madeleine, O.P.

Alleluia! This year is one of great importance for our congregation. We are celebrating two very big anniversaries – 150 years since the arrival of the first Dominicans in New Zealand and 800 years since the death of Our Holy Father St Dominic. As a result we have chosen an Irish Dominican theme for the secondary school in commemoration of these two special events. We began this year of grace with our annual retreat preached by Fr Albert who has been detained in New Zealand due to the Covid crisis. We were blessed to have Father as we were not able to import another retreat master. Six Sisters renewed their vows at the end of the retreat on January 6th, Feast of the Epiphany.

On Foundresses' Day, February 18th, we celebrated the 150th anniversary with a boat trip down the Wanganui River with all of the school girls in re-enactment of the arrival of the Irish Sisters by boat in Port Chalmers, Dunedin. Then on March 17th, Feast of St Patrick, we made a mini-pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a Maori settlement and Catholic mission on the Wanganui River, in gratitude to our foundresses from Ireland. It is here that Mother Aubert founded the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion, the only NZ founded Congregation of Sisters.

The year continues following our Irish theme with Irish dancing being taught to the girls as a part of their Physical Education course and incorporated into our annual girls' school music competition, which was held on April 20th, feast of St Agnes of Montepulciano, O.P. The girls also sang and played Irish melodies in keeping with the theme. Irish topics were chosen for the three debates for our celebration of the feast of St Thomas Aquinas in March. The seniors debated while the juniors performed skits based on the lives of Irish saints. Many of the Sisters are also using Irish works of literature in their classes and shamrocks decorate some of the whiteboards in the classrooms.

In honour of the anniversary and as a fundraiser we are making and selling rosary beads and rosary rings made of olive wood from France. Thank you to everyone who has supported this little venture thus far. Orders are always most welcome and we will endeavour to fill them as soon as we can make them.

We are making an effort to be more in touch with our ex-pupils and we were pleased to see some of them at the ex-pupils' Day of Recollection held on Passion Sunday in preparation for Holy Week. We now have a section of the newsletter dedicated especially to our ex-pupils and look forward to hearing more news about them which we can incorporate in later editions.

This year again we were able to celebrate the full Dominican liturgy of Easter from Tenebrae right through to the Easter fire and the Easter Sunday Mass. The singing was beautiful and we have added new décor to the chapel to enhance the liturgy.

Now with the borders open between Australia and New Zealand we may see new faces inquiring about religious life. We do have a few prospective postulants who have been waiting for the borders to open up. Please keep this intention in your prayers that other nationalities can gain entrance to New Zealand soon.

We are also happy to say that the school girls are making good progress and we are particularly pleased with the seniors who are working well as house captains encouraging the younger girls to earn points for their houses by neatness, exemplary conduct and academic excellence. Due to this we have every hope that next year's Cambridge results will be as good as this year's which were very pleasing.

Life in our convent and school is very happy – Deo Gratias, Alleluia!

Mother Mary Madeleine OP

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News from St Dominic's Convent

Wanganui; NEW ZEALAND

Retreat and Ceremony 2021

Our annual retreat concluded on the Feast of the Epiphany, 6 January, with six Sisters renewing their vows for a further one year. Fr Albert, O.P. preached the retreat – and led us to the heights of contemplation while considering the Incarnate Word of God become a little Babe, aided by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church, St Augustine, St Leo, St Bernard, St Thomas Aquinas, and St John of the Cross.



Feast of St Thomas Aquinas

The feast of St Thomas Aquinas is usually black and white: the colours of the Dominican order he belonged to, the colours symbolic of the clarity of his sublime doctrine. However, this year his feast possessed an additional greenish hue, as the customary inter-house competitions arranged for the celebrated day both had the Emerald Isle, its customs and people, as their theme, in honour of the 150th anniversary of the Dominican Sisters' arrival in New Zealand. Beginning the day of festivities, while their minds were still fresh and green, the senior girls of the school engaged in debates whose topics were in some manner connected to Ireland and the Irish Sisters. Judged by Reverend Father Albert, O.P., the debaters received helpful commentary on their performances before the final winner, Calaroga, was announced. In the afternoon the Irish element continued as the junior girls entertained their peers, teachers and family with short dramatic performances, admirably directed by their house captains, of the lives of three Irish saints: Patrick, Malachy and Laurence O'Toole. Our special guest, Mrs Melda Townsley, acted as adjudicator, awarding Bologna first place whilst also giving warm commendations to both Prouille and Calaroga. The girls' efforts for the day were a pleasing way to commemorate both the Dominican Saint as well as our Irish heritage.



Celebrating the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Dominican Sisters in Aotearoa

On the *Waimarie*: 150th Anniversary of the Arrival of the Dominican Sisters

Ropes were cast off. The paddles of the Steamship *Waimarie* began to turn and we were off! St Dominic's College, Sisters and pupils, were going up the Wanganui River to re-enact, on the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary, the arrival of the Dominican Sisters in New Zealand.

Of course, the Foundresses arrived by sea at Port Chalmers in the South Island but we were doing our best to reproduce 18 February 1871. We were travelling by water and the girls were all wearing Victorian costume. (The Nuns were in their usual thirteenth century garb, not unlike what the early Nuns wore when they arrived.)

Before we left the dock we were able to visit the steamship museum and learn the history of the *Waimarie*. We were also photographed by the local newspaper. On the way up the River the girls explored the ship and listened to Sister Mary Anna and Monica Bennett playing violin duets. Then Sister Mary Anna produced a keyboard and we all sang our

way up the River to Upokongaro, the furthest navigable point on the River for the *Waimarie*. When we got to the Railway Bridge we were all asked to gather on the foredeck so that the Newspaper Photographer could get a shot of us going up the River.

The singing continued all the way to Upokongaro where the crew asked us to stop singing so that they could concentrate on the tricky docking. The girls got off the ship first and "welcomed" the Nuns to New Zealand by singing the National Anthem. We then gathered at the picnic place for a talk on the Foundresses from Mother Micaela and then for a picnic.

We re-boarded the ship and sailed down the River again, saying the Rosary and doing a little singing on the return-journey. Finally we reached the dock in Wanganui where friends and family were waiting to collect the girls after our celebration of 150 years of Dominican Life in New Zealand.



Photo Chronicle

Life in St Dominic's Convent and the Girls' College



Foundresses' Day this year was an unforgettable event, with the highlight of the celebrations being a trip on the historic River Boat *Waimarie*. The girls dressed up in 19th - Century dress, complete with gloves and parasols, as they accompanied the Sisters on a journey up the Wanganui River.

We made a stop at Upokongaro, where Mother Micaela rehased the history of the arrival of the first Sisters from Ireland to Dunedin, New Zealand, early in the morning on 18th February, 1871.

The little passengers were also treated to a special tour of the boiler room, where they got to inspect the coal-burning furnace and take a closer look at the machinery powering the steam paddles.



The Feast of Saint Thomas Aquinas was celebrated by the Girls' School with a series of debate and skit competitions, centred on the theme of "Ireland."

While the senior pupils engaged each other in battles ranging from Irish pipes to the place of dancing in Catholic culture, the junior girls entertained their audience with dramatic renditions of the history of Irish saints.

There was also a Solemn High Mass to mark the occasion, with all three schools in attendance. Fr Palko, SSPX, preached a sermon on the virtues practiced by Saint Thomas Aquinas, emphasising the saint's humility, his purity, and his devotion to *Veritas*, Truth.





On the Feast of Saint Patrick, the great patron of Ireland, many of the girls accompanied the Sisters on a mini-pilgrimage to Hiruhārama (Jerusalem), the site of Mother Suzanne Aubert's first Home of Compassion, 60km up the Wanganui River.

Mother Aubert was a French lady who established the Daughters of Our Lady of Compassion in 1883, working with the Maori community.



Holy Week, with its various and manifold liturgical ceremonies, was celebrated with all the solemnity and simplicity that the Dominican Rite offers. We were blessed to still have Fr Albert, O.P. with us this year. With a traditional Dominican priest in our midst, we have been able to learn much about the beautiful heritage bequeathed to us by our Holy Father Saint Dominic, in the practices and customs that are unique to the Order.



As "the whole world" became the Dominican's cloister, so as vast as the sea is the Dominican *Old Pupil's Corner*...



Our new Southern Star "Corner" created especially for our "old pupils" to encourage and assist them in continuing to burn with St Dominic's fire for *Veritas* and to spread it throughout the world.

From Him to Whom Much Has Been Given Much Will Be Asked

by Father Albert, O.P.

From his very birth there was something supernaturally radiant about Saint Dominic's face. His godmother reports that when she was holding him at his baptism and the water was poured on his head she saw "a brilliant star shining on his forehead." Later on, one of the Sisters he gathered together at Saint Sixtus in Rome witnesses that when he would give them conferences, "from his forehead and between his brows, there shone forth, as it were, a radiant

light which filled men with respect and love." This aspect of the spiritual physiognomy of Saint Dominic is perfectly portrayed in the famous painting by Fra Angelico of the mocking of Our Lord, in which he portrays Saint Dominic in the lower right-hand corner, sitting with a book and meditating on this mystery. Above his head hovers a beautiful star, symbol of the supernatural light of faith that is illuminating his meditation.

Article continued on next page...

Dear Past Students of Saint Dominic's, during the time you passed with the Dominican Sisters here, you had the grace to participate a little in this light that shines out from the figure of Saint Dominic, a delicate and yet very powerful light that transforms profoundly all those who have been in contact with it. In the different traditional chapels I have visited all over the world, I have had the occasion to notice suddenly, a girl or a woman who had something of this star over her head and, upon inquiring, to learn that they had been a pupil in a Dominican school. It is not always physically visible, but it is always there, somehow: a sort of inner light that guides them to know what is according to the faith and what is not. They do not, alas, necessarily always live according to this light, but it is there and it is a great grace, for it reveals to them what their life is for, something of which the vast majority of people today have no idea.

This light of faith, dear Students, which you have received from the Church and from St Dominic, is a great gift: but at the same time it is a great responsibility, firstly for yourself and secondly with regard to others. For yourself because, having received this light, you have no excuse – like so many others today who have not had this gift – for not living a life according to this light. With regard to others, because you have been given what they are looking for (even though they may have no idea that they are looking for it) and so you can give it to them.

Thus Our Lord says in the Gospel: "From him to whom much has been given, much will be asked" (Lk 12: 48). You have been given the faith, so you are obviously expected to live according to it yourself, and, secondly, you are expected to share it with others since it was given to you, not just for yourself, but so that you can share it with them. Now that you have left school and started your life in the world, it is good to stop and examine yourself on these two points.

First of all, have you been faithful yourself to this light, or rather to Him who says, "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8: 12)? The transition from the sheltered life of

home and school to life in the world is often a difficult one, especially today. Just the mere fact of no longer being carried by the flow of one's situation to accomplish one's religious duties is already a challenge that a lot of young people find very hard. At home, for example, everyone went to Mass on Sunday «automatically» as it were, and in the same way every night the whole family said the Rosary together. To continue that on your own afterwards, however, is not «automatic» at all.

Then there are the extra difficulties involved with living with people who do not share your faith and who, although they might not be positively hostile to it (as they sometimes are), regard it as something very strange, even if they do not say it out loud. The temptation then is to begin to live on their purely natural, pagan level, and leave one's faith «on the back burner», which inevitably leads to it growing cold and, in the long run, being practically forgotten and dying. As the saying goes: "If one does not live what one believes, one ends up believing as one lives."

This leads to the second point: sharing one's faith with others who do not have it. Obviously it is not a matter of pushing it down their throats or even of making an exterior display of it, like a young "born-again Christian" I once knew who used to wear a little New Testament on his arm so that everyone would know he was «a believer». In fact, it is not necessary to wear a Bible on one's arm to show that one is «a believer» today. The way one dresses, the way one talks will show that soon enough, even without having to «preach» explicitly at all. The mere fact of being faithful to the first point, to keeping one's faith and living it personally in the midst of people who don't share it, is already going to lead to the sharing of that faith with others even without saying anything explicitly at all.

This silent witness, however, will inevitably lead to something more external, especially with the people one mixes with more regularly. Here there is a point of «strategy» that is important: it is better *not* to wear a Bible on your arm because that immediately puts a distance between you and «the enemy»



you wish to attain and doesn't allow you to get within range. Your normal behaviour will already put a great enough distance between you without adding the Bible on your arm on top of it. You have no idea how strange non-Catholics can imagine us to be : so often the first objective to reach is to show them that the distance is not as great as they think, or at least that it does not consist in what they think it does.

An example of this is found in a book by a Muslim convert to Catholicism entitled *The Price to Pay*. The author, an Iraqi, explains how his conversion started when he ended up in a room with a Catholic when he was doing his military service. After some initial disgust with being put in a room with an infidel, he was so impressed by the behaviour of his roommate that he decided to try to convert him to "the true faith" of Islam. The Catholic refused to argue (something that would have gotten him and even the Church herself into trouble with the Muslim authorities) but simply asked the author if he knew his own faith. This led to the Muslim actually reading the Koran for the first time and realizing how ridiculous his religion was and abandoning it. He then read a New Testament his roommate gave him and grace took him from there.

Fortunately it is not forbidden to preach the Gospel openly in this country as it is in Iraq (although that day may not be far off and is already here with regard to certain things) so in certain situations one can be more on the offensive. A Franciscan friar in the U.S. who did a lot of work with the Militia of the Immaculata used to say that today one is either an apostle or an apostate. Indeed, Saint Thomas explains that the very essence of charity consists in sharing in the divine good in which God Himself finds His happiness. God has given us to share in His beatitude and part of this sharing is to will, like Him, to share it with others. That is why everyone in the state of grace is "an apostle" in the sense that he will want to share this beatitude with others. It is the bishops and priests alone who have an official mandate and obligation to do this, but every Catholic who has divine charity in his soul will necessarily, by that very fact, tend towards bringing others to share in the divine good that he possesses. This is why there are two precepts: to love God, first and then, to love one's neighbour "that he might be in God", as St. Thomas puts it. These two precepts are simply two sides of the same coin, or two parts of the same virtue, which is divine charity, which is why Our Lord, speaking of the second precept, love of neighbour, in comparison to the first precept, the love of God, says that it "is like to it" (Mt 22: 39). Let us explain this more deeply, because it is literally fundamental, one of these mysteries of which Our Lord spoke when He said, through the mouth of the prophet : "I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world" (Mt 13: 35).

Divine charity is a friendship, as Our Lord said to the Apostles: "I will not now call you servants (...) but I have called you friends" (Jn 15: 15). Now all friendship is based on some common good, and friendships are distinguished according to the different good which is shared in common. For example, there is a certain friendship between members of

a tennis club or a bridge club, based on the common good they enjoy of playing tennis or bridge (which good can only be common, since it takes at least two to play tennis and four to play bridge). A deeper friendship exists between those whose common good is deeper. For example, "army buddies" have a deeper friendship because the good they share is more important, and is sometimes even a matter of life and death. Members of the same family have an even deeper friendship because of the common blood that unites them, the fact that their very life has a common source.

Deeper than all of these friendships is the friendship based on sharing supernatural life. This is the supernatural friendship of charity for, as we said, God makes us share in His supernatural beatitude which consists in His knowing and loving Himself. The "common good" we share with God, that we love together with Him and which is the basis of our friendship with Him, is His beatitude, which He enjoys Himself and which He shares with us. Thus Our Lord says: "I have made known thy name to them and will make it known: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (Jn 17: 26).

We are not alone, however, in being invited to share in this beatitude which is divine life: God offers it to everyone. This common invitation to share in God's beatitude is the basis of the love of neighbour which is "like" the love of God because by it we will the same divine good to others that we will for ourselves by our love of God. True love of neighbour is not just some natural benevolence based on some natural common good but is founded on the supernatural good we have in common that is the beatitude to which God calls us all.

Saint Thomas, as usual, sums it up perfectly: "That which must be principally loved by charity is the good which beatifies us, namely God. Secondly by charity we must love our neighbour, who is united to us by a certain social law in the reception and the participation in beatitude. Thus what we must love by charity in our neighbour is that we might together arrive at beatitude." (*De Perfectione Vitae Spiritualis*, C. 2)

The practical consequence of all this for you is simply what the Franciscan friar said: today one is either an apostle or an apostate. Either one loves one's faith and therefore shares it ; or, conversely, one fears to share it, one hides it and ends up, more or less, losing it, or at least not really living it. The sharing obviously has to be done prudently according to circumstances: at times, as Our Lord says, we must not cast our "pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you" (Mt. 7: 6). However He also says : "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house. So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Mt. 5: 15-16)



A Lesson from Dante

from a conference given by Fr Doran, SSPX, during a retreat preached to students at a Dominican school



Many of our past pupils will recall the school's production of the *Paradiso* from *The Divine Comedy*. There is a painting connected with it – shown above - containing essential lessons to be grasped.

This painting shows a scene in Florence along the bank of the Arno, with Dante standing as a young man on a bridge, while three women walk past. In the centre is Beatrice carrying a rose (a reference to the mystical rose in the *Paradiso*), looking straight ahead... while on either side, the other women are flirting with Dante. Beatrice is looking on to something else, seeing something else.

It gives a glimpse of how we must not collapse under human respect in the world. When younger, one is self-conscious in public of being different – being a Catholic, modest, etc – you notice others looking at you. As time goes on, you just do what you are doing and you don't notice everyone else, because you have something to do: you have a life to live, a God to serve, and so are totally un-self-conscious of everything and everyone around you. That self-consciousness is, in fact, a form of vanity and pride. The message of the painting: Beatrice is looking straight ahead – not being

distracted by this young man on the bridge. Dante was very much living in the world, as he tells us throughout *The Divine Comedy*, but Beatrice had something else that she was going toward... You will be less aware and concerned about what other people are thinking and their opinions if you live a life which is focused completely on your goal. This painting is striking, showing Beatrice having the vision of what is to be accomplished... which Dante doesn't yet have.

She will have to intervene several times in his journey to assist him to finally obtain it. Reading *The Divine Comedy* will be quite different as a graduate than as a school girl – it will be understood more profoundly, without sentimentality – because we have changed, matured, and gone through experiences of love and suffering – then one will see the vision that Dante writes of. It depicts a conjuncture of pain and love – which is the key to the mystery of life - not grasped by world... Let us strive to be like Beatrice, focussed on our eternal goal, not being distracted by things that are only ephemeral.

*I am proud to call myself a graduate of St Dominic's College... I hope to continue shining my light in the world, and that all the other girls will become burning flames which will create more sparks in the world...
May our motto "Veritas" resound everywhere.*

WORDS FROM A PAST PUPIL OF SAINT DOMINIC'S COLLEGE

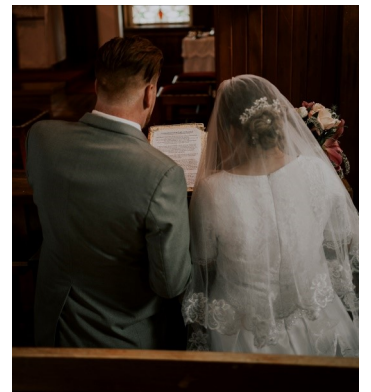
Photo Nook

...a place for past-pupils to share notable events in your lives...

This past year, several of our past pupils managed to prove that "Love is as strong as death" and *stronger* than COVID-19 restrictions - since their planned betrothals and weddings still went ahead...



Sister Mary Bartholomew (formerly Juliana Stephens) received the habit of the Society Sisters on Low Sunday, 2020, in Browerville, MN, USA. God-willing, she will make her first vows next year.



Catherine, née Smith, and Joshua Sharkey received the holy sacrament of matrimony on 9th May 2020, at St Anthony's Parish in Wanganui despite COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions limiting attendance.



Photos c/o Bjergas & Angelus Press

Sister Immaculata Teresita of Jesus (formerly Nicola Bjerga) renewed her temporary vows at the Carmel of the Holy Trinity, in Spokane, WA, USA, on January 11, 2021. This was her second renewal, which means, God-willing, that she will make perpetual vows in 2024. (Due to the cloister, photos of the event are not available)

As a regular section of the *O.P. Corner*, we invite you to share with us and your fellow alumni, in the *Photo Nook*, notable events in *your lives* that have taken place recently. Please send photos with captions (eg. date, event, etc.) to o.p.corner@dominicansisters.net.nz!



SURREXIT CHRISTUS SPES MEA!

This Paschal season, please consider helping us out - whether with gifts of cash or regular monthly donations. The stipend we receive is minimal, so we are truly grateful for every little effort and sacrifice that helps us to continue living our traditional Dominican way of life.

We would like to thank those who have already pledged regular donations - these gifts, no matter how small, do make a difference.

May Our Lady of the Rosary reward your generosity and kindness to the Spouses of Her Divine Son. The Sisters pray specially for you during our weekly Chapter.

May the joy of the Risen Lord be yours always.

AUSTRALIA

Westpac Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui
Westpac Account BSB Number: 033-636
Account Number: 334285

NEW ZEALAND

Westpac Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui
Westpac Account Number: 03-0791-0728558-00
Cheques can be made out to "The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui" and sent to:
Motherhouse and Novitiate, 12b York Street, Wanganui, 4501, New Zealand.
All donations now qualify for a 33% TAX REBATE from the IRD.
Please quote our NZ Charities Services Number: CC37884

UNITED STATES

Account Name: Dominican Sisters of Wanganui
Wells Fargo Bank, A/C # 2 015 569 425, Routing # 1210 42882
Cheques can be made out to "The Dominican Sisters of Wanganui" and sent to:
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All donations to our U.S. account now qualify for a tax deductible receipt!

OR VIA PAYPAL

Visit our website at <https://www.dominicansisters.net.nz/fundraising>