Proposed Apostolic Programme for the Oxford Lay Dominican Fraternity of Blessed Adrian Fortescue

Academic Year 2022-3

Submitted by Bethany Mulvey

As Lay Dominicans we share in the Dominican vocation of ‘Laudare, Benedicere and Praedicare’. While not neglecting the first two items, this year I propose we focus on ‘praedicare’ the vocation of preaching. We are reminded in the Lay Dominican Handbook that our vocation is, ‘to propagate the presence of Christ in the heart of humanity so that his divine message be known and accepted by all’ (Handbook page 58). Also, ‘The particular mission we receive is the proclamation of the Word of God, above all by sharing, as Dominic did, God’s mercy as a sign of liberation’ (Handbook p 55).

It is important to fit our apostolate to the needs of the Church today. One of the greatest needs in this country is found in the number of Catholic young people who, despite Catholic homes and Catholic education, are lapsing from the Faith. There are many reasons for this, all of which need to be examined, but this year I propose that we focus on one very important aspect, which is the lack of transference of the Faith to young children in the home. The transfer of Faith at a young age is vital. It is at home and from parents that children learn to believe and to pray. It is from answers to their many questions about God and the Faith that children learn to trust their Faith as a basis from which to face a world full of confusing ideas.

RE teachers in Catholic schools point out that many children arrive at school with very little basic knowledge of the Faith – many can’t make the sign of the Cross or say the ‘Our Father’. Furthermore, the role of the RE teacher at school is to instruct and build on the Faith, it is not to transmit it initially. So, without this basic knowledge in children attending, the role of the Catholic School becomes very difficult.

There are families where the Faith is being transmitted. These are mainly Charismatic families, who consider family prayers and discussing the Faith at home important, and Traditional Catholics. The majority of current vocations to the priesthood and religious life come from these two groups.

The vast majority of Catholics do not belong to these groups.

There are many reasons why faith is not being transmitted in families.

1. Before Vatican 2 it was the norm for devout families to pray together e.g., the Rosary, teach basic prayers, learn from the Catechism together etc. After Vatican 2 there were many changes to the Liturgy, etc and parents were less certain about how they should transmit the Faith. Many therefore decided to leave it to the Catholic Schools.
2. Family life itself changed, with parents both at work, children eating on trays in front of TV instead of family meals. Then there are the distractions of homework, computer games, social media etc.
3. The challenges of an increasingly less Christian society faced by parents and children.
4. Many young parents as a result of all this have an imperfect knowledge of their Faith themselves.
5. An aging and reducing population of priests reduces Catechesis in Parishes.

The aim of this apostolate is therefore to produce a body of guidance and materials to help families transmit the Faith to young children in the home. Catholic bookshops are few and far between, and many books unaffordable to a large number of people. Therefore, it is important that these materials should be free of charge and easily available. I suggest they could be published on our website, and maybe circulated via email to parish priests to be passed on to families with young children at their discretion.

These should include:

1. Basic prayers. To be used in the family.
2. Basic teaching of the Faith. Including convincing answers to questions children frequently ask.
3. Simple scripture stories and illustrations to coincide with Sunday Gospel readings.
4. Basic teachings on the lives of Saints to coincide with the liturgy of the year.

All made as attractive and easy to use as possible with illustrations etc.

Cheng in our fraternity is already producing excellent materials for the children’s Sunday Liturgy at Blackfriars. She is willing to share these. Others are producing valuable resources as well. Alexander (newly admitted) is also interested in contributing ideas. Those with children will be able to pass on their own experiences of handing on the Faith in the home.