

## The Order of St. Dominic

I mentioned in my last post that I recently began the process of joining the Our Lady of Mercy Chapter of the Lay Fraternities of St. Dominic. I'm guessing that a lot of people who read this are wondering what that means. So here's the story...

Books upon books have been written about who St. Dominic was and what his spirituality is, but here is the two-cent version from the Catholic Prayer book:

Saint Dominic was born in Calaruega in Spain around the year 1170. He studied theology at Palencia and was made canon of the church of Osma. He worked effectively against the Albigensian heresy through preaching and good example. To carry on this work he gathered together companions and founded the Order of Preachers. He died at Bologna on August 6, 1221.

In 1864, a young Dominican priest, Père Marie-Jean-Joseph Lataste, O.P., was sent to preach <sup>to</sup> a spiritual retreat at the women's prison in Cadillac-sur-Garonne, France. After an amazing spiritual transformation as a result of the retreat, Père Lataste founded a new religious congregation for women coming out of prison - the House of Bethany. The Dominican Sisters of Bethany grew and prospered and some 130+ years later found their way to MCI-Norfolk.

Ruth Raichle, a former member of the Dominican Sisters of Bethany and the MCI-Norfolk prison chaplain from 1988-2011 first envisioned the possibility of a Dominican Laity chapter at MCI-Norfolk in 1997. After many struggles and growing pains, the Our Lady of Mercy Pro-Chapter was born in 1999. In 2005, they were approved as a full chapter. Today the chapter numbers 18 final professed Third Order Dominicans, 10 temporary promised, 2 novitiates, 4 postulants and 9 "friends" of the Order who attend mass, meetings, and formations of the Chapter. It remains the only chapter of its kind (behind prison walls) in the world.

So what does this mean for me? I don't mean to sound selfish, but I mean you are reading my blog, so I assume that is what you are thinking. A little back story first...

If you've read Change you know about how I found my way back to the Catholic Church. In 2008 I found myself at MCI-Concord. After Brian's death, I really embraced my faith and grew to know and admire the prison chaplain there, a Jesuit priest named Father George Williams. I talked extensively with him and began RCIA classes to make my Confirmation. Only days before the ceremony, I was transferred to another prison. In December 2009, I was

moved here to MCI-Norfolk. I was immediately embraced by the fantastic Catholic Community here. In June 2010, I was confirmed by Cardinal Sean O'Malley. Over the next few months I became aware of the strong Dominican Chapter. Late in 2010 I made the commitment to myself to get more involved in the Catholic Community here at MCI-Norfolk. I hesitated to join the Dominicans, however. You see I had a strong desire to pursue Jesuit spirituality, much because of my time with Father George. I wondered if I would just be getting involved with the Dominicans simply because it was here. So I waited and prayed about it.

My prayer was simple, "God I want to get more involved with the Catholic Community here, but I don't want to just join stuff for the sake of joining, so whatever you want me to become a part of, let me know." Over the next few days, I received some responses. Now there was a time in my life (like the first 32 years) where I would have called these coincidences, now I call them God-incidences. First a friend, Frank Debenedetto (sp?) and my step-Godfather (my confirmation sponsor) Anthony Miller, asked me to join them in a prayer group on Tuesday afternoons. That was a year ago and Tuesday afternoons remain one of my favorite times. Just days later, one of the temporary professed Dominicans gave me the full recruitment speech and request. How could I not see this as God's calling? I began the process soon after. On Saturday, November 5, as a part of our Dominican Retreat, I was accepted into the Order to begin my learning and discernment period. I am blessed to have the opportunity to do so.

It's been an interesting journey thus far. God has not made His intentions for me clear. I am still interested in Jesuit Spirituality. I've become good friends with James Keown and we've pursued our curiosities in St. Ignatius of Loyola, his Society of Jesus, and the Spiritual Exercises which make up the basis for Jesuit lifestyle. At some point the two vocations may conflict and I will have to choose between one or the other, or perhaps I will find that neither is for me, but for now, I am just enjoying the ride.

In March, I was blessed with the opportunity to meet the Master of the Order of St. Dominic, Father Bruno Cadore, O.P., when he visited us. What an inspiration. I included the picture below of he and I. I also included my picture from the weekend of the Dominican Retreat because well, come on, who could ever get tired of pictures of me? Hope you enjoy.