CABRA
Dominican College

The Story of St Dominic

The story of Cabra truly began in 1206 when St Dominic established a convent for women in Prouilhe, France. From that foundation stem the many Dominican establishments – schools, Colleges, universities – that, all over the world today, are centres of learning for youth.

Born in Caleruega, Spain in 1170, Dominic was the youngest of four children in an impoverished noble family. His father, Felix, was part of the knighted class and his mother, Jane, a noble woman. Education and prayer were highly valued by the Guzman family. Dominic's mother was a woman of great faith and prayed regularly at a nearby monastery. As was the practice amongst nobility, the Guzmans had dedicated Dominic to the church – he was to be a priest.

Opportunity for schooling was a rarity in the 12th century but Dominic was afforded this privilege and began his education with his uncle priest at age seven. When he turned 14 years he travelled further afield to Palencia where he was to spend another 10 years studying. Departures from familiarity into the unknown, a family commitment to the growth of the church and a drive to seek knowledge and understandings are three crucial forces at play in Dominic's early formation.

In 1193 at age 23, Dominic was ordained a priest. Dominic worked at the Cathedral at Osma in Spain under the Bishop of Osma who had embraced canon reformation including the rules of community life under Saint Augustine. It was these notions of community life which attracted Dominic and formed the basis of what he considered should be the community life for his own order. In July 1215, Dominic was granted permission to form his own religious order for this purpose. He was joined by six followers. The group followed a Rule of Life which included a strict routine of discipline, including prayer and penance. They also established a system of education. They often travelled the countryside to preach. His order was confirmed on December 22, 1216, and in 1217, Pope Honorius III dubbed Dominic and his followers "The Order of Preachers." In the summer of 1217, Dominic decided it was time to send his followers out to grow the order. The band of seventeen men was ordered to depart Prouilhe and to go out across Europe to spread the order. The decision was a fateful one which proved successful. New members began to appear in great numbers across the continent. After sending out his followers, Dominic headed to Rome to meet with the Pope and seek support for his mission. Shortly afterwards, Pope Honorarius III elevated Dominic to the rank of "Master of the Sacred Palace." The position has been occupied by Dominican preachers since Dominic himself in 1218.

There are many stories about St Dominic that have been passed on throughout the centuries. One of the most significant in understanding him happened when he was a young man. While studying humanities and theology in Palencia a severe famine struck the region with devastating impact on the local people. Dominic was so moved with compassion for the ordinary people who were left with nothing to eat as a result that he sold all his precious books and furniture to raise funds for those in such great need. His declaration that, 'I do not want to study dead skins, while people are dying of hunger' reveals much about the values on which he based his choices. It is said that numbers of other students at the university followed his example of compassion. Indeed, it was compassion that was at the core of Dominic's response to all people – both companions and strangers.

Dominic died after a short illness at the age of 51.

Pope Gregory IX canonized St. Dominic on July 13, 1234, and his feast day is August 8.