



# The Most Holy Body & Blood of Christ

## June 2, 2013 C

### Church History (Part 7) The High Middle Ages – Part Two

#### The Mendicant Friars

In his introduction to the role the Mendicant friars played during this period in the Church's history, Carl Koch writes:

*As mentioned earlier, the Albigensians set themselves against the materialism and corruption they found in the clergy and the monasteries, and they carried that stand to extremes. But others in the Church who were not heretical also saw the need to renew the Gospel spirit of poverty and simplicity, and they responded in creative, prophetic ways to the needs of the Church. In particular, the mendicant orders stand out: the Order of Preachers and the Order of Friars Minor (friars minor means "little brothers"). These two religious groups were different from the earlier orders whose members usually lived in large country monasteries. These friars stayed on the move, teaching and preaching mostly in the growing towns, and they lived a simple life, dependent primarily on what people gave them for their efforts. Because they were, in effect, beggars, they came to be known as mendicant orders. (The word mendicant means "beggar.") They had no farms for food or large monasteries for housing, at least not originally. (A Popular History of the Catholic Church, p.151)*

**The Dominicans.** *Dominic de Guzman (1170-1221), a Spanish priest, founds the Dominicans (Order of Preachers). He opposes a Crusade against heretics with the motto: "Logic and persuasion, not force." He also states: "The heretics are to be converted by an example of humility and other virtues far more readily than by any external display or verbal battles.... So let us arm ourselves with devout prayers and set off showing signs of genuine humility and barefooted to combat Goliath."*

Gradually, the Dominicans begin to also focus on the intellectual life of the Church. They believe that through scholarship, they will be better equipped to illustrate the truth of the Gospels and the wisdom of Church tradition. Many of the great university teachers of the Middle Ages are Dominicans, the best known being Thomas Aquinas.

**Francis of Assisi (1183-1226)** founds the Order of Friar Minors (O.F.M.), popularly known as the **Franciscans**. He is probably the best known and most loved of all saints, not

only by Catholics but also by other Christians and even non-Christians. No wonder Assisi is the place where Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI gathered for interfaith services with both Christian and non-Christian religious leaders from around the world.

At the time of his conversion, Francis, the son of a well-to-do cloth merchant, takes off all his clothes in the village square as a sign of his desire to shed worldly possessions. Henceforth, Francis weds himself to "Lady Poverty." He dresses himself in a rough, simple garment, goes about the countryside preaching the Gospel and begging from the rich so he can help the poor. When many young men start to follow him, Francis realizes that God is calling him to start a new religious order. This means writing a Rule of Life for his brothers and seeking approval from Rome.

The pope at the time, Innocent III, is not impressed with Francis when he appears before him dressed like a beggar. Francis is dismissed and left waiting in Rome for months. When the pope and the cardinals discuss how they should respond to Francis, it seems they are moving against the approval of a new religious order. But the night before Innocent meets with Francis, he has a strange and fearful dream in which he sees St. John's Lateran Basilica shaking and about to fall. Suddenly, the pope sees a small man dressed in peasant garb and barefoot, holding up the basilica. This leads Innocent to believe that Francis is to play a special role in renewing and building up the Church. So the next day, he gives Francis permission to begin a new religious order. Through the centuries, Francis has become the spiritual father of more than 30 male religious communities and over 300 provinces of female religious communities—the first being that founded by his friend, Clare of Assisi in 1212. Because of his intense love of creation expressed in his poem "Canticle of the Sun," Francis becomes known as the patron saint of ecology.

Concerning the meeting between Innocent III and Francis, Michael Pennock writes:

*The meeting of the Pope and poor preacher represents a marriage between the stature and influence the Church achieved during the Middle Ages and her core roots of discipleship and dependence on God's providence. On the one hand, Pope Innocent III typifies the heights of the medieval papacy and the splendor the Church achieved in the age of Christendom, the ideal of a unified society guided by Christian beliefs, piety, and values. On the other hand,*

*St. Francis of Assisi represents the Gospel lived in all of its radical beauty and stark simplicity. Francis is one of history's true originals – a lover of nature, which he saw as a reflection of the Beauty of the Creator. Unlike the monks of his day, Francis did not withdraw from the world. Rather, he engaged the world by ministering directly to the poor in the growing cities of medieval society. His witness to the Gospel is timeless. And words attributed to him speak to the hearts of Christians as much today as they did centuries ago: "Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary, use words." (This is our Church, p.101)*

**Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153).** Many historians would vote for Bernard as "the man of the twelfth century." At the age of twenty, he leaves home to join the monastic community of Citeaux, from which a new order of monks, the **Cistercians**, received their name. Shortly after, Bernard and some of his brothers found a new monastery in Clairvaux (1115), the Valley of Light. This new monastery becomes a light for the whole Church. Gradually, Bernard's reputation and brilliance become so widely known that popes and kings seek his advice. He is a Scripture scholar, theologian and eloquent preacher. In a letter to Pope Eugenius, Bernard speaks truth to power when he writes:

*That you have been raised to the pinnacle of power is an undeniable fact. But for what purpose have you been elevated? ... It is not I suppose that you may enjoy the glory of lordship.... Therefore that you might not think too highly of yourself, bear always in mind that a duty of service has been imposed upon you, and not a dominion conferred.... Do you think St. Peter loved to surround himself with pomp and display? In all things that belong to earthly magnificence, you have succeeded not Peter but Constantine.... (Quoted in The Story of the Church, Alfred McBride, p.90)*

**Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179).** If Bernard of Clairvaux is "the man of the twelfth century," Hildegard of Bingen is surely "the woman of the twelfth century." Born in 1098 in the Rhineland part of Germany, she is the tenth and last child of noble parents. At the age of eight, in gratitude for God's blessings on the rest of the family, Hildegard is given to a Benedictine Monastery, not an unusual practice at the time. Despite poor health for most of her life, Hildegard lives to the age of 81.

As Hildegard grows to young adulthood, she receives mystical visions which she starts to write down at the urging of her spiritual directors, one of whom is Bernard of Clairvaux. Concerning these visions, she says: "*The visions which I saw I did not perceive in dreams nor when asleep nor in a delirium nor with the eyes or ears of the body. I received them when I was awake and looking around with a clear mind, with the inner eyes and ears, in open places according to the will of God.*"

When her writings become known, many young women come knocking at the door of her monastery wanting to join. Because of this, and due also to the male dominated monastery of St. Disibodenberg, Hildegard founds her own monastery in Bingen.

Hildegard goes on to write books on a wide variety of topics, such as medicine, natural history, dietary prescriptions, music, poetry, theology. She advocates regular warm baths and installs plumbing in her monastery, both of which are unheard of in Europe in the Middle Ages. As a preacher, she draws enormous crowds and does not hesitate to challenge the pope and emperor in her day. To Pope Anastasius she writes:

*Why do you not cut out the roots of the evil which chokes out the good, useful, fine-tasting, sweet-smelling plants? You are neglecting justice....*

*You who sit on the papal throne, you despise God when you don't hurl from yourself the evil but, even worse, embrace it and kiss it by silently tolerating corrupt men. ... And you, O Rome, are like one in the throes of death.*

Even though Hildegard's canonization process is begun 44 years after her death, it will take the Church almost a thousand years after her birth to raise her to the status of sainthood. In October 2012, Pope Benedict XVI declares Hildegard a doctor of the Church, i.e., a person whose writings are so profound that he/she can be helpful to Christians in every age. Such men and women are especially known for their depth of understanding and the orthodoxy of their theological and spiritual writings.

## **Cathedrals**

A unique feature of the medieval church is its magnificent cathedrals and abbey churches built between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. They symbolize the grandeur and spirit of this period. Each cathedral contains the bishop's chair, symbolizing his teaching authority and power. Thus, the bishop's Church is the center of worship and a symbol of unity for the people of a given diocese. Commenting on the magnificent Gothic cathedrals of the medieval era, Bruce Shelley writes:

*For eight centuries Gothic cathedrals throughout Europe have inspired worshipers and awed tourists. The medieval masters of Gothic style tried to portray in stone and glass man's central religious quest. They wanted to depict a tension. On the one hand was man aspiring to reach the heights of heaven; on the other hand was God condescending to address the least of men.*

*The movement of the Gothic, therefore, is two-way. The pillars, arches, and steeples—aligned like rows of rockets ready to ascend to heaven—point skyward. But through colorful windows of leaded glass the light of God descends to meet the lowly. It is an architect's version of human*

*reason and divine revelation.* (Church History in Plain Language – Third Edition, p.194)

The medieval cathedrals stand as a living memorial to the countless anonymous ancestors in the faith of today's Christians. Their hard work is part of an unprecedented institutional effort to praise God in stone.

## Universities

Another achievement of the Middle Ages is the rise of universities. Universities grow out of cathedral schools which have been created by bishops to train priests and to offer education to the sons of nobles. Concerning the university life, medieval-style, Carl Koch writes:

*A lecturer at a university would announce a series of classes on a particular subject. Then students would come or not. If they came, they paid a fee to the lecturer; if no students wanted to listen to the lecturer, he was out of a job. Books were rare and expensive, as each one had to be copied by hand. Teachers lectured, and students listened, taking a few notes but depending mostly on their memory (paper was expensive too). Examinations were taken orally, each student being expected to give reasons for accepting or rejecting the teachers' statements about the subjects studied.* (Ibid, p.140)

The medieval universities gradually develop a way to advance learning known as *scholasticism* which tries to reconcile the newly rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle with the truths of the Church. The greatest theologian and philosopher of this period and perhaps in the history of the Church is *Thomas Aquinas* (1225-1274). He, more than anyone, sought to reconcile faith and reason. He is able to show how divine revelation is not contrary to reason, that in fact we can know some truths about God by using our minds. On December 6, 1273, Thomas has a mystical experience which leads him to conclude: *"Everything I have written seems like straw compared to what I have seen and what has been revealed to me."* After this experience, Thomas stops teaching and writing. He dies three months later.

## A Brief History of the Parish facilities

**1959** – Parish is founded. First pastor is Fr. Martin Power (1959-1968).

**1961** – First parish church (our current parish hall) is built which seats about 600 people.

**September 1961** – First school (our current Ministry Center) is opened and run by the Sisters of Mercy. Two years later enrollment grows to 670. Sr. Immaculata teaches Kindergarten for the first 50 years of the school's history. In 1971, Sr. Joseph Barden is appointed School Principal, a

role she holds for 30 years. She is currently the school's Development Director. Fr. Ned Condren is our second pastor (1968-1973).

**1980** – Parish Office is built which also serves as Rectory for priests for the next 15 years.

**1986** – Current church is built for \$1.5 million dollars under the leadership of Fr. Val Sheedy (1973-1989). It seats about 1,100 people.

**1992** – First part of current school is built. The second half is built in 1997. Fr. Frank Smith (1989-2001) is pastor.

**2003** – School gymnasium is built under the leadership of Sr. Joseph.

Don Foy and the late Dick Cross coordinated the next three projects.

**2005** – A new chiller system is installed.

**2006** – Parish hall is renovated (new kitchen, bathrooms and windows).

**2008-09** – Church façade and adjoining area are renovated.

**2012** – With the leadership of Bill Porzio, we replaced the old software controls of the chiller system with a newer, more energy efficient control system, which will save money on the power bills.

**June 2, 2013** – The Howard & Mercedes Buescher Parish Center is dedicated.

Aydin Erhan, Architect-AE Studio Architecture; David Poetker, P.E., Io Engineers, Inc.; Builder: Doug Wilson Enterprises, Inc.; Thomas Parker, Senior Project Manager; Andy Davis, Field Superintendent; Bill Porzio, P.E., Parish Owners' Representative.

Size: 10,000 square feet. Cost: \$1.2 million

Why build it? To provide extra meeting space for our ministries. This new facility is funded by a very large donation from Howard and Mercedes Buescher and by all of you who are participating in our *Alive in Christ Campaign*. AIC pledges are anticipated to be completed by Easter 2014.

This weekend, we once again pause to thank God for all our parishioners, past and present, whose sacrifices have made it possible for us to enjoy all these wonderful facilities, valued today at approximately \$26 million.

Have a blessed week,

