



The Southern Star

ISSUE #34

Newsletter for the Dominican Sisters of Wanganui

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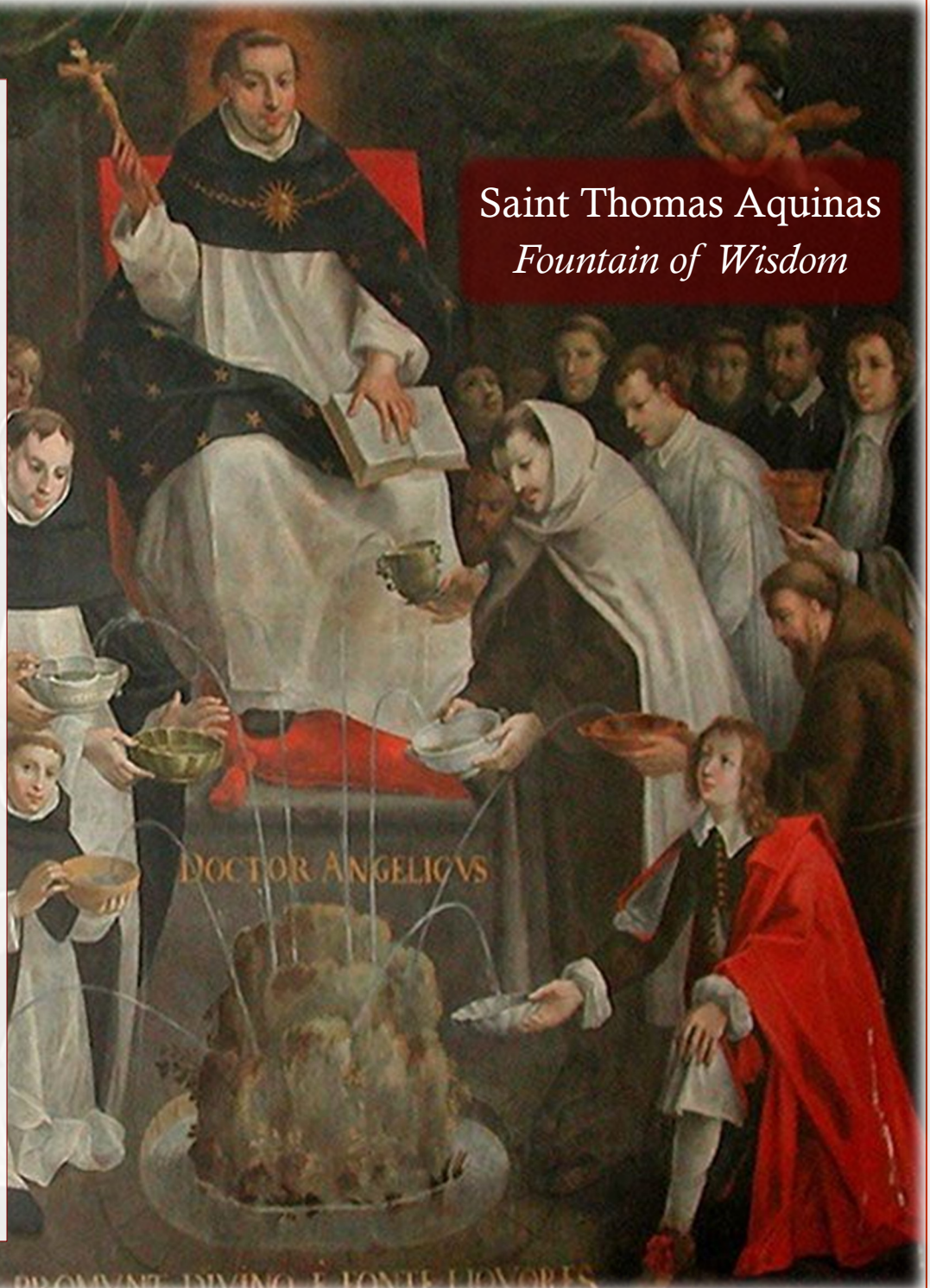
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Saint Thomas Aquinas
Fountain of Wisdom



Jesus, Shepherd mild and meek, shield the poor, support the weak; help all who Thy pardon sue, placing all their trust in You: fill them with Your healing grace! Source of all we have or know, feed and lead us here below. grant that with Your Saints above, sitting at the feast of love we may see You face to face. Amen. Alleluia.

~ St Thomas Aquinas, **Lauda Sion**

LETTER FROM MOTHER PRIORESS

T*he Master is here and calleth thee.*

Especially in the month of April, the month of the Blessed Sacrament, these beautiful words should echo in our heart as we pass by a church or, as religious, when we hear the convent bell toll throughout the day to call us to the chapel. There Someone is dwelling night and day in the tabernacle, waiting for us to render the homage that is His due. As a Dominican Sister once wrote, partly quoting St Catherine of Siena, *“There He is, all God, all man, hidden under the whiteness of a little piece of bread”*. For religious, the bell is the voice of God calling us to our school of prayer, where we will learn everything that we need to be taught. Mother Margaret Mary Hallahan O.P., a great English Dominican foundress, instructed her sisters, *“Go often before the Tabernacle; take the image of your crucified God into your hands, and you will learn everything.”* Our great Dominican giant, St Thomas Aquinas, also tells us that he learnt everything at the foot of the crucifix, before Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. It is to St Thomas, the Theologian and the Sacred Songster of the Eucharist, that the *Adoro Te* is attributed as the highest and best expression of all that can be said of the Blessed Eucharist.

During the past few months we have been privileged to celebrate the feasts of these two great Eucharistic saints of our Order, as well as some other feasts unique to the Dominican Rite. As you will see, this edition of our newsletter has a Thomistic touch, because we are in the midst of celebrating a triple jubilee in honour of the Angelic Doctor and Patron of Schools. With great solemnity we celebrated his feast on March 7th which also coincided with the 750th anniversary of his death. We had a sung Mass with the girls and then our traditional debating and poetry competition to mark the occasion. On April 24th we celebrated the feast of the crown of thorns, instituted in the middle of the 13th century when St Louis commissioned the Dominicans to celebrate it in La Sainte Chapelle, built to house this

precious relic after two Dominicans brought the crown from Constantinople for him. In return the Dominicans were privileged to be gifted with some thorns. The crown has great significance in our lives as the sisters choose the crown of thorns during their reception of the habit ceremony, in imitation of St Catherine of Siena, who did likewise when Our Lord offered her the choice of two crowns, one of roses and the other of thorns. It is for our golden jubilee of profession that we are given the crown of roses to wear in return for our fidelity and perseverance. Next year, God willing, our foundress will be given her crown of roses on Easter Monday, when she will celebrate her 50th anniversary of profession. Please pray for her—*ad multos annos!* It was common in her old congregation to remind the sisters, when struggling with their daily difficulties, that they had “chosen the crown of thorns”. In anticipation of St Catherine’s own feast, we had our annual music competition on April 26th, of which you can read more about later in this issue. On her feast, April 30th, we had a beautiful sung Mass with our pupils followed by a shared lunch and an afternoon of outdoor activities for the girls to enjoy in their respective houses. On the eve of the Ascension, May 8th, our Order celebrates the feast of Our Lady Mediatrix of All Graces. This year it fell during our school holidays, and Our Lady certainly brought great graces for our community during this time.

Several other festivities this autumn also reminded us of the great gift of the Blessed Sacrament—Corpus Christi, with its beautiful office written by St Thomas; the Feast of Pentecost, when the children of the parish made their first Communion; and a special first communion day for our new boarder, as well as the feasts of St Paschal Baylon, patron of the Eucharistic Crusade, and Blessed Imelda, the Dominican patroness of First Communicants. May each returning autumn, each month of the Blessed Sacrament, bring us a greater appreciation of this priceless treasure, reminding us that, every day, *“The Master is here and calleth thee.” “There He is!”*

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St Thomas Aquinas:

Doctor of the Church and Dominican

As this newsletter comes out, we are in the midst of a triple jubilee related to St Thomas Aquinas's life. On 18 July 2023 we celebrated the 700th anniversary of his canonisation. On 7 March 2024 we celebrated the 750th anniversary of his death. And on 28 January 2025 we will celebrate the 800th anniversary of his birth.

St Thomas was born at the family castle, Rocca Secca, near Naples. His upbringing helped to develop his enormous capacity for information and for processing information. At the age of five he was sent to the Benedictines at Monte Cassino to be educated, and there was a thought in the family brain that he might become Abbot of the monastery in due time. However, he was removed from Monte Cassino because his family was embroiled in a quarrel with the papacy. Instead of training to be abbot, Thomas was sent to University in Naples. It was all done very properly with a servant to look after him, but Thomas, a boy of tireless curiosity, managed to meet and be enchanted by a new religious order of wandering beggars, the Dominicans. Thomas, indeed, went ahead and joined this order

– very different from being able to say, “My son, the Abbot” would be to say “My son the wandering beggar”. Thomas’s father was dead by this time but his mother kicked up a terrible fuss, appealing to the Pope among other things. The Master-General thought that Thomas would be better out of Italy and sent him with a group of Dominicans who were going to Paris.

However, Thomas’s brothers ambushed the group,

kidnapped Thomas, took him to one of the family castles and locked him up! Thomas was angry for once in his calm life especially when his brothers pushed a woman of ill-repute into his cell. He chased the woman with a glowing brand from the fire and she fled. Later that night angels came to gird St Thomas with a cincture of chastity. From this comes the Dominican custom of wearing the “St Thomas’s Cord”.

After about a year of imprisonment Thomas was sprung by his sisters who let him down the castle wall in a basket into the hands of a waiting delegation of Dominicans. It is possible that his brothers connived at the “escape” also. They were probably tired of being gaolers to a younger brother who remained placid and was bored with any argument they made about the family honour. They would not have sympathised with Thomas’s project of learning the scriptures off by heart.

Thomas was again sent to Paris where he studied under St Albert the Great, who recognised Thomas’s ability when the other students thought he was slow and stupid! Thomas went to

Cologne with Albert for a few years to complete his own studies, then returned to Paris to take his degrees as a lecturer and then as a Master in the university system of the time.

Thomas spent the rest of his life shuttling among the Dominican Houses in the university centres of Europe. Some people, G.K. Chesterton for one, even suggest that he visited Oxford.

However, Thomas, helped by his faithful secretary, Father Reginald, did an enormous amount of



St. Albert the Great with his student, St. Thomas Aquinas

writing in his comparatively short life. It is suggested that his greatest work is the Summa Theologiae, a very accessible treatment of combined theology and philosophy dealing with all the doctrines of Catholicism in a question and answer format which includes objections to the doctrines and answers to the objections. Another massive work was the Summa Contra Gentiles. Thomas is said to have “baptised Aristotle” because he showed how Aristotle’s teaching could contribute to the exposition of Catholic teaching. Thomas also wrote extensively about the Holy Scriptures. Of his works on Scripture the best known are the Catena Aurea, or Golden Chain, a series of commentaries on the Gospels in which Thomas creates chains of quotations from the Fathers of the Church to illustrate the four Gospels. Yet Thomas could write in a way that appeals to ordinary Catholics.

When the feast of Corpus Christi was being established the Pope asked both St Thomas and his friend St Bonaventure, a Franciscan, to write liturgies for the new feast. Unfortunately, Bonaventure had a chance to read St Thomas’s contribution and destroyed his own work. St Thomas’s hymns for the Feast of Corpus Christi are some of the best-loved hymns the Church has. They are familiar to the faithful because parts of them are used for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Even lapsed Catholics and dyed-in-the-wool Novus Ordo Catholics admit that Thomas’s beautiful hymns make them remember and celebrate the days when everybody went to Benediction.

Thomas’s versatility is seen when one looks at a list of his writings. He seems to have covered all

aspects of Christian thought with great mastery—and in an eloquent and captivating style. His talent made him a giant in his own time and also in all Christian centuries up to the present. He may have towered over other men physically but he towers over every century intellectually.

Sadly, Thomas died comparatively young at the age of fifty-one. He had been asked by the Pope to attend the Church Council to be held at Lyons in 1274. He set out for the Council but became sick on the road and took refuge at the home of his sister.

However, he soon realised that he was dying and asked to be taken to a nearby monastery so that he could die in a religious house. Even while he was sick he gave lectures to the monks on the Cantic of Canticles. However, his illness worsened, and he made his last confession and died peacefully on 7 March 1274.

A short time before the end of his life Thomas had some sort of vision which made him say that, “Compared with what I have seen, all that I have written seems just straw”. Fortunately, he seems to have had no inclination to destroy his writings and

they have come down to us in all their value and beauty. Thomas did not want a reward for his writing. He was observed praying in the chapel when the Figure on the crucifix said to him, “Thomas, you have written well of Me. What will you have?” St Thomas replied,

Nought but Thyself, O Lord.



Autumn: News from St Dominic's Convent

“Contemplare et contemplata aliis tradere”

'To contemplate and to hand on to others the fruit of contemplation'.

These well-known words of St Thomas resonate in every Dominican heart. Contemplation is the purpose of our entire life – not the aim of Dominicans alone, but rather as St Thomas points out, something for which every member of Christ's Mystical Body should strive (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 180, a. 4).

Our Sodalities, even the youngest of these, strive to embody this motto. The Eucharistic Crusade this year has grown to include over 60 members. One might be tempted to question if any contemplation is going on in those young minds amidst the noise that so many children in one place inevitably produce. Yet, St Thomas points out that contemplation does not rest in the intellect alone but must be united to the affective powers (*Summa Theologica* II-II, q. 180, a. 1). And with the Crusaders the seed of contemplation is being planted as the children line up to genuflect before the Blessed Sacrament and hand in their 'treasure' charts, which comprise the many acts of love offered to Our Lord in Masses, Communion, visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

The Children of Mary has also grown this year to over 40 members. We have welcomed eight new consecrated members and 12 new aspirants. In becoming members of the Children of Mary the girls increase their spiritual commitments, taking on the additional responsibilities of attending Sodality Masses, a holy hour on first Fridays, fortnightly spiritual talks and daily spiritual reading. The Children of Mary also strive *'to hand on to others the fruit of contemplation.'* As charity starts at home, the girls give a good example of living their faith by their dedication to church cleaning, arranging flowers for the altar, setting up the Altar of repose, visiting the rest home and organising Kids' Day Out.

May Our Lady and St Thomas continue to help the members of our sodalities strive to greater holiness.



Feast of St Thomas Aquinas



This year's feast of St Thomas Aquinas was a particularly special one, being part of the jubilee of the 750th year of his heavenly birth. St Thomas once said, quoting St Hilary, *"I am aware that I owe it to God, as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of Him"*. The juniors therefore entertained parents, teachers and fellow-classmates with dramatised selections from *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, recalling the importance of truth and honesty in all our dealings. Eight Form 4 and 5 girls defended (in true Thomistic style with objections and 'sed contra' authorities) theses as varied as children's voting rights, cow-keeping as essential to the family economy, and wilderness camping as an educational experience.

The six seniors of each house faced off in debates that attempted to draw the line between uses of art and technology that help us to appreciate reality and those that seek to escape or distort it. While some debates, such as "Virtual reality does more harm than good," turned out to be quite abstract for an audience that reckons little of such technology, the question whether "women should not wear makeup" held the attention of Sisters, pupils and guests alike, proving that the application of perennial principles to current questions will stimulate the intellects of any age. Besides poetry, oratory and debate for the mind, the day featured ice cream for the body and a sung Mass for the soul—all for the honour and glory of God, the First Truth, in fulfilment of our chief duty as defined by the Saint of the day.

Annual Music Competition

Looking around the school, before the Music Competition, the rehearsals promised a performance extraordinaire. Looking at the year's theme, before the Music Competition, it was tantalising guessing what sorts of songs would be chosen to suit it. 'Veritas' is about the broadest school theme you can get — consequently, entailing endless musical possibilities. But looking back, after the Music Competition, it must be said, quite truthfully, that the 2024 Competition was a high-water mark event for both the devoted performers and the dedicated organisers. Veritas was ubiquitous.



Appropriately, the night began with a tribute to Truth Incarnate in the Irish-tinged test pieces, the 'Lorica of Saint Patrick' and 'Christ Be With Me.' Then followed a stunning array of vocal, instrumental and ensemble pieces, all glistening or glowing with some spark of Veritas. Truth being so broad for all it is utterly one, the colourful variety of moods and themes and chords and choreography was truly delightful, enlightening the audience as to the many ways in which Veritas colours human experience. Here are a handful of the truth-gems on display that night: the beauty of butterflies, rainbows, mornings and waterfalls; the sturdy realities of work (like digging in a mine), time (even when you are walking in the air) and thought (such as the musical logic of a sonata-form piece); and that elusive but very real aspect of human experience: humour. It would be true to say that that night the stage sparkled with stars – musicians whose music was infused with Veritas.



Whether Veritas is a fitting theme for a Music Competition?

Obj. 1 – It would seem that Veritas (truth) is not a fitting theme for a Music Competition. For competitions involve striving for prizes. But all may partake of Veritas without strife. Therefore Veritas is not a fitting theme.

Obj. 2 – Further, music connotes beauty. But Veritas is not beauty. Therefore 'beauty' is a more fitting theme than Veritas.

Sed contra: 'In the beginning was the Word ... and without Him nothing was made.' But the Word-made-Flesh said 'I am the Truth' — Veritas. Therefore, without Veritas nothing was made, including music.

Respondeo: Veritas is a fitting theme for a Music Competition, and this for two reasons. Firstly, because a thing must be before it can be anything, just as a cake must exist before it can be iced. Hence, by the truth of its existence, a Music Competition pays tribute to Veritas. Secondly, because Veritas (truth), goodness and beauty are closely inter-related, such that if a thing is good, it partakes of truth and beauty. For this reason, if a thing is truly beautiful, it partakes of the true. Wherefore, a Music Competition, which presents beautiful sounds, may fittingly have the theme of Veritas.

Ad 1 – All may partake of Veritas without strife, but effort is needed to overcome the obstacles in attaining Veritas.

Ad 2 – If a thing is beautiful, as the music featured in the Competition truly was, it partakes of Veritas, as stated above.





Fraternity of the Angelic Doctor

Most of our readers and past pupils will be familiar with the cord of St Philomena—advocated especially by the Children of Mary Sodality, having St Philomena as their patroness. Many may not, however, be familiar with other cords under the patronage of the saints—the powerful cord of St Joseph or the perhaps less-well-known cord of St Thomas. The origin of the latter dates back to St Thomas’ life, when he himself was girded by a miraculous cord by two angels.

The combat of St Thomas

“At the tender age of sixteen, Thomas renounced the brilliant future that awaited him in the world, in order to bury himself in the cloister under the humble frock of the Friars Preachers...

“At the first news of this unexpected resolution, his noble and powerful family was dismayed, and resolved to do everything in their power to oppose the accomplishment of his generous purpose. In vain did he try to flee from Naples to Rome, and from Rome to Paris; surprised on the way by his brothers, who had set out in pursuit of him at the head of a troop of armed men, he was brought back as a captive to the castle of Aquino, and confined to a

narrow prison.

“But as nothing could shake his constancy, his brothers had recourse, to triumph over the heroic young man, to a means suggested by hell.

“A woman of ill repute was introduced into the room where Thomas was alone. The struggle was what it should have been, to the glory of the athlete of Christ – that is, short and decisive. Unable to take the side advised in such cases by the wisdom of the Gospel (viz., flight), he adopted another kind of combat, he created new weapons in the presence of an enemy as dangerous as it was unavoidable.

“Raising his gaze to Heaven, and taking a burning firebrand, he pushes back and pursues the unfortunate woman who had made herself the instrument of his brothers’ plan.

“Then with the same firebrand – the instrument of his victory – he drew a cross on the bare wall of his prison, fell on his knees, returning to God the honour of his triumph, and renewing in this glorious and memorable circumstance the vow which consecrated him entirely to the Lord...

The cincture of divine combat

“While he was praying, a sweet sleep came over him, similar (as a pious author says) to that of the first man in the earthly Paradise. All the ancient historians relate that the angels visited him in this ecstasy of virginity, and that after congratulating him on a victory which gave one more warrior to their immaculate phalanxes, they girded his loins with the cincture of divine combat, saying to him: “We come to you from God, to confer upon you the gift of perpetual virginity – of which he gives you from this moment the irrevocable grace.”

“But Thomas was not made a knight of Heaven and purity without a strong feeling of pain which suddenly called him back to the outside world. At the involuntary groaning of his awakening, his guards came running. But he sent them away, taking care not to tell these rude men of the singular favours he had just received.

“His deep humility kept these absolutely hidden for the rest of his life. It was only when he was about to die that he revealed the secret to Father Reginald, his confessor, and the last and most intimate of his friends. He confessed in the end the mercies of the Lord, telling him that since the day of the struggle and triumph, the celestial cord had sheltered him from those temptations so humiliating for the Christian, and from those insulting blows of Satan’s angel, which the great apostle always experienced in spite of the sublimity of his revelations and the immensity of his works.

The cord itself

“The miraculous cord that Thomas received from the angels, and which he wore until the end of his life, was given to the house of the Dominicans of Vercelli, in Piedmont, by Bl John of Vercelli, sixth master general of the Order. {Today the cord is located in the Dominican Church of Chieri, outside of Turin, Italy}

The confraternity

“On this model, other similar cords were soon made, consecrated by the memory of Saint Thomas Aquinas and by the blessings of the Church. They became the distinctive mark and powerful weapon of a new religious association, called “The Angelic

Militia”, whose aim was either to preserve the sacred treasure of purity, or to regain it after having lost it.

“This holy legion, armed by the triumph of the spirit over the flesh, spread with marvellous rapidity to all parts of Europe, and has continued to this day. For more than five centuries, in fact, we have seen people from all walks of life, from those whose affluence seconded their inclinations, to those whose poverty could not overcome their passions, gather under the banner of this beautiful and chaste militia.” Saints of the confraternity include St Aloysius Gonzaga, Pier Giorgio Frassati, and Bl. Columba of Rieti

The approbation of the Church

No less than eleven Popes have turned their attention to the spread of this confraternity, in many instances, strongly urging the faithful to embrace this remarkable remedy against temptations of bodily concupiscence. Through these Popes, the Church has richly endowed the noble cause, with privileges and indulgences.” Pope Pius XI even wrote encouragingly: “*that the Faithful may be persuaded the more eagerly to enrol in this Militia, We grant members of it the privilege of wearing instead of a cord a medal round the neck impressed on the obverse with a picture of St. Thomas*

and the angels surrounding him with a girdle and on the reverse a picture of Our Lady, Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.” (Studiorum Ducem, 1923)

“Kings and queens took pride in wearing the cord of Saint Thomas and the Blessed Virgin; it became especially popular among students in all universities. And who could say how many impure desires it stifled in its chaste embrace, how many heroic virtues it made germinate? Who could count the despairs it prevented, the futures it guaranteed against the dreadful storms of youth? The sacred heritage of a great man and a great saint, the precious monument of the decisive struggle that saved his genius as well as his purity!” The cord may also be worn—with the special Dominican blessing—outside the official confraternity and will still gain countless graces for its wearer.

Excerpts from pamphlet: Confrérie de la Milice Angélique ou du Cordon de St Thomas d’Aquin, Rue St Nicolas, Montreal, 1863, Translated by The WM Review; and “The Angelic Warfare” By Fr Matthias Robinson OP, Dominicana Journal, Vol. 26, Issue 1 – Spring, 1941, pp 21-5

“If St. Thomas had not been victorious when his chastity was in peril, it is very probable that the Church would never have had her Angelic Doctor.”

— Pope Pius XI

Photo Chronicle—Autumn

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

{Counter-Clockwise, starting at left top}

Procession on Palm Sunday, stopping outside the door of our chapel; Our Chaplain gives us weekly conferences on the Summa of St Thomas or a spiritual topic—he has nearly completed the praiseworthy project of a commentary on our Holy Rule of St Augustine—a topic which the sisters immensely appreciate; With growing numbers in the school, we have introduced a new House, *Galway*, to the Interhouse Competitions. The new House represents another stepping stone in the spread of the Order, with sisters going from France to Ireland, and then from Ireland to New Zealand. The colour of the new House is green and its patron, St Patrick. To promote devotion to our College's House Patrons we have also reinstituted the custom of specially celebrating House Patrons on their feast days; Members of Galway's inaugural year 2024; The pupils planting in their College House's allocated garden—part of the interhouse competitions; Pupils enjoying the 'new' school sport—Pickle Ball—with additional courts being painted onto our school netball court as well; On Pentecost, we continue the tradition of each sister receiving different cards—one Gift and one Fruit of the Holy Ghost—while singing the Veni Creator at the office of Terce, the traditional time commemorating the Descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost; Also on the Feast of Pentecost, the first communicants received our Lord in the Eucharist for the first time. *Deo Gratias!*



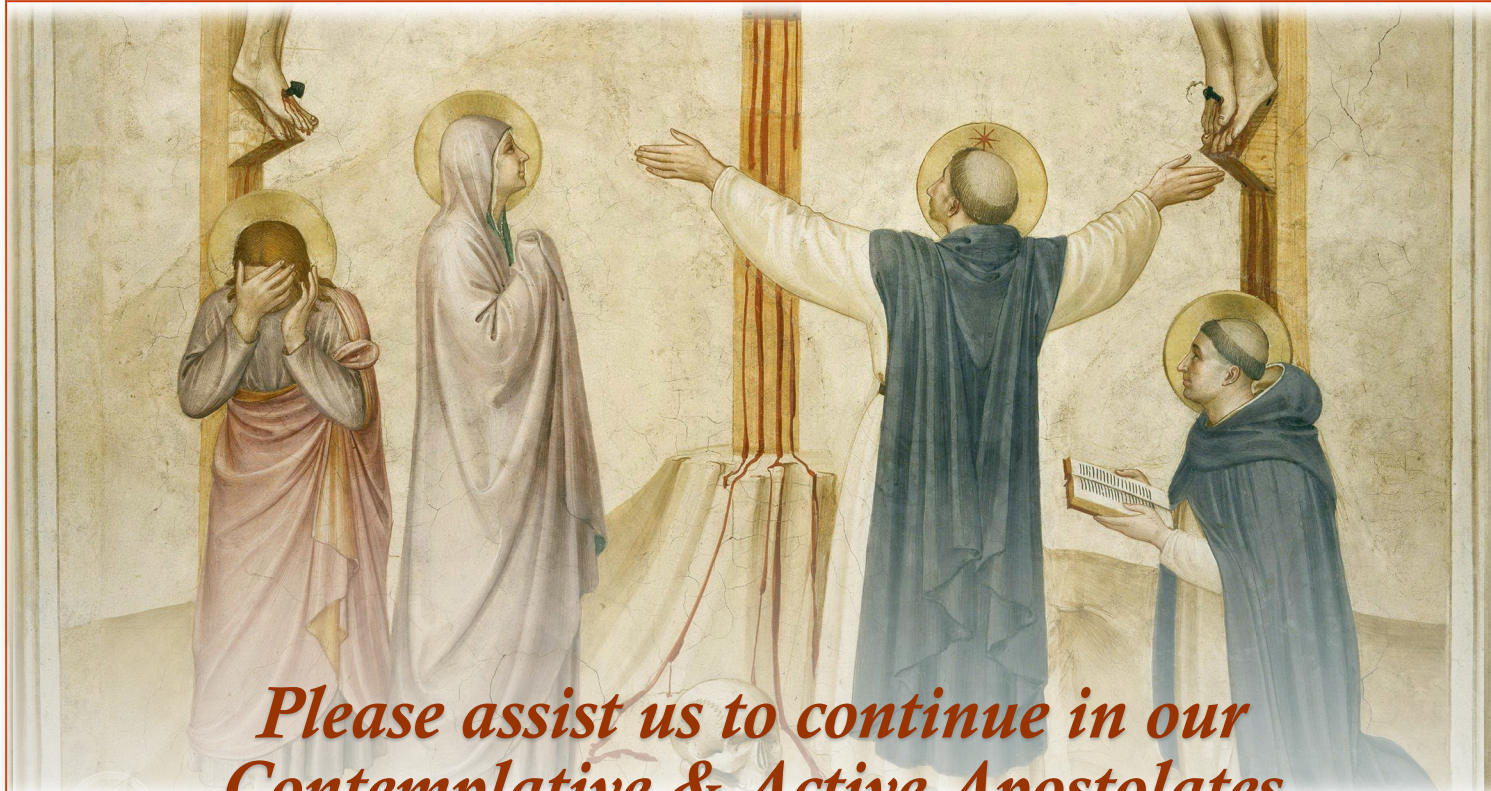
Bologna Feast day: June 9th Patrons: Blessed Diana, Cecilia and Amata	Calaroga Feast day: May 24 th (transferral of the body of St Dominic) Patron: St Dominic
Prouille Feast Day: July 22 nd Patrons: Our Lady and St Mary Magdalene	Galway Feast Day: March 17 th Patron: St Patrick



Construction Chronicle—*Autumn*

{Clockwise from Top left} Blessing of new guest quarters on the feast of St Catherine April 30; Ground was also broken on April 30 for the new fence and gate project for our convent and guest quarters. Progress was steadily and quickly made throughout the month of May by our faithful builders balancing several projects at once, with the fence being nearly completed and the large posts in place for the three gates which will be built; Gates will be built at the bottom of each driveway—connected by the new fence—to better combine the two properties and offer better security and privacy; the soon-to-be built fence and a smaller gate near the steps of the guest quarters will also provide a boundary between the cloister and the apartment.





Please assist us to continue in our Contemplative & Active Apostolates

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.

Thank you to 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.

Queen of the Most Holy Rosary, pray for us!

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

Please note that the banks in NZ no longer accept cheques. Apologies for the inconvenience.

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:
Dominican Sisters, Attn: Loren Vaccarezza, 2240 Paragon Drive, San Jose, CA 95131
All donations to our U.S. account now qualify for a tax deductible receipt!

OR VIA PAYPAL

Visit our website at <https://www.opsisters.org.nz/fundraising>