

Our Scripture today for St Dominic perfectly resumes the themes of yesterday. Dominic wanted to found a new order for two purposes: first to create an ambience where the members could seek personal holiness through poverty, chastity and obedience; and secondly so that the special vocation to intellectual study of theology and religion and the things of the spirit could bear fruit in the preaching of healthy doctrine in a wandering world where heresy was filling the space where truth should have held sway.

Heresy is a word that isn't politically correct. It is based on the Greek word for *choosing*, and it represents the decision to treat spiritual statements of all sorts as a kind of chocolate-box, from which any individual can make up his or her own set of beliefs with equal justice.

Put like that, you can see at once that we are living in an heretical world; people think personal beliefs are sacrosanct areas of freedom, where one opinion is as good as another, and the consequences are minimal in any case; religion is of small importance, and as long as we keep it private and don't try to draw any big conclusions from it, it can do little harm.

The flying of two jets into the World Trade Centre Towers in 2001 brought this curious conclusion into sharp doubt. People suddenly began to notice that religious beliefs lie behind moral decisions, and that unless we start to take care of what people allow themselves to think, we shall find the falling of two-hundred-floor skyscrapers the least of our worries. The decision to let people believe what they like suddenly appears to be pretty unhygienic. The problem now is that we don't know what to offer people as a system of belief that can once more build a trustworthy society that is safe with jets and skyscrapers and guns and poisonous gas, nuclear power stations, and high finance, pension funds, internet access, fast cars, and knives and alcohol and drugs.

Dominic had a lot to deal with, but nothing like that list. However, we celebrate Dominic today for a good reason. The truth about human nature may look very different to us today; but the truth about God has not changed, and the truth about humanity is in the end going to be the truth about God. Our faith does not depend on the thought of Dominic or the thought of Pope Benedict. It depends on the truth of God which is far beyond the power of either of these holy people to grasp or express. Therefore the power of any human being to sell us the truth or mould us in its image is extremely limited. The holiest of guides will be the one who teaches us no human thinking, but the spaces where the divine word of God can resound. That is why the poverty and chastity and obedience of Dominic is so important. He stripped himself of human dignity in order to become a listener and a receiver of the mystery of God. That is the treasure that he went through the world to proclaim, and he did it so that people would not seek for human rewards or a secure home or earthly achievement, but the most precious pearl of all: the knowledge of the God who calls us to seek his presence and be our great reward.

Lord help us to lay our emptied hands on the plough, and not to take our eye from the furrow until your work in us is complete.