The name Dominic says so much of the man we honour today. The Latin word DOMINUSfrom which his name derives tells us simply: he is of the Lord, of GOD, belonging to God – God’s man. I have always loved that thought when thinking of Dominic and his intense love of God. We’re told that he was a person who spoke mainly “of God or to God”. At the same time Jordan of Saxony used of him this lovely phrase, “*nemo communius*.” Our brother, Chris, translates this: “there was no-one who was better company.” People were drawn to Dominic like flies to a honey-pot because of his friendly, manly nature: someone completely given to God, and at the same time intensely interested in others – a marvellous balance. Legend tells us that Dominic’s mother, Blessed Jane of Aza, had a dream before his birth. She saw a dog running round the world with a lighted torch in its mouth. This idea has been applied cleverly to the Order itself. We are Dominicans, yes, but in the orginal Latin it sound so much better, we are *Domini canes*, the dogs, the hounds of the Lord: that from the beginning our brother Dominic was to be a preacher of grace, with a torch in his hand from which shone forth the light of Christ: to be not just light, but a source of Christ’s light, the LIGHT OF THE CHURCH, as one of our ancient prayers names him.

Legends and powerful memories of this man have sparked the Dominican liturgists who chose the readings for this solemnity. They wanted us to reflect on scripture in such a way that we’d remember this man as he was – joyous and compassionate, but looking clearly at what he points us to. It is futile to talk of Dominic as he was, without thinking of what’s going on presently. How are we to be *lumines Ecclesiae*, a people that shines forth the light of the Gospel - not just within the church, but beyond, to a world, often dark, and always in need of light? That is this call that God makes over and over again - to each generation of Dominicans – “Be a Gospel people for whom truth is a light.”

For us here in Aotearoa/New Zealand, that call seems quite unwittingly to have been given first to Father Leonard de Villefeix, a French Dominican priest who was chaplain to Dumont D’Surville’s expedition in the Antipodes, and who celebrated the first Mass in this country on Christmas Day 1769. Next, on 18 February 1871, ten Irish Dominican Sisters stepped off the wharf at Port Chalmers, and within days of their arrival were teaching both primary and secondary school to young Catholics: a win-win situation for the newly founded Diocese of Dunedin and for the sisters who saw themselves as teachers of truth. Their struggles over the next twenty years to set up small convents in Otago and Southland, with meager resources and often no money, are little known stories of courage and endurance, in the face of some real pove rty. Not surprisingly, in no time, these same sisters had lay people helping them in their work of teaching the faith. They grouped them into what became the Dominican Tertiaries. The last to be called here were four Irish friars, the real Johnny-come-latelys. They went two by two, gospel like, to Dunedin and Auckland in 1949. The first Auckland men began by teaching philosophy at Loreto Hall, and later with university chaplaincy at Newman Hall.

And in the fullness of time, you have the present sisters, friars and laity. Most of us have responded to this call of preaching and teaching the truth of the Gospel in good, ordinary ways, through teaching in lecture rooms and school classrooms, preaching homilies, leading retreats, helping with ministry to the deaf and giving spiritual direction. Some preach in more challenging ways: through the creative arts, painting, composing music, and writing or being involved with human rights and justice projects especially with the environment. A few others have spoken Gospel truth to power. Many of you will have seen in the film “The Fifth Eye,” which has just been shown in the local Film Festival. This remarkable story of the Waihopai Three is told with great respect, showing that it was the truth of the Gospel message that drove these men to do what they did, one of them being a Dominican friar. In Aotearoa we are now 39 sisters and four friars, mostly elderly. Not so for the lay Dominican Family group; they are younger, and much more numerous. Together, we enter into the work of preaching the truth of the Gospel in a great variety of ways, with a strong desire to serve.

I believe that it is quite simply the power of the God’s Word alive and well in our lives which keeps us going and being as faithful as possible to the apostolic way that Dominic set out for us. In fact, it is because the Gospel has had to be interpreted and reinterpreted in each generation that the Dominican charism has survived and flourished over these 800 years. It has faltered sometimes, but has revived, and that ebb and flow continues today. In some parts of the world, mainly Africa and Asia, the Dominican family is growing, while in others it is not. I know that despite the sisters’ and friars aging and our few vocations, every Dominican in New Zealand believes that Dominic’s work for God will continue. We do not know how, but we continue to live the life of the Gospel with a measured hope and great faith that God’s wishes for us will be revealed.

We are grateful to God for the many people to whom we have been able to minister, and from whom we have received so much. You have been a source of immense strength to us. And we thank God that the red-headed Spaniard, Dominic de Guzman, was such a powerful spearhead of the truth of the Gospel. May his prophetic insight into the Word of God continue to be “salt and light” to all of us.

A special happy feast to you all, and ONWARDS TO THE NEXT 800 years!