

Trusting God's Merciful Love

Dominique Seraphim - 2025-05-01

INTRODUCTION: We concluded our 18th season with Dominique Seraphim's uplifting talk of God's merciful workings in our lives. Dominique shared her personal story and how the Lord has guided her life. She has a special devotion to St. Catherine of Sienna who said: "Be who God meant you to be, and you will set the world on fire." One of the things she has struggled with for her whole life is believing that she is a beloved daughter of the Father. There have been voices that have tried to tell her what she wasn't and what she should be, but the Lord has always called her back, reminding her that she IS His beloved daughter.

BACKGROUND: Dominique was born in Corona Queens, New York to a Haitian family steeped in the Faith, in a Hispanic neighborhood. There were all kinds of identity confusion for her growing up in this diverse environment. She did not know during those formative years that the Lord had already claimed her, and that He knew His plan for her. Faith was part of her upbringing: Mass on Sundays and Catholic school during the week, but like many of us, she reached a point where Faith was more a duty than a desire. God was patient. Since her mother was responsible for her soul, Dominique was going to Mass! Today, she thanks God for her mother being tough on her and fighting for her faith.

WORLD YOUTH DAY: When she was in High School, God cracked open the door to her heart. Her youth group was invited to attend World Youth Day in Denver, Colorado. She was not interested in the religious part, she just wanted to see the Rocky Mountains and get on a plane. Yet God uses our shallow yeses to do deep work! She saw something there that she had never seen before. She saw joyful, passionate people who were alive in their Faith. At the closing Mass, she was struck by the opening words of Pope St. John Paul II's homily: "Do not be afraid to go out into the streets and into the public places like the first Apostles who preached Christ and the good news of salvation in the squares and cities and villages. This is no time to be ashamed of the Gospel... Do not be afraid to break out of comfortable routines and modes in order to go out to the byroads." After that quote, applause continued for 17 minutes. That moment was a springboard for the Lord calling her to a deeper Faith.

RETREAT & CONFESSION: Shortly after World Youth Day, Dominique's mom invited her to attend a retreat, where she was the youngest one there. They were offering confessions at the retreat, and her mother told her she needed to go to confession – she was 18 at this point, and had not been since 7th grade for confirmation. To make her mother happy, she went to confession. But she went with the intention to lie, or at least to keep things superficial. The priest called her out on her superficial confession – he looked her in the eye and invited her to tell him the truth of what was really going on. He called her out, and she is grateful for that moment because the Holy Spirit was able to work in her and she had the first honest confession of her life. She was in confession for almost two hours and when she left, she felt the power of the experience. She did not know confession was so awesome. She felt incredible. It sparked something in her.

YOUTH 2000 & PILGRIMAGE: The priest who heard her confession, told her about the Youth 2000 retreat movement for teenagers all over New York, and said he needed her to go to one. The next weekend in her home parish bulletin she saw an announcement that Youth 2000 was coming to HER parish! Youth 2000 was born out of a vision of JP II, to see young people praying before the Eucharist. Dominique walked into a Youth 2000 retreat, and saw young people with faces beaming with joy. She saw the friars walk in, kneel down and kiss the floor, and they were staring at Jesus, which at the time she did not know was Jesus. She felt an ache in her heart for more, and she wanted what they had. She began to fall in love with the Lord. She would go on these monthly retreats all over New York, but between them, she would find herself sliding back into her old life. One day she went to confession at another retreat, and she was telling the priest about her struggles. The priest had been seeing her coming to all these retreats, and he told her that if she sits in the middle of the road she will become roadkill. She needed to make a decision – is she with the Lord or is she not with the Lord? Once again, she was called out in confession, and this convicted her.

Shortly after that, Dominique had the opportunity to go on a pilgrimage to Assisi, Medjugorje, and Rome. She was in college at the time. Grace came over her as she visited the room where St Clare of Assisi died. She felt close to her, and knew the Lord was calling her away from her college criminal justice studies.

RELIGIOUS LIFE: After the pilgrimage, Dominique felt a call to the religious life. It shocked her as she had always been "boy crazy." She looks back now and thinks that it is laughable that she became a religious sister. God has a sense of humor. She entered a convent and became Sr. Therese Faustina of the most precious Blood. St. Therese was her confirmation saint. She chose her when she was in 7th grade because of Therese's statement "my vocation is love" because Dominique loved boys! Even in our poverty and in our littleness, our saints intercede for us, and St. Therese has been interceding for her all this time. Dominique had a great devotion to Divine Mercy. St. Faustina has also interceded for her in a special way. Dominique has had great encounters with the Lord's mercy in the sacrament of confession. The graces that come in confession, in being honest and vulnerable before the Lord are incredible. Her identity was being rewritten in Christ. She was learning that she was not what she does – she was not her achievements or her failures, and she was not the voice of shame in her head. Rather, she was His! After three years, she discerned out of the religious life, but she knew the journey was not over. God was still writing her story.

COMMUNITY: After leaving the convent, one of the things Dominique deeply missed was community. She did not realize how much it meant to her until it was gone. She missed the rhythm of prayer, hearing the chapel bell ring, being with the other sisters, and the joy and support. She began to pray. She stayed connected with some friends who were seminarians in New York, and some of the friars and some friends who were Sisters of Life. She was sharing her longing for creating a space for Catholic young adults to come together, not just to pray, but to laugh, to eat, to go hiking, to have real joyful fellowship rooted in Christ. From this desire grew the Frassati Fellowship of Catholic Young Adults, named after Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati, soon to be a saint. What started as a small group gathering for authentic community has now flourished for over twenty years. She shared this story to show what the Lord did with her yes. She did not feel ready, she did not feel qualified, she was not confident. She found herself thinking I am not smart

enough, I am not eloquent enough, I am not a theologian, I really don't know what I am doing. Even giving this talk, she does not feel equipped. She has learned that the Lord does not call the equipped, He equips the called. This sense of inadequacy, this poverty has become a gift to her because it keeps her humble and dependent on the Lord and creates a space for His power to be glorified. We see this pattern in scripture over and over again, where the Lord is calling on less than perfect people to lead the way, people like Moses, David, and Peter. God chose them, redeemed them, and did amazing things through them, not because they were qualified, but because they were available. Dominique loves the show "The Chosen," because it highlights the humanity of those who were following Jesus. Even though they witnessed the miracles, they still doubted, they still compared, they still fought, they still wondered what His plan was, and they had a hard time trusting Him. And Jesus was frustrated that they did not get it. How many times does the Lord say this about us, that we just do not get it? He has done so many things in our lives, and we still do not get it! We need not write ourselves off because we think we are not good enough or not holy enough or we are not prepared enough. That voice of unworthiness is not of God. Instead, we need to offer the Lord our little desires, our longings, our yes and our open heart, and He will take it and multiply it.

Years after she left religious life, she was still discerning what to do next. She started working in the church, serving in various ways, in various parishes. In the meantime, she was dating unsuccessfully with nothing sustaining her. She spent some time in Paris, visiting her brother who was studying abroad. Here she was in the most romantic city in the world with her brother! While in Paris, she received a message from a friend in New York announcing her engagement. But Dominique was not joyful. This was an extremely picky friend who had found love. Dominique was not happy for her, and spent 20 minutes in Adoration feeling sorry for herself, having a tantrum with the Lord. After her tantrum, she felt a sense of peace – The Lord asked her to trust Him, to truly trust Him, not just seem to trust while constantly monitoring the results. How many of us find ourselves doing this type of monitoring while claiming to trust Him?

COURTSHIP & MARRIAGE: After Dominique returned from her trip, she was teaching in a Catholic High School, and found out that her students took her social media profile and signed her up on a Catholic Singles website. That evening as she was getting ready to take down the profile, a guy messaged her. He is now her husband! The Lord continues to show her that He is in charge. After a two year courtship, they married on the feast of Divine Mercy with 18 priests in attendance. For most of her life, Dominique had worn masks, trying to fit in, figuring out what others wanted her to be, in church, in friendship and in relationship. She was living up to others expectations and not walking in the freedom of her true God-given identity. Something shifted. God had done a lot of healing in her heart, and she was beginning to understand her worth, not based on how others saw her, but based on how the Lord saw her. Their wedding day was a testimony of mercy and faithfulness, not just in bringing the right person to her, but in preparing her to receive his love in freedom and truth. God waited until she could love herself in an authentic way that was rooted in God the Father. Now after 15 of marriage, she continues to walk with the Lord as a wife and a mother. Some days are quiet, most days are chaotic, but He has been present in them all. The Holy Spirit still whispers, still heals, and still guides.

A RECENT STORY: Dominique is enrolled in the Encounter School of Ministry, a ministry that teaches people how to hear the Lord's voice and empowers them in the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are taught to be bold, to listen to the voice of the Lord, to listen to the inklings of the Holy Spirit. Dominique gave a recent example where she was in a long line at a grocery store, and she heard the Lord say to her that she needed to pray with the man in line behind her. She argued with the Lord – she was tired, head achy, and he was scowling. The Lord told her she needed to pray with this man. She waited outside for him to pay and then approached him, timid and scared, and introduced herself, told him she loved the Lord, and that the Lord had put this feeling on her heart that he needed prayer. The man looked at her and immediately his scowl turned into tears. He told her that his wife had just died after a long illness, and he watched her suffer. That morning he got up and he was so angry with God that he demanded that God show him that He exists. Along came Dominique, prompted by God to seek him out. They had a profound conversation and prayed together in the parking lot of a grocery store. He came back to the faith, not because of what she did, but because she stopped fighting with the Lord. It showed her and humbled her because the Lord did not need her to have it all together. He just needs us to say "yes" to Him, even if we do not feel smart enough, good enough, not in good space today. When the Lord puts a prompting on our hearts, it is up to us to respond. This man left feeling seen and heard by God the Father. Is that not what we all want?

CALLED BY THE LORD: The Lord is constantly calling us to be aware and to hear His voice. The Encounter Ministries have helped Dominique unleash the gifts the Lord has given her. In her morning routine, when she prays, she does some scripture reading and she says declarations out loud, banishing the lies she has believed. And then she speaks truths in the name of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, I am loved, I am seen, and I am worthy. The lies that come into our head can destroy us. We each have a reason for existing. And women especially love to compare themselves to other women, the spirit of comparison. Lord, I banish the spirit of comparison. We all have different gifts. We were made for more. Sometimes we spend so much time obsessing what we are not that we forget what we are. The Lord prompts our hearts to more – it is not a burden, it is an invitation. The Lord does the heavy lifting. We just need to show up, to be ready to say yes! "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). "For all who are led by the Spirit are children of God" (Romans 8:14). It is not about being the most gifted, or the most ready. It is about being led. If God puts someone on our heart, trust Him. He is already preparing that person's heart to receive, we just have to be willing to reach out to them.

CONCLUSION: Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts. Listen for God in the grocery store, in lines, and during sleepless nights. Trust God that we are never alone. Let go of comparison. Silence the voices that say we are not enough. Our stories are sacred. Our wounds are the places where His glory shines the brightest. We are chosen, we are seen. We are filled with the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. Let us walk together in this Truth, not with fear, but with the fire of the Holy Spirit. Let us live as healed women, rooted in Christ, on a mission, with love, and let us set the world on fire.

Q & A: One question asked for her advice on how to reach teens who do not show much interest in their faith. Dominique used the example of her mother, who gave her and her brother many opportunities to attend conferences and retreats and other Catholic youth events. Dominique said to encourage them to make their Faith their own. Young people are particularly drawn to acts of service, and tying the Faith in makes these experiences profound. Experiential things have an impact, and Dominique encouraged us moms to step away and let them experience them on their own.