

DESIRE AND FULFILMENT

[The following extract from some meditations composed by a Belgian Dominican, Father Jordan W. Dreessen, during a long imprisonment in Bochum concentration camp, has been adapted from *Loïn du Courant* in the January issue of *Evangeliser* (Liège). Fr Dreessen never returned to the convent of which he speaks so affectionately, for he died in his prison in March 1945. The Germans gave out this had happened during an allied air-raid on Bochum on 12th March, but his Breviary recorded a somewhat different version; one borne out in fact by the bullet in his neck when his body was recovered after the liberation. For on the page of the Breviary for 11th March there was, in pencil, the simple word 'condemnatio' followed by an arrow and a cross.—L.B.]



WITH a vividness I had not felt hitherto in this prison of mine, the last days of July brought home to me the reality of my being far away from my convent. I know, of course, that no matter where we go we still have our convent with us—an inner cell into which we may withdraw; an interior homeland from which nothing can sunder us. July 30th, however, happened to be the tenth anniversary of that wonderful Saturday on the evening of which I made immolation of myself to God by uttering the words 'even unto death'. That day remains the most beautiful day of my life; the most beautiful because on that day I experienced in the most complete manner possible the joy flowing from my choice and sensed the immensity of the 'sacrifice by desire' I had made. . . . I thank God for the grace to have persevered; he has not left me a prey to my own weakness. Often have I said, echoing the words of St Philip Neri: 'Lord, keep a good grip on me, for I am liable to betray you'. And God has kept hold of me, and I want to cling to him more than ever now. More than ever, too, am I overcome with joy at the grace of my vocation; a calling by God due to no merit of mine. More Dominican too am I now than when wearing that habit which really goes so little to the making of a monk and which is at the moment in the keeping of the vestiarian awaiting my return. . . . More than ever *usque ad mortem*. 'Where you do not wish to go, there shall I make you go' is more or less what Jesus said to Peter. See what the generous soul has to undergo in realising, in the way God wishes us to realise those desires of immolation framed during the years of formation:

how, also, God raises the structure of our personal life. Our religious life, our priestly life . . . reflect, however modestly, the life of Christ, yet how they differ from those models of sanctity from whom our inspiration came! Fathers Lacordaire and Didon, great apostles that you are and inferior only to Paul and Dominic, were we to build as you have built, we should be forever tearing down our edifices! I am insignificant and trail far behind you; yet I, too, have been bathed with you in the same ray of light and of blood; have had my share of trials for the Apostolate. Trials next-to-nothing, perhaps, but something at least in that by their inexpressible hardness and tangibility they provide the reality which realises desires, and some drop of the blood with which words must be sprinkled if they are to be fruitful in the saving of souls. *Propter electos sustineo!*

It is, happily, thoughts such as these with which my mind is preoccupied. On this the eve of St Dominic I am tasting anew the utter isolation of my cell. Yet, when the soul itself is not shuttered up and the heart forgives and does not harbour ill-feeling when chastisement is meted out by men, a cell can be far less confined than one would expect. I have, besides, something within me giving me a greater range than any radio or transmitting set could: the life of God which so tempers my mind with its light that I am enabled to range afar on waves of the spirit. I am alone, however, utterly alone with God; alone also with a pitiful 'self' which deepening faith and a fuller understanding of the mystery of the redemption must mould. The implications of co-redemption are becoming clearer at last. '*Non sicut ego volo sed sicut tu vis.*' And what of Bochum? Should not I admit that, like St Dominic who loved Carcassone when he had been made to suffer, I love this place betimes? Indeed when all this is over and I shall have renewed my contact with men and their dissipations and duperies, I shall dream often of the pregnant silences of that captivity in which I attained to some appreciation of the essentials of life. So much moved am I in fact that I want to cry out to St Dominic this evening and re-echo what I feel in the depths of my filial soul: 'Oh, Blessed Father, I love this prison. Here it is that God wishes I should bleed for those souls who have been rather committed to my desires than given a chance to hear my words. It is in this prison and not in a normal apostolate that I shall speak of God or to God: the thousands of envelopes which I have to make are so many thousand souls to be saved; the souls indeed of those who will use these envelopes and never dream that the hands that gummed them together were priestly hands.'