

The life of Father Daniel O'Daly (1595?-1662)

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Igreja de Corpo Santo, Largo do Corpo Santo, Cais do Sodré

Introduction

Ever since it was built, the Corpo Santo church in the Cais do Sodre district of Lisbon has been closely associated with the Irish Catholic community, a fact which is generally taken for granted. What is not so well known maybe is the history of Father Daniel O'Daly, better known in his time as 'Father Dominic of the Rosary' (*Domingos do Rosario*).

¹ The BHA was in existence in Portugal from 1937 to 1954.

Early Life

Born in Kilsarkan near Castleisland, County Kerry in about 1595. The O'Dalys of Kilsarkan lost their extensive property in the Munster plantation when they were identified in the Inquisition of 1584 as being supporters of Gerald Fitzgerald, the Earl of Desmond, in his rebellion against Queen Elizabeth I. Due to religious persecution, Daniel O'Daly left Ireland as a youth and joined the Dominican Order in Spain, first at Lugo in the province of Galicia, where he adopted the name 'Dominic', which is why he is known in Portuguese as '*Frei Domingos do Rosario*', under which title he most often appeared in European diplomacy. He completed his studies at Burgos. Following his ordination he taught a course of philosophy and theology at Bordeaux, then returned to Ireland for missionary work in the Emly diocese on the borders of Co. Limerick and Co. Tipperary as a 'fugitive' priest with no fixed abode. However soon he was to go back to the Continent in charge of the newly-founded college at Louvain in the Spanish Netherlands, where the Irish Dominican province was endeavouring to found a college for the Irish nation. A visit to Madrid in 1629 on college business brought him to the notice of King Philip IV, who received him so favourably that he ventured to press upon the monarch the advisability of founding a college of the order in Lisbon, which was under Spanish rule. He had a brother, Denis, who enlisted in the Spanish army and eventually settled in Portugal.

Lisbon, Portugal

With the assurance of financial stability from the King, he arrived in Lisbon in 1629, first to found a hospice for clerics returning to Ireland, and subsequently a seminary and college for Irish Dominican students. The hospice was first installed in temporary facilities provided by the first two Irish Dominicans who had arrived in Portugal in 1600. Father O'Daly soon obtained a small building with the help of the Archbishop of Lisbon and a few students were sent out from Ireland, and the Order named it a college, appointing Father O'Daly as its first rector in 1634.

In 1640, Portugal threw off the yoke of Spain and Father O'Daly, whose entire work and interest was now centred in Lisbon was loyal to the new monarchy. The new Queen, D. Luísa de Gusmão invited him to be her confessor and he won the confidence of the newly restored King, D. João IV de Bragança, who sent him on several diplomatic missions. He was sent as Ambassador to Louis XIV of France in 1655, remaining in Paris for over a year. Prior to this mission he had already been employed on affairs of State during the secret negotiations between Charles I of England and Philip IV of Spain and in 1649 and had acted as the go-between between Charles Stuart (Charles II of England), then in exile in Jersey, and Pope Innocent X concerning the nomination of Portuguese bishops directly by the Vatican, as the King of Spain was blocking the process. In 1655, D. João IV sent Father O'Daly as envoy to the French regent, Anne of Austria, to negotiate financial and military help with her chief adviser, Cardinal Mazarin and try and conclude an alliance between the two countries. It was shortly before this journey to Paris that Father O'Daly published in Latin his first book, 'The History of the Geraldines' in Lisbon in 1655, a valuable contemporary account of the religious persecutions in Ireland. His second work recounts the lives and fate of 20 Dominican friars known to him personally who were executed on religious grounds in Ireland.

After D. João IV death in 1656, father O'Daly was recalled to Lisbon to act as chief adviser to the Regent, D. Luísa de Gusmão. His main diplomatic triumph was his successful negotiation of a marriage alliance between the newly restored King Charles II of England and Catherine of Braganza, the daughter of Queen Luisa and the late King.

The College and Convent of Corpo Santo

Founded in 1634, the original College of Corpo Santo was located at the "Pátio das Fangas", central Lisbon, in an old theatre donated by the benefactor Luís de Castro do Rio. Although the male College of Corpo Santo was central to Father O'Daly's aspirations, he also founded a convent for Irish women in Belém, near Lisbon, as it was forbidden by

civil law to establish convents in Ireland. A Lisbon widow, the countess of Atalya, endowed the convent handsomely and the convent of Bom Sucesso came into existence on the 12th November 1639, remaining with its large school the oldest Irish Dominican convent up until 2016.

The original small College of Corpo Santo in Lisbon was unable to accommodate all those who wished to study there, and, relying on the sympathy of the Catholic people of Lisbon, a petition was handed to the Queen Regent, D. Luísa de Gusmão, requesting that a new college on a much larger scale be built. The request was granted and land was ceded in the Largo de Corte Real in the grounds of the Court, with its frontage and main door overlooking the Tagus. It originally had the capacity for 50 Fathers and a college for Seminarians.

Construction started on the 9th December 1660, although the foundation stone was laid over a year earlier on the 4th May 1659, with much pomp by the Bishop of Lamego, D. Francisco de Souto Maior, with the following inscription engraved in Portuguese:

‘Her Majesty Donna Lucia de Gusmão, Queen of Portugal founded this College dedicated to the Queen of the Holy Rosary and the Holy Patriarch St. Dominic, for the Irish Dominicans. May 4th 1659’.

The great earthquake of 1755 reduced the College to a heap of ruins, four of the Fathers being killed. Among others who were hurt was Father Charles O’Kelly, then regent of studies, who made up his mind to have the college rebuilt. He went to Rome to attend the general chapter, carrying with him commendatory letters from the Inquisition at Lisbon certifying that from its inception the college had been the source of nothing but good. Father O’Kelly was some time in Rome, obtaining an Apostolic brief from Benedict XIV, dated the 5th November 1756, addressed to all the bishops of Spain and the Indies, commending the work to their charity. Another appeal was issued by Pope Clement XIII in 1759. These appeals brought thousands of pounds from Spain and South America, while Father O’Kelly himself collected a certain amount in Ireland and the reconstruction commenced in 1758.

During the re-building the members of the community were housed in Rua Formosa at the royal expense. On the 13th October 1770, Dr. Burke, the Bishop of Ossary, visited Lisbon and dedicated the Church of the new college for divine worship. In all, the fabric is said to have cost £40,000. From Father O'Daly's time up until the earthquake the college generally supported 20 to 30 members. However the community began to decline rapidly, firstly owing to the French occupation in 1807 and later on account of the Civil War and the subsequent suppression of religious orders in Portugal in 1833.

In 1852 the Master of the Order permitted the sale of part of Corpo Santo, provided that sufficient room was left for 12 Fathers. Much of the college was sold in 1856, with the proceeds being applied to the purchase of a site for a new noviciate at Tallaght, Co. Dublin, which houses a splendid library of 8,000 volumes, gathered in Lisbon many years ago by Father Wiseman. It also has a valuable collection of oil paintings, most of which had been sent from Lisbon by Father Patrick Russell, who had bought the site for the new college and always proved to be a firm friend and benefactor of the rising novices.² Finally, in 1990 Corpo Santo was transferred to the Portuguese Dominican province.

Father O'Daly's death in 1662

The new Corpo Santo College of 1660 proved however to be insufficient for the needs of the Irish Dominican community and the still larger community of nuns at Bom Sucesso. Father O'Daly was therefore persuaded by the Queen Regent, D. Luísa de Gusmão to accept the rich bishopric of Coimbra, in order that he could apply part of its revenues to the support of his brethren. He had previously refused this see, as well as that of Braga and also the archiepiscopal see of Goa, nevertheless he accepted Coimbra in 1662 in order to assist both the College and the Convent of Corpo Santo. However, unfortunately he died before his planned consecration, on the 30th June 1662.

² Source: The Irish Dominicans, by O'Heyne, and História de S. Domingos, 4^a parte.

He was buried in the cloisters of the Igreja de Corpo Santo, being the only one in the church's cloisters. It carries the following inscription:

Hic jacet
Venerabilis Pater Magister
Frater Dominicus de Rosario Hibernus
Hujus et Conventus Monialium Boni Successus
Fundator
In variis Regum Legationibus felix
Episcopus Conimbricensis Electus
Vir. Prudentia Literis et Religione conspicuus
Obiit 30 Junii, Anno Domini 1662
Aetatis 67.

An abbreviated translation reads: successful in embassies for kings. . . a man distinguished for prudence, knowledge, and virtue’.

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