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Unidentified artist

Our Lady of the Rosary with Saints Dominic of Guzmán and Thomas Aquinas

Quito, Ecuador

18th century

DIMENSIONS

This small devotional work testifies to the Dominican dedication to the Rosary and their patroness, the Virgin of the Rosary. According to pious tradition, St. Dominic of Guzmán (1170-1221) received the Rosary directly from the Virgin (along with instructions for how to use it in prayer) when she appeared to him in 1208 at the church of Prouille (France) during a difficult campaign to return the Cathars to the Catholic faith. With this new tool against heresy in hand, Dominic found great success in conversion and the Dominican Order, which he founded, propagated devotion to the Rosary across Europe and the Americas in subsequent centuries.

This work recounts the moment of Dominic's endowment with the Rosary. At the center of the work, the Virgin and Child sit in heaven surrounded by angels. St. Dominic, dressed in the black and white robes of the Order he founded, stands at the left gazing reverentially up at

the Virgin who offers him a Rosary. Dominic is recognizable by the staff in his right hand and the dog dangling from a chain on his chest. This latter attribute comes from a dream Dominic's mother had during her pregnancy in which she saw a dog with a torch in its mouth that would set the world on fire, as her son would one day set the world ablaze with his preaching. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) stands at the right and receives a red rosary from the Christ Child which he pinches delicately between two forefingers. In accordance with his noted corpulence in life, Aquinas has been given a fleshy, rounded face. Aquinas can be identified by the radiant sun on his chest which indicates his position as a Doctor of the Church, enlightening others through the teaching of Catholic doctrine. In his left hand, Aquinas bears a book, the *Summa Theologiae* (or *Summa Theologica*), his best-known work, an instructional manual for theology students and clerics that contains among its 3,000 articles Aquinas' five arguments for the existence of God.

In the background, angels hold symbols representing the Virgin from the Marian litanies – a mirror of justice, the tower of ivory, mystical rose – along with a palm, an attribute more typically associated with Christian martyrs. These images derive from various lines in the Song of Solomon as well as the book of Wisdom which came to be incorporated into the Litany of Loreto, a prayer that often follows the recitation of the rosary.

The iconography of the Virgin of the Rosary with Dominic and another Dominican saint is not uncommon; in fact, the Thoma collection includes a seventeenth-century oil on copper depicting the Virgin giving the rosary to St. Dominic and St. Catherine receiving the rosary from the Christ Child (fig. 1). Both of these small-scale paintings were likely intended for private devotion.



Fig. 1 Unidentified artist, *Our Lady of the Rosary with Saints Dominic and Catherine of Siena*, early 17th century with gold embellishment added in the 18th century, oil on copper. Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation.

The elaborate frame surrounding the work is not original; most likely it is a European frame dating to the 1780s or shortly thereafter that has been recycled to hold this image. Indeed, the canvas appears to have been cut down to fit within the octagonal frame, as can be seen from the crowding of the two saints at the bottom of the picture plane.