

FR. MICÉAL O'NEILL, O.CARM. PRIOR GENERAL
OVERVIEW - LESSONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Míceál O'Neill was born in Galway, Ireland, into a family of five brothers. Educated by the Jesuits in Galway and the Carmelites in Dublin, he made his first profession as a Carmelite in 1971. He did all his studies in Rome, ending with a study of the life and works of St. Mary Magdalen de'Pazzi. This was followed by a period as a teacher and school chaplain in Terenure College. In 1982 he answered a call to go to Peru, to a parish in the Andes that was part of the prelature of Sicuani, at that time in the care of Carmelites of the PCM province. His experience in the Latin American Church had a big impact on his life. He returned to Rome to pursue a doctorate which was obtained with a thesis on the emerging spirituality in the Christian communities in Peru. In 1989 he was elected to the General Council in a new structure that gave him a role in Latin America, Africa and Asia. That was followed by some ten years in Ireland, living successively in a Dublin city parish, Terenure College, and the Carmelite friary in Kinsale, by the sea. In 2011 he went back to Rome in the role of Prior of the Carmelite International Centre, where he remained for eight years before going to the General Chapter of 2019 at which he was chosen as the Prior General. His interest continue to be in Carmelite mysticism and contemporary spiritualities, as well as some less holy things like rugby and politics.

ADDRESS TO THE CINA SYMPOSIUM – 2024

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

Part i

Thank you for your kind invitation to be with you for this 2024 symposium, the latest in a very long line of symposia that have captured the best of Carmelite Scholarship and opened up the riches of our tradition to a very wide audience over many year bringing together devotees and academics, O.Carm. and O.C.D. men and women, young and not so young from at home and abroad. I see that this present symposium will be no except and I am overjoyed to be able to share the podium at the beginning of the work with Fr. Miguel Marquez Calle, with whom it has been possible by the special grace of Carmel to work with one mind and one heart over these last few years in which we have found ourselves matched as two Michaels caring for our two traditions.

My task is to give some kind of an overview of the Carmelite Order of the Ancient Observance as it now stands in the world, with some pointers for the future, near and distant. My first urge is to say to you that Carmel is alive and well in all parts of the world. I can say that with all certainty if I distinguish Carmel from the states of life in which it is expressed. I recognize that many of the participants at this symposium who are Carmelite Friars, like myself, have at least two vocations and many of us have three. I refer to the vocation to priesthood, the vocation to religious life in community and the vocation to Carmel. In looking at these three vocations together, we find that as priests, Carmelite friars generally do very well, as Carmelites, they along with all the other sectors of the Carmelite family, share in what is now a wonderful interest in and enthusiasm for the Carmelite gift, its charism, tradition and spirituality all over the world. As religious vowed to the life of poverty, chastity and obedience in community it is here that we as friars are now meeting our greatest challenges.

A universal love for Carmel

The Carmelite Forum has been enriched since the beginning by the one reality of the Carmelite charism and its traditions. It has been possible to recognize the one charism in many states of life, in different cultures and side by side with the many other charisms that the Holy Spirit distributes generously among those who believe in God and seek his face. What has emerged very clearly in recent decades is the new identity that Carmelites have. If in the past we were much more compartmentalized, today, we speak about one another and to one another as equal members of the one Carmelite Family. Now Carmelite laity, sisters, nuns and friars alike speak of the inspiration for their lives that comes from the Rule of St. Albert, known affectionately as the Carmelite Rule. There is now a much better understanding among Carmelites of the nature and meaning of contemplation. Our Marian tradition has taken on new forms, new language and new energy, seeing in Mary both Mother and Sister, Disciple and teacher, model and hope. The scapular continues to be sought by thousands of people, who know that it is not an heirloom but a sign of believing, a sign of commitment, and a sign of belonging to all that Mary stands for. This Carmelite identity has broadened out from a very strong devotion to Mary, to an interest in prayer in all its forms, principally contemplative and liturgical, a recognition that Mary is an inspiration for our life in community, and an interest in the traditional forms of ministry with a new sensitivity to issues pertaining to Justice and Peace and to the protection of our common home. For all of this we find inspiration in Mary, in Elijah and in the many and distinguished saints of Carmel.

My presentation will deal, of necessity, with the life of Carmelite Friars. However I am also aware of how much Carmelite cloistered nuns, Carmelite affiliated congregations and lay Carmelites are a part of our lives. Here the difference in size between the O.Carm world and the O.C.D. world is significant, less than 1000 O.Carm nuns, almost 12000 O.C.D. nuns, 16 O.Carm. affiliated congregations, almost 70 O.C.D. affiliated congregations, and our figures for lay Carmel vary proportionately.

This changing face of Carmel is both a blessing and a challenge. The challenge is to transmit the tradition to the new generations in a way that allows the charism and tradition to remain strong, while perhaps taking on a new look or physiognomy in different cultures. In 2019 as friars we published our latest constitutions. The first three sections deal with charism and mission, life in community and formation. It is here that we can see the development of our understanding of our tradition as the fruit of years of insights, studies, research and meetings, in line with movements in the Church and in society.

In the field of formation we can appreciate the wealth of writings that the Order has produced in recent decades. This wealth of material is there for every member of the family. In the past it has been shared through ongoing formation courses and publications. That work must continue in order to have a good formation in our family as a way to answer the call to lead a more authentic Carmelite life. The phrase we use is that we want to be what we say we are, what we profess to be. To achieve this we must accept the need to have good formation from the beginning and then continue that formation throughout our lives.

In the reflection that we are part of today, we find the need to reaffirm that our life is and must always be centered in Jesus Christ. The statement in the Rule that our charism is first of all a charism of allegiance to Jesus Christ has moved us to recognize that our life is either centered on Christ or it is meaningless. We see that it is very easy to pay lip service to the idea of having Christ at the center of our lives. We can try to clarify a little by saying that our way of life is modeled on the way Jesus lived, on the choices he made and on the answers he gave to the cry of the earth. Furthermore we say that Jesus through his Spirit is the external and internal motivation that moves us in everything we try to do in response to our vocation. He is the reason we get out of bed in the morning. Finally we believe that by living in union with Jesus through the gift of his Spirit we allow ourselves to be transformed in whatever way God desires and this is our contemplation and our reward. It means that we are now living a life that is united to Jesus. Is that not what heaven is? In this project, we see the role of Mary and Elijah in our lives, as mother and sister, as prophet and brother who take care of us, enlighten us and distract us from our egocentricity moving us towards a generous openness to God and our neighbor especially to our brothers and sisters among the poor. Just as the God of our contemplation hears the cry of the poor, the Carmelite men and women of today are moved to listen to that same cry and to respond with all the gifts that God has made available to us.

The Carmelite Family

We friars have had to learn to play our role in the development of the Carmelite Family. Sometimes we find ourselves saying things like "the friars were there, at such and such an event, and the family also" as if the friars were one thing and the family another. In our best moments we can say family and know that together with the lay Carmelites, the consecrated religious and the cloistered nuns we are part of one family united by our appreciation for the values of Carmel. Historically, the relationship between cloistered friars and nuns has been very close. Now, since the time of John Malley, Prior General of the Order from 1983 to 1995, the gift of extended family has come to the fore. The question now is what does it mean to be a Carmelite? What makes us feel and recognize

that we are all part of this one family inspired by the values and traditions of Carmel? We have a number of answers to that question: what unites us is our devotion to Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Mary has always been associated with Carmel. We believe that this constant relationship is part of our charism. We could say that what unites us is adherence to Jesus Christ and attention to his word. We are seeing more and more the benefits of lectio divina in our communities. We could say that it is our love for the saints of Carmel that gives us a common identity. We speak with enthusiasm about those people who are proof of what the Rule says, "this way is good and holy, follow it". The question arises, is it possible that it is precisely the Rule of Saint Albert that gives us our identity card as different sectors of the Carmelite family. More and more we find that people who consider themselves Carmelites refer to the Rule that was written for us by St. Albert. In our constitutions we put the following description, perhaps not a definition, of the Carmelite family:

All individuals and groups, whether institutional or not,
 which draw their inspiration from the Rule of St Albert,
 from its tradition and from the values expressed in Carmelite spirituality,
 constitute the Carmelite Family within the Church today.¹
 That the Carmelite charism is embodied in many different ways today,
 including the ecumenical expression,
 is a source of joy for us
 and is a confirmation of a creative fruitfulness,²
 that comes from the Holy Spirit
 which we find in the variety of expressions of Carmel that exist today.

Our listening to the word of God
 leads us more and more
 to a new experience and understanding
 of our contemplative charism and the nature of our mission,
 in order to be able to share in the work of evangelisation,
 supporting one another
 in our prophetic and contemplative service
 in the midst of the people.
 Being members of a spiritual family implies
 nurturing friendship, hospitality, co-operation and dialogue
 as expressions of the fundamental equality shared by its members³.
 For the Order to be prophetic in a changing world,
 we have need of the gifts, talents and experiences
 of the whole Carmelite family.
 We must exercise discernment in the face of challenges that may arise.⁴

¹ Cf. XIII Cons. Prov. 1994, in AOC 45 (1994), 62.

² Cf. IX Cons. Prov. 1985, in AOC 37/3-4 (1985), 178-179.

³ Cf. XIII Cons. Prov. 1994, in AOC 45/1 (1994), 63.

⁴ Cf. General Chapter 2007, Message to the Carmelite family throughout the world, in AOC 58/2 (2007), 671-672.

It is possible that in the constitutions of each of the affiliated congregations represented in this meeting we will find ideas very similar to these and thus we will recognize the richness of our common heritage, combined with the individual charisms of each sector of the family, and the great gift that this type of Carmel can be for the Church and for the world. For the purposes of this reflection I would like to highlight one or two elements of the constitution:

Over the years we have seen the publication of numerous studies on the history and content of the Rule. For some it indicates a process of mystical transformation (The Dutch school). For others it indicates the relationship with the primitive Christian community described in the Acts of the Apostles and is therefore a school of brotherhood. (The Italian school). All those who read this Rule seem to find in it elements that attract them, which in a certain way resonate with their particular spiritual sensitivity. It seems that in this way people are attracted by the values of Carmel and find their spiritual home in Carmel, even people of other Christian traditions.

The article refers to our listening to God's Word and suggests that it is something we do as individuals and as a community. We find that Word mainly in the liturgy, celebrated in a certain Carmelite way, in our ability to be alone in our cells meditating on the law of the Lord, and in our willingness to share our reading with the community in common *lectio divina*, prayer groups or simple conversation around the word we read.

The article also suggests that all of us Carmelites, together and equally, offer this charism to the Church so that when the Church shines with all its charisms, the Carmelite charism is present in the beauty of the mosaic that is the life of the Church and the life of humanity.

Lastly, as it is in our Rule, at the end of Constitution n. 28 there is a reference to discernment. In the Church and in our Order we recognize the essential role of discernment. If we have not already done so, we need to learn the techniques, skills and methods of discernment. As a Church we seem to have dedicated ourselves more to teaching than to discernment. Now the call is to discern to know in our hearts and minds the plan that God has for us and what his Spirit tells us today.

Discernment is the ability to see the meaning of what is happening in our world in terms of what we mean by salvation. Salvation is the work of God that continues tirelessly throughout time. Discernment will allow us to be fully united with that work and to see what God's will can be for each of us individually and in our different forms of communion: Church, Order, Province, local community, family. In the Carmelite tradition, much of our discernment is done in community when brothers or sisters gather to "discuss the preservation of order and the salvation of souls" (Rule, 15)

Our tradition, for example, St. John of the Cross, has taught us that there may be a fundamental question that distinguishes Carmelite discernment from other forms, namely the question, What are the signs of God's love in your life? In so far as we are able to identify those signs for ourselves, and help others to do the same, we like John will dedicate our lives to the quest for the author of those signs, the one who has wounded us by his love.

Part II

I would like to dedicate the second part of this presentation to a number of issues and questions with which our lives are concerned on a day to day basis.

1) A return to Mary

We sense that in the Church today there is a call to all of us to live more authentic lives. We cannot any longer rely on established positions, clichés or slogans. Somehow the way we live has to be such that the truth of what we believe shines out. In wanting to live authentic lives our attention has always to be fixed on Jesus, the Saviour, as the centre of our lives. It is his Word that we seek to know and to put into practice in everything that we do. (Rule 20) Our model in listening to the word of God and putting it into practice is Mary, our Mother and Sister. It is clear that each one of us enjoys his or her own personal relationship with Mary. Love for Mary is an integral part of our Charism. All who come to Carmel and find their spiritual home in Carmel receive this gift. It is love for Mary, given by the Holy Spirit that makes us the kind of people who can find our spiritual home in Carmel. We nourish that love for Mary through our personal prayer, our reading, our conversations and through our celebration of the liturgy.

In the section on Mary in the constitutions of the friars (O.Carm.) we find the results of so much work that has been done by our Order on our tradition, with a view to being better able to talk about Mary in today's world. In § 25 we read that all that we desire and all that we wish to be today was fulfilled in the lives of the Prophet Elijah and of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As these are our models in the way that we live in *obsequio Jesu Christi*, we have to be familiar with their story and take inspiration from that story for our own lives and the lives of the people with whom we live and work. What do we see in Mary? Our constitutions point to the woman of the new heart, who gave a human face to the Word made flesh, the virgin of wise and contemplative listening, who kept and pondered in her heart the events and words of the Lord. Like St. Therese of the Child Jesus, these constitutions praise and glorify Mary in her

simplicity, as she is presented in the pages of the Gospel. Following each mention of Mary in the Gospels of Luke, Matthew and John we see her at the centre of the work of salvation, ever attentive to her Son and constant in her presence among the disciples. The author, Chris O'Donnell speaks of this presence simply as a "loving presence" in our lives.

Right now, however, our Order has a peculiar difficulty. While recognized by the Church as a Marian Order, right now in our Order we do not have specialists in the area of Mariology. What we have at the moment are the publications of the acts of a number of important congresses on Mary that have taken place in the years since the II Vatican Council. These include, the Italian congress of 1992, the North American congress of 2002, the Brazilian congress in Recife in 2001 and the Portuguese congress of 2018. Along with that we have the writings of Christopher O'Donnell who died in 2020. Emanuele Boaga who died in 2014, and above all the writings of Eamonn Carroll, as well as the festschrift published in his honour in 2001 to mark his eightieth birthday. On the General Council we have concluded that in programming studies for younger and older members of our Order we have to give more attention to Mary because our knowledge of Mary and our devotion to her are such integral parts of our identity. To that end we have put forward a policy of using our resources to invite and enable Carmelites who wish to research and write in the four majors of Sacred Scripture, Mariology, History and Liturgy, with a view to providing the kind of expertise for our Order that we had when Roland Murphy, Ernie Larkin, Eamon Carroll and their contemporaries were in their heyday.

2) The year of prayer

We know that Pope Frances looks to Carmel as a school of prayer. When he announced 2024 as a Year of Prayer I am sure he was making a particular appeal to Carmel, with the idea that Carmel would pray itself and help many others to pray in accordance with the gift that is given to Carmel.

When Carmelites pray, we believe that we pray with Mary as well as to Mary. Mary is with us in our prayer and we share in her gift of contemplation. The angel greeted her with the words Full of Grace, the Lord is with you. This is our prayer. It is the prayer of people who pray to a God that is very close, who has brought us to share in his very life. This kind of prayer, is Marian, prophetic and contemplative. This prayer transforms our lives and brings God's love and grace into the world for everyone to receive it and be saved. This is brought out for us in our constitutions in the section on prayer. There we read, the prayer of the Carmelite community is a sign to the world of a Church that prays. It recalls the example of Mary, Mother of Jesus, who kept all these things and pondered them in her heart, praising the wonders that the Lord had

worked in her. (N. 67) In our recent letter to the Carmelite family Miguel and I underline the idea that prayer in Carmel is prayer in Mary and in the way that Mary prays.

3) Care for our common home: Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation

In announcing the Year of Prayer Pope Francis linked prayer to care for creation as we find in his letter to Archbishop Fisichella introducing the Year. He said: *I would greatly desire that we devote 2024, the year preceding the Jubilee event, to a great "symphony" of prayer. Prayer, above all else, to renew our desire to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to him and to adore him. Prayer, moreover, to thank God for the many gifts of his love for us and to praise his work in creation, which summons everyone to respect it and to take concrete and responsible steps to protect it.*

I begin with the belief that the world we live in is not the world as the Creator intended. We see every day how the dignity of the human person and the beauty of creation suffer due to the unjust actions of people who from the beginning were entrusted with the task of taking care of everything that God had placed in their hands (Gen. 2 ,15). For this reason, and because we are contemplatives who see with the eyes of God and love with the heart of God, the area of justice, peace and the integrity of creation continues to be an area of great interest and concern for our Order. It is our way of assuming a responsibility that belongs to us as followers of Christ and as fraternal and contemplative Carmelites. When we look at society around the world, issues such as caring for our common home, protecting people from human trafficking, widespread corruption in public life, and the growing gap between rich and poor challenge us to respond. We recognize that through our preaching, our work in schools, prisons or hospitals, our specific work for justice and peace, and the support we give to other organizations, we can significantly influence the way people think and live and therefore be a leaven in the creation of a world in which the dignity of the human person is increasingly respected.

At a meeting of superiors of the friars and the affiliated congregations 1998, we presented the idea of a Carmelite NGO at the United Nations to the then Superior Generals of the Affiliated Congregations. Now, many years later, the Carmelite NGO at the United Nations is developing its own story. It continues to represent the desire of the Carmelite Family to participate in United Nations debates on the dignity of the human person and the protection of that dignity in the areas of sustainable development, human rights, education and freedom of worship. Our NGO obtained the full right to participate in the work of United Nations committees twenty

years ago. During these twenty years, the NGO has made important contributions to United Nations debates on climate change, human trafficking and justice education, and has published much of this information in its newsletter, CARMENGO. This NGO connects to the local NGOs we have in our Order (Spain, Indonesia, India, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.) and to Carmelite communities around the world, gathering information on what is happening in the many places where we work with the poor and other victims of injustice.

By developing the NGO at the United Nations, together with other NGOs promoted by the Carmelite Family, we seize the opportunity as a family to offer the secular world the riches of our tradition regarding the dignity of the human person. In doing so, we become defenders of change towards a more human and fraternal society, open to the mystery of God.

Work within an NGO at the United Nations, or in the national context is clearly a job more suitable for lay people than for religious people. In a well-formed and animated Third Order there will be those people who feel the need for a stronger presence of the Gospel in public life. Here is the opportunity for lay Carmelites in to see with their experience of family life, the world of work and social life in general whether there is not a call and an opportunity to transform society in favor of the most weak following the intuition of Carmelite spirituality, in which the dignity of the human person together with the discernment of God's will are the first principles of an authentically Christian life.

We are now entering a new phase in the history of the organization where, we have to involve the whole family in the functioning of the NGO. So far the main promoters of the NGO have been the Congregations affiliated to the Order and the friars themselves. We will see a new leadership structure and we hope, greater participation by the various sectors of the family, in areas that are important to us all, I repeat, sustainable development/climate change, human rights/antitrafficking, education for justice and freedom of belief/interreligious dialogue.

4) Conversion to synodality

Pope Francis has called the whole Church to engage in a synodal process that began with the opening of the Synod on October 9, 2021 and will conclude with a first session in October 2023 and a final session in 2024, when the bishops will gather in a special session of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican to discuss the topic, For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.

The key to understanding what Pope Francis wishes us to recognize about the concept and reality of the Synod is captured in his address on the 50th

anniversary of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015. On that occasion the Pope invited all to “journey together” – “the faithful people, the college of bishops and the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’(Jn 14:17), in order to know what he ‘is saying to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7)”.⁵We need to add to this what is contained in the themes, Communion, Participation and Mission, that is, the recognition of and the employment of all our gifts in the advancement of the one mission of Jesus Christ.

The first stages of the synodal process have been completed. Religious Congregations have made their contributions through the dioceses in which they live. The General Councils of religious orders have also made their submissions. The General Council of the Carmelite Order made its submission on March 23, 2022. In that submission we pointed out that from our origins, expressed in the founding experience and in the text of our Rule, the Carmelite Order has had a synodal culture. That has been the basis of chapters and community meeting throughout all these centuries and seems to have acquired even greater importance today as we grow in our realisation that we are called to live in community, as equals, with an elected prior to facilitate our coming together to talk about everything that comes under the heading of health and maturity.

Synodality for us today, in anticipation of what the synod might eventually conclude, reminds us of the importance of our community meetings, and the need to acquire the science of community meetings that distinguishes them from many other moments of conversation that may be part of our lives. The science of community meetings allows us to appreciate how meetings need to be conducted so that they are moments of truth and enrichment in the community, that discerns and organises its life on the basis of these meeting and in them practise the virtues of fraternal affirmation and fraternal correction that will keep us fully in tune with our vocations and the needs of the Church and the world of today.

What militates against the promotion of a synodal culture in the Church are the tendencies that divide us, namely, individualism, clericalism, misuse of power, and overly hierarchical and patriarchal approaches.

We have to decide for ourselves to what extent we support the culture of synodality that Pope Francis has proposed to the Church. In doing that we will have to see how we can be formed into that culture and be fully at home with the kind of listening and discernment that it involves, and the recognition and cherishing of everyone’s gifts so that the members of the

⁵ Pope Francis, Ceremony commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015), see: [www.vatican.va/content/Francesco/en/speeches/2025/October /documents/papa-francesco..](http://www.vatican.va/content/Francesco/en/speeches/2025/October/documents/papa-francesco..)

body work and walk together, drawing on all the gifts that the Holy Spirit has lavished upon us.

In this spirit we may well be able to create the kind of environment in which vocations to Carmel can be more easily recognised and supported.

5) The creation and maintenance of safe environments

Because of what has been revealed about abuse in the Church, we now are very aware of our responsibility towards those who have suffered abuse. We recognise how our Church in many instances seemed more intent on defending its own good name, rather than caring first of all for those who had suffered and for their families. With all the work that our Church has done it is now possible to believe that abuse in the Church will be something rare and if it happens it will be reported to the relevant authorities without delay. To further the commitment of our Order to the creation and maintenance of safe environments we now have a General Commission for Safeguarding that will work closely with all our provinces to ensure the fullest understanding of the issue and take on best practice in dealing with it. The focus of our attention today, as well as caring for survivors and their families, is on the creation of safe environment where we live and work. That means that our houses, our schools, our parishes or formation and spirituality centres are to be places where people may work in safety without any fear of receiving anything other than love and respect from those who share that environment. I am aware that while we work on our protocols and practices we also have to make sure that our attitudes are correct and that we act with awareness and responsibility in all cases in which people are truthful about the abuse they suffered at the hands of our brothers in the Carmelite Order. This concern has now become part of our formation programmes throughout the Order.

6) Saint Titus Brandsma

In this context we are blessed to have the life, teaching and example of Saint Titus to inspire us. This hallowed member of our Order is of particular significance to us today as we strive to give clearer witness to our calling as Carmelites. Titus is the model religious, the model Carmelite and the model priest. If today we wish to be professional as well as humble in what we do, we find in his story the perfect example. He was familiar with the art of religious life and practiced it faithfully. Moreover, like Elijah he abhorred what was happening in his country and took action to defend the truth. Like Mary, he was a bearer of the Word for others, and imbued all he did with a sense of praising God for his goodness. He knew the closeness of Jesus, and that knowledge deepened in his time of imprisonment. His refusal to make an enemy of anyone and to seek God's

peace in the midst of terrible conflict is a bright light shining for us in the darkness of today's world.

By way of allowing Titus to enrich our lives, the work of translation of his works into English continues. In addition to that we are about to see the second Titus Brandsma course and pilgrimage take place in Germany and the Netherlands this coming autumn. This time the participants will be solemnly professed members of the Order who will get the opportunity to hear lectures and visit the places in the Netherlands and in Germany associated with the life of the Dutch martyr.

This symposium will put the names of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and St. Titus into one reflection which we all look forward to sharing. There is another connection that is emerging in relation to St. Edith Stein. Among the initiatives that we have supported in recent years there was the congress held in Aylesford, England last year that linked Edith Stein's understanding of the human person, empathy and the theology of disability giving us an very strong intellectual support for the understanding of the dignity of every human person no matter what their physical or mental condition may be. Carmel has a strong voice in the world of today in the presence of ways of thinking that do not defend the dignity of the human person, a world that sorely needs compassion, the gentleness of Carmel, that sees every child of God as a God by participation.

7) Vocations

I would like to conclude with a word on a topic that worries us all when we think about the future. Vocation is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the Church is built where the Gospel is preached on the basis of the vocations of each and everyone. We are used to the idea of appointing specific people for vocational ministry. Although we continue to appoint specific people for vocational ministry, it is possible that now the main task of these brothers or sisters is to work with our communities and with people associated with our communities, so that the word vocation is on the lips of many more people and the awareness of the call is much more alive among the people who associate with Carmel.

It is coming across to us more and more that while the Holy Spirit continues to call people to our way of life, the environment is not conducive to the development of a vocation and therefore too many people who are called to our way of life go elsewhere and do not even consider the matter beyond the first movements of their hearts. Our future depends in a very real way on the arrival and discernment of vocations to our way of life. The Order is now on the move to find new energy and new ways to be in contact with the people the Holy Spirit is calling and to offer them the best possible formation in the best and safest

possible environments. When we think of our saints and their vocation very often, as in the cases of Therese and Titus people who came to know God at a very early age and who had the good fortune to live in environments that were able to support and cultivate this knowledge. Today it would seem that the great challenge is to create helpful and positive environments in families, in church communities, in places where people meet and talk. Carmel embraces the vocations of lay people, religious sisters and brothers, friars, monks both men and women and hermits both men and women. We are getting more and more requests from people who would like to change from their religious life to an hermitical life. It is very clear that hermits as such belong to the church and come under the care of the local bishop, while Carmelites wishing to live an hermitical life can find ways to do that within the religious life that they have professed.

8) The 2025 General Chapter

Our next General Chapter will take place in Malang, Indonesia. The two main reasons for this choice of venue are the celebrations of the first hundred years of Carmelite presence in Indonesia, and the fact that Indonesia has become the largest province in our Order with some one hundred and fifty candidates in initial formation.

The theme of the Chapter will be, "You must do some work" (Rule 20); Our contemplative fraternity discerns its mission.

It focuses on discerning what work we need to do in the Church and how we need to do it as an expression of who we have been called to be as Carmelite friars. Once again, in our reflections we will return to our constitutions, not so much to the chapters on gift and mission, but more to the chapters on our specific mission that we find in chapters VI and VII. We must now examine how we carry out our ministry in parishes, schools, chaplaincies of different types and in accompanying people in the development of their spiritual life. The title and theme of the chapter suggest that we must always discern before making decisions and before acting. This discernment is best done in community, both in chapter and in community meetings. The concern we hear throughout the Order is that in matters of parishes we too easily assume the model of the diocesan priest and pay too little attention to the approaches to ministry that our charism and tradition suggest. In a Carmelite parish we would expect to find a fraternal approach to all ministry rather than an individual one; we would expect to find constant attention to the Word of God in personal prayer, preaching and the celebration of the liturgy; we would expect to find a participatory approach to parish organization where there is genuine respect for everyone's gifts and a strategy that allows those gifts to be

used for the building up of the entire community. In Carmelite parishes we would expect to find both the cultivation of devotion to Mary and the existence of a Marian spirit that speaks of attention to the Word of God and tender care for everyone in the parish, leading everyone to Christ as the goal of human life.

9) Internationality and new configurations

Today, in a world in which distances seem to be smaller and smaller and people are constantly on the move from country to country, we too experience desire for a more international Order. The responses we give to today's challenges include the search for greater collaboration between the provinces and the search for new configurations in the distribution of the Order's provinces. Seeing the increased movement of brothers within the order, both permanently and temporarily, the General Council recently published guidelines for the order as our interpretation of the Constitutions. In the question of the configuration of presences, starting with the formation of the Italian province in the eighties and nineties, we have seen the unification of the two provinces of Germany, the unification of two provinces in Spain, Castile with Aragon and Valencia, and now the continuation of that process with the possibility of seeing only one Spanish province. In Africa we need to think about greater collaboration between the French-speaking communities and the English-speaking communities. In Northern Europe the work continues with discussion of possible unifications and/or greater collaboration. In the Mediterranean there is also the possibility of some new configuration between the provinces. The times require a lot of patience and a lot of imagination with due discernment on the best way to be a Carmelite Order in the five continents in which, by the grace of God, we find ourselves serving.

In all events, Carmel today comes across very strongly as a fraternity, a fraternity first and foremost in which the brothers and sisters discern in community and grow in community. This fraternity today can be seen as a contemplative fraternity, seeking God and God's will, a Marian fraternity, living like other Marys, a prophetic fraternity, whose word and existence speaks of God, and an international fraternity, as it has been from its very origins on Mount Carmel, able to believe in and build a universal family.

As we come to the end of the month of July, a month that gives us the celebration of our major feasts, we join in asking Mary and the Carmelite saints to help us. With the Holy Spirit shaping our hearts and our minds, we pray that our hearts and minds be filled with divine wisdom and the bonds of charity among us may be strengthened. Mary, friend and spouse of the Holy Spirit and Mother of Carmel, pray for us and bless us.

Washington

29th of August, 2024