

FR. MIGUEL MÁRQUEZ CALLE, OCD
FROM ST. THÉRÈSE TO ST. TITUS: LESSONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

(Taken from the back covers of some of his books)

“My best title is my own family, and the university where I grew up in the Valley of Jerte and the Batuecas Valley. In the shadow of the contemplative Carmel of my city.”

“Fr. Miguel grew up in the Jerte Valley, full of suggestive landscapes. His house was a semi-abandoned former Poor Clare convent; his recreation place the street; his faithful friend the ball; his maximum aspiration, that Mondays did not exist; accomplice of their escapes the bicycle, to live, also with the imagination and unexpected adventures. His best companions of the first hour: [his brothers] Carlos and Mari Paz. The best teachers he remembers: Leo and Miguel [his parents]”.

“For many years he has accompanied young people on their way through the lands of Castilla, Galicia and the Holy Land, in the footsteps of Jesus, Saint James the Apostle, Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross.

The job he likes most of all the ones he has held to date is that of listener, because he never ceases to marvel at the surprising miracle that springs from being human, in which beats a God always newborn. He is convinced that it is infinitely more what we have left to discover and learn than what we already know.”

FROM THÉRÈSE (OF LISIEUX) TO TITO BRANDSMA : Lessons for the 21st century

*We can easily forgive a child for being afraid of the dark.
The real tragedy in life is when a man fears the light (Plato).*

We should be afraid of the lie, not of the truth...

*It is worthwhile to stop crying and make an appointment with the future,
It is worth living (Silvio Rodríguez)*

*The Evil One makes us look at our fragility with a negative judgment,
while the Spirit brings it to light with tenderness.
(Letter of St. Joseph, Pope Francis 2)*

1. Hagar and the way of Carmel
2. Microcosms of communion
3. What's being a saint? Purity of heart
4. The winks, God's surprises.
5. Challenges and hopes

1. Hagar and the way of Carmel Gn 21, 9-21

Let's start with a biblical text, which frames an idea I want to share with you, and which has to do with the charism of Carmel. (Cf. Lucien Florent, *El Camino del Carmelo*, Estella, Navarra 1981).

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁹But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰and she said to Abraham, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”

¹¹The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹²But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your slave woman. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring[†] will be reckoned. ¹³I will make the son of the slave into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

¹⁴Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

¹⁵When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. ¹⁶Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there, she[‡] began to sob.

¹⁷God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has

heard the boy crying as he lies there. ¹⁸ Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰ God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became an archer. ²¹ While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

- Suffering
- Contempt and rejection
- Traps and deception
- The desert and the limit
- Blindness
- Grace and the well
- Life is reborn

2. Microcosmos and communion

The idea I propose to you in this first point has to do with fidelity to God's call and plan in each one of us, the authenticity and originality of each human being, who allows himself to be guided by the Spirit and dances to his music, believing in the goodness of God's gaze upon himself. And flee from comparison, accepting the Adventure that God dreams in you and with you. This refers in a privileged way to the saints of Carmel. Each one is a creative reproduction of the charism and, at the same time, each one responds to something urgent and extremely necessary of the time in which they live. It is closely related to the heartbeat of God in the heart of the present.

Starting with Therese of Lisieux and Titus Brandsma. A conviction: Every Carmelite saint reproduces in her mini cosmos, in her personal adventure, the longings, sufferings, nights and hopes of the time in which she lives. Not only those who are in constant relationship with the people and their tears and their joys. Contemplation and contemplatives are especially a precious indicator of the time in which they live, of today's society.

I quote once again the Dutch catechism, which reflects this idea magnificently. Therese was in tune with thousands of workers in her time who were living a crisis of meaning and faith. She could not imagine to what extent she was in tune and in communion with the society and the soul of her time still hidden in a lost corner of French Normandy.

Teresa had to know and suffer terrible doubts against the faith, before dying at the age of twenty-four in her convent. Nothing remained of her faith outside of her last abandonment: I want to believe, come to the aid of my little faith. This young woman thus became a saint worthy of a place among the heroes cited in Hebrews 11. In the midst of the great crisis of faith that her contemporaries in Europe - both intellectuals and workers - were going through, she endured this suffering with them, plunged in the most extreme abandonment to love for eighteen months. How many lives have found their birth there!
Dutch Catechism, French ed., p. 346.

Likewise, Titus, the other example that inspires our congress, reproduces in the priest and journalist fundamental elements of the passionate story, crucified and giving birth to the truth in constant threat of being aborted by the dictators of the time.

It is also the example of three blood brothers, Lucho, Enrique and María Salud Espinal, a publicist, poet and Jesuit journalist killed in Bolivia, a priest killed in the Spanish civil war and a Carmelite hidden in a corner of the beautiful Catalonia, Igualada. Precious story of dedication and donation to the extreme... Lucho killed by the dictatorial regime of Bolivia, for his freedom of conscience and his word without gag. Maria Salud in a time of crisis and community bankruptcy, the result of an abuse of power, is a testimony of a faith in the midst of the greatest confusion.

Teresa of Jesus, without leaving Spain, lived in her vital adventure what all her brothers lived when they ventured to the New World (Here in America). They came to discover and acquire riches, risking their lives. Two brothers died in these lands. And Teresa lives a risky adventure in the inner discovery of a fascinating world and no less dangerous than her brothers. To risk¹, to venture, to go ahead even if the world is sinking, courageous souls... 'animas animosas'. V 13, 2.

I would also like to connect the current exodus in search of the home of millions of people in the world, who are not only looking for material well-being, who are looking for the inner house, the intimate dwelling, the inner castle, the inner truth and beauty, dignity, homeland.

Today, for example, Carmelite nuns, or contemplatives and Contemplatives (film of monks preparing to leave their monastery) are used to a stability in other times. A sister entered forever in a monastery and there she died where the sisters who had completed their adventure during a long life and several centuries of history rested. Now provisionality and uncertainty mark the soil of society. Politics, ecclesial currents, ideologies, economic instability, the uncertainty of politicians... climate change... are realities of our time. They speak of an inner climatic change in which God dwells despite all powers against, silenced and reborn in the exile of a society that often does not leave him room in the inn (of Bethlem) and excludes him, but which changes history.

We must connect the drama of many monasteries in accelerated numerical and vocational decline with the drama of today's society. Citizenship and interior home: An exodus to the promised land. ¿Where to find this promised land?

To end this point of the inner cosmos of the human being, let me tell you that Spain won the Euro Cup this year with a team full of freshness and joy in the game, especially for the contribution of two young immigrants of sub-Saharan and Moroccan origin, who scored decisive goals.

¹ Vida 20, 4. And I say that it is understood and you see yourselves carried away, and you do not know where. For, although it is with delight, the weakness of our nature makes us fear the beginnings, and it is necessary to have a determined and courageous soul much more than for what has been said (9), **para arriscarlo todo**, come what may, and leave ourselves in the hands of God and go where they take us, willingly, since they take you even though it may weigh you down.

Holiness is a decisive goal scored by God on the field of present history through the one who did not count in the eyes of the wise (The Cornerstone).

3. What is being a saint? Purity of heart...

It would be very interesting to ask ourselves what holiness consists of. What do each of us think about what it means to be a saint, but vitally, what have we learned from the lives of the saints we have read? What is our ideal of holiness?

An exhausting competition. I was a little bit dreaming on the world of sports (swimming, soccer, volleyball, cycling, etc.), I was led to constant comparison and reflection on originality. Is holiness an obstacle course, or a competition to get further and faster than others?

I remember once, at school (elementary school) when they took a picture, I used to stand behind everyone and stand on tiptoe, to look taller. Years later, reading Lao Tse, I realized what he said: he who lives on tiptoe, does not remain standing for long (he ends up exhausted).

Thomas Merton, in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, says that there are many religious who are not saints and there are many poets who are not true poets, because they spend their lives wanting to be the saint that God does not ask them to be, or writing the poems of others, imitating them. They are too lazy to be themselves... To be a saint is to be oneself....

A week ago, I visited the place where the remains of Conrad (Alois de Meester) rest. When I was starting to get exhausted, reading lives of saints and trying to imitate them, I read the summary of his thesis, which I recommend to you: *The Empty Hands*. These began to heal me, and to teach me another way of looking at myself.

At this point, a decisive book that narrates the crisis of St. Francis fell into my hands: *Wisdom of a Poor Man*, by Eloi Leclerc. In particular, one of its pages, which speaks of purity of heart, profoundly changed my look at myself and my laments about my misery and sin.

Hace pocos años, leyendo la carta sobre San José del Papa Francisco (Patris Corde, 8-12-2020), me encontré con una frase fascinante:

*The Evil One makes us look at our fragility with a negative judgment,
while the Spirit brings it to light with tenderness.
(Letter of St. Joseph, Pope Francis 2)*

As a novice, I had to throw away the stork's nest that was in the belfry (the bell tower) of the convent - sepulcher of San Juan de la Cruz, in Segovia. When I was throwing the nest away, I realized that the stork makes its nest with all the garbage and garbage it finds. And I had a revelation: that is the spiritual life, to take advantage of and recycle everything that happens to you in life to build the nest of life that is given to you, not to despise anything that you have lived or that has happened to you. God is the master of recycling and knows how to take advantage of your poverty to transform it into wealth if he finds you humble.

In another biography of St. Francis (*Ternura y Vigor*: Francisco de Asís, L. Boff, Sal Terrae, Spain), he said that the saint is not a perfect man, he is an integrated man. And I liked the idea very much. The saint is not the one who has no flaws or makes mistakes, but the one who allows himself to be rebuilt and is humble to learn from everything and set out on the way. So was Teresa of Jesus.

A true charism creates communion and recognizes the other, it never eliminates him, it loves him. Whoever discovers his richness and his gift, does not need to envy others, nor rivalry, nor ambition for power... true power is the conquest of the freedom of self, in giving oneself without leaving a trace of self, gratuitousness.

The homeland is neither here nor there, it is inside you or nowhere (Hermann Hesse). The story of Ruth and Noemi, the story written by the last and unarmed. Cf. the short story by Jiménez Lozano. The small, clandestine story of two midwives who disobey the Pharaoh's order to kill the first-born becomes decisive and opens a crack in the all-powerful empire of the Pharaohs. In the person of a child left in the waters of the Nile. God laughs at our all-powerfulness and gives us an unsuspected path when all seemed lost. Just as the newborn of Bethlehem put in check the arrogance of Herod and made him tremble, and rightly so. Just as David defeated Goliath. Just as the Magnificat sings of God's victory in the story of the Anawim.

4. The winks, God's surprises

For the last three and a half years I have had a program on Radio Maria in Spain called "Los guiños de Dios" (God's winks). In it I tell something of what God gives me during the week as a discovery and surprise, as an outbreak and birth.

Before I became General, I was sometimes surprised to think how many difficult and problematic news would Father General receive, and it occurred to me to send him some good news every week... some small things or unexpected gifts, which broke into everyday life. Not every week, but some weeks I did send him my 'good news', and he also sent me... With the conviction that, when I am asked if I have many problems, I usually answer yes, but that there are many more blessings than problems, and that is the truth.

During the pandemic, I wondered what to do in order to open a window that would help unlock the sense of threat and death lurking, and it occurred to me (like so many things that were done so creatively), to tell a story every night during those three months, more than a hundred days of pandemic.

Every year I go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, we walk about 170 kilometers, also this past year I went with a group... during the first year of preparation, about fifteen years ago, we met a fisherman in the Lake of Tiberias, casting the nets by the shore, and we asked him how the fishing was going, and he answered us: Sometimes well, sometimes not so well, but always HALLELUYA.

Only once during these almost three years I did not ask permission or advice from my brothers in community on a matter. In all other problems, difficulties, conflicts, issues, we always dialogued, and corrected each other, only once I did not ask permission and

announced my decision: I am going to spend Easter in Ukraine. The war had started a little more than a month ago. We entered Ukraine when the refugees were leaving, and everyone looked at us strangely, thinking it was the wrong direction, to enter at that time. But we were not wrong. My brothers were on the side where the war had started. And we had to accompany and comfort....

The head of the hospital closest to the war front, when we brought him medical material, for which he was very grateful, when he showed us the horrible and miserable showers of the small hospital, he told us: this is the light, pointing to a filthy shower. Saying that at the front they have a liter of water to take a shower... My brothers stayed on the side of the war to accompany the people. I understood that Ruth is still alive in many who remain from the lake of those who feel their lives threatened... That is the story of Therese of Lisieux and Titus Brandsma.

5. Challenges and hopes

Challenges that I see in my passage through these months (almost three years) as a general

These points are not an answer or an affirmation, they are a question and a concern that I launch to you, to propose an inner dialogue within each one of you... they are a question to think about, and to contrast with our own lives.

- **Communication**
- **Discernment**
- **Realism and recognition**
- **Collaboration, communion, teamwork**
- **Identity: who we are at the root and in relation to each other**

1. Communication

I believe that 50% of our problems are not real problems, they are problems of communication, of understanding, of comprehension, of saying or not saying, of interpretation, of lack of sincerity and lack of trust. From what I am experiencing, I am surprised that there is so much toxicity in our dialogues, church, work, political, or whatever they are. In reality, it is not possible to call dialogue that which does not generate a true listening and speaking, understanding and expressing with truth.

Talking, listening, keeping quiet, taking the right distance, empathy, respect, expectation and necessary time, silence... humility to ask questions and not to keep wounded silences, to speak from the front and not from behind. Do not judge the other, but try to understand him/her. "We do not dialogue to convince, but to understand". We have a great challenge of communication, of listening and speaking from the heart, in our communities. There is a long way to go, starting with each one of us, with myself.

2. Discernment

Teresa of Jesus spent her life asking for help, asking to be accompanied, asking to be disenchanted, and seeking healthy contrast. She did not trust herself. She was passionate about the truth, and she was very afraid of being deceived. She sought light, with friends,

and with those who were not very friendly... She wanted, above all, to be noble and true, authentic, so as not to lose her life in protecting her image. That is why she insisted so much on humility. In the contrast and in letting ourselves be seen, there is a light to be discovered about ourselves. A grace and a gift, which sometimes hurts, but which provokes an incomparable joy, when one does not seek oneself, but seeks the right path, as the psalms say so often and so beautifully: "Teach me, Lord, your ways, instruct me in your paths" (Psalm 24).

Every day more and more people here in the USA, as in Europe, in religion, as in any field, who think they possess the truth, without knowing that truth is not possessed, nor is it shot, that truth is a person, said Benedict XVI in his last speech (December 21, 2012). We all need to let ourselves be discerned with urgency and humility, simplicity and without fear. 'We must be afraid of lies, not of the truth.'

3. Realism and recognition

One of the biggest challenges we face today is the lack of realism. It is one of the unrecognized evils. We do not see reality, because if we saw it, we would have to move position and to move position costs us our lives... we prefer not to see in order not to recognize, for many reasons. Distortion and distortion of reality. In our planet world, planet Church and planet politics, the difficulty to recognize the reality unarmed, without partisanship, without ideologized glasses, without positions taken before having listened is growing. It is very difficult to find communities vaccinated against self-justification and fear of being looked at from the outside, to let themselves be helped to grow. It is necessary to re-read Life 16, 7, where the saint says that we are friends in order to not be cheated (desengañarnos)

4. Collaboration - communion - team

I used to play soccer. It's a team sport... You don't win alone... you need to have a good vision of the whole field and of the other players position...

We have not been educated to work as a team, for creative and fruitful dialogue. More protagonism of the group, of the whole. Instead of manufacturing stars and myths. We have great facility to move to the air of our whim, and genius. There are many geniuses among us, whose genius dies with their last breath...

If you want to get there fast and fast go alone, but if you want to go far, walk with others and let yourself be accompanied (African proverb).

5. Identity. Who we are at the root and in the relationship.

Not because we do not know who we are... but to give life to what we already know well. And to be born every day, without fear of discovering our truth in the gaze and in the voice of Another, our Beloved, who pronounces and recreates us every morning. It is an invitation to retrace the path, as the Angel said to Elijah... Under the tree, in the same desert where Hagar saw the well of water, Elijah lost his security and did not know who he was, and God taught him the greatest lesson of his life: The way is beyond your strength, retrace (walk back) the way, through the desert, to Horeb. God gave him an identity at the moment of greatest helplessness and frailty, with his breath, whisper of life

at the door of the cave... And Elijah was then a newborn, after and inside God's own heart....

Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism. Number 3: *The ever-present call [C Epilogue]*

In our concern for the future, we must not lose sight of the experience of our call which is the solid foundation on which our existence rests. **We do not know what the future of the Order will be, much less of that portion to which we belong. Nor do we know what form consecrated life will take or what changes the ecclesial institutions that we consider unchangeable will undergo. But this is not what we need to worry about; rather, we need to take concrete steps in the light of the experience we hold in our hearts from which our life and our spiritual identity have sprung and continue to spring. Everything can be taken away from us, but not this "hidden source" that nourishes our hope.**

It's said that Father Míceál has not been allowed to enter the USA because of some relationship with Cuba, which he himself does not know what it is... that is why I end with the quote of two Cuban writers:

It is worthwhile to stop crying and make an appointment with the future, IT IS WORTH LIVING... (Silvio Rodríguez).

And the poem I recited when I remembered my mother one year after her departure to heaven:

Cultivo una rosa blanca
en junio como enero
para el amigo sincero
que me da su mano franca.
Y para el cruel que me arranca
el corazón con que vivo,
cardo ni ortiga cultivo;
cultivo la rosa blanca. (José Martí)

I cultivate a white rose
In June as in January
For the sincere friend,
who shakes my hand frankly.
And for the cruel person
Who would want to break my heart,
I cultivate, neither thistles nor thorns,
I cultivate a white rose.

When my father was about to die, every night, on the weekend when it was my turn to help, we would put him to bed with my mother and he would protest and complain, he had Alzheimer's, and he wanted to hit my mother, at that moment I would put my hand on his head and tell him, God bless you, dad, and he would say: and you too, son.

A blessing that awakens life, the sleeping or forgotten truth....

God bless you.