

JULY 21, 2021 BY MOTHER ANGELINE SOCIETY

Mary: Image and Mother of the Church



Our Lady of Mount Carmel
(Photo: Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm)

+ Maria

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Once again, I would like to welcome you virtually, to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Middletown, New York. Here, under the patronage of Our Lady, we strive to draw closer to Christ under Mary's guidance and mantle, and to provide a place of prayer, silence, and grace to all who visit. We welcome all who are joining us in the Carmelite Symposium co-sponsored by the Center for Carmelite Studies at Catholic University of America, and the Carmelite Institute of North America, of which I am the Chair of the Board of Directors. With us present for the Mass and Morning Prayer this morning are the Novices of the North American Provinces of St. Elias and the Most Pure Heart of Mary, as well as Lay Carmelites who belong to the Shrine Community.

In the old days, this would have been the fourth day in the Octave of the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and tomorrow is the Solemnity of our Father Saint

Elias. The Mass chosen honors the Blessed Virgin Mary, Image and Mother of the Church and, of course, she is the Image and Mother of Carmel, our religious family. The members of a family always reflect the parents from whom they came, and in Carmel we are always meant to imitate and reflect Mary, the best and most faithful disciple of her Son. Carmelites are never confused: we live in allegiance to Jesus Christ with a pure heart and a good conscience, as our Rule teaches us. However, in that living, Mary – and Elijah of course, – give us examples of how to live in that full allegiance, and what that means. Anyone who turns to Mary can be assured that she will turn them toward Christ.

Among the beautiful sentiments and teaching found in the readings at today's Mass, I would like to reflect briefly on a few points, in keeping with the theme that Mary is the image and Mother of the Church – and Carmel.

When once I was participating in a *lectio divina* session with a group of lovely diocesan priests, the text was taken from the Acts of the Apostles, as we heard it read today. Each priest shared what he understood the text to mean at that moment for him, and each sharing was meaningful. When I read the passage, my eyes immediately fell upon Mary at prayer in the midst of the apostles and disciples gathered. That was all I could keep coming back to in my mind. As we went around the circle, not one of the other priests mentioned Mary, which amazed me, and when my turn came, this presence of Mary in the middle of the early Church was the focus of my sharing and poured out of me. As Carmelites, what might we see in this passage? I think, first of all, we see an image of the Church, gathered together, praying, calling down the Holy Spirit, and Mary is with the believers, with us. Beyond anything we do, any kind of service we perform or project we undertake, we first of all have to place ourselves and keep ourselves in the middle of the Church, at prayer, invoking the Holy Spirit, and realizing Mary's presence, guidance and love for us. This week's Symposium will consider the place of Carmel and her spirituality in the midst of today's world. I think that we need to affirm from the beginning, that Carmel's place in the world is to be in the middle of the Church, always being the prayerful, Spirit-led community which imitates Mary, and witnesses to Mary and Jesus in our times and cultures. Whether we are Carmelites in parishes or schools, in the cloister or nursing home, with our families, children or in the workplace, we need to image and mother Christ's presence in the world in imitation of Our Lady.

In truth, I don't purport to be a scripture scholar, and I know that volumes have been written and movies produced about the gospel of the wedding feast of Cana which we just heard. Why did Mary say what she said? Why did Jesus say what he said, or do what he did? Why did Mary, the model disciple, basically ignore Jesus' response and, instead, just tell the attendants, "Do whatever he tells you." Maybe in

heaven we will get the right answers, but even now we know that the result of their dialogue and the action of Jesus brought joy and relief into a very delicate situation and, in fact, the wine of Jesus was regarded as “having saved the best for last.” From this text, I draw two conclusions which, I think, are to the point. The first is: Mary is a very good intercessor, effective, and able to achieve results. Asking Mary’s help when the cause is worthy, brings an answer from her Son. Again, we Carmelites who live in the midst of the Church, can safely and confidently, turn to our Mother Mary for Her heavenly intercession and encourage others to do so. As St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross taught, we Carmelites are called to stand proxy for those who cannot, or will not pray for themselves and their needs, and we can be assured that our Mother will help us.

And, in this passage, we actually see Mary bring the best out of Jesus. He seems to hesitate, but she sails on full throttle. Mary draws a response out of Our Lord, and His response is the best. There is a lesson of faith here for all of us to ponder, and the lesson is a consoling one about the care which Mary has for her children, and the magnificence of Jesus’ care as well, granting exactly what is needed and best to those who persevere in calling upon Him.

Let us ask Mary, the Image and Model of the Church and Carmel, to teach us how to pray, how to intercede, and how to live as her children and as her brothers and sisters in the middle of the Church, as light and life.

May God bless our Symposium.

Father Mario Esposito, O.Carm.
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