

TO BE A CARMELITE TODAY

“A JOY EVER NEW, A JOY TO BE SHARED”



“...the moment your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy.” (Lk 1:44)

1. A LIFE CENTRED IN JESUS CHRIST

The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ, joy is constantly born anew. (*Evangelii gaudium*, EG 1)

I invite all Christians, everywhere, at this very moment, to a renewed personal encounter with Jesus Christ, or at least an openness to letting him encounter them; I ask all of you to do this unfailingly each day. No one should think that this invitation is not meant for him or her, since “no one is excluded from the joy brought by the Lord”. (EG 3)

Many and varied are the ways in which our saintly forefathers laid down how everyone, whatever his station or the kind of religious observance he has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ -- how, pure in heart and stout in conscience, he must be unswerving in the service of his Master. (Rule Ch. 2)

Reflection and Prayer

Our life centred on Jesus Christ, means that Christ is in our thoughts as the model, the motivation and the reward of all that we do. As our model we aim to live like he did. In all our motivation it is Christ who becomes the reason for what we do, and the strength with which to do it. As our reward, we ask for nothing more than to live in union with him along with our sisters and brothers.

Lord Jesus you show us the way we are to live and in you we find the reason for all that we do. Grant us so to live that your love will fill each one of us and reach out through us to the world you have created and to all the people with whom we share our space in the world. You are our God and you live and reign forever and ever.

2. A LIFE LIVED IN COMMUNITY

(...) never tiring of our decision to live in fraternity. There indeed we find true healing, since the way to relate to others which truly heals instead of debilitating us, is (...) a contemplative fraternity. It is a fraternal love capable of seeing the sacred grandeur of our neighbour, of finding God in every human being, of tolerating the nuisances of life in common by clinging to the love of God, of opening the heart to divine love and seeking the happiness of others just as their heavenly Father does. Here and now, especially where we are a “little flock” (*Lk* 12:32), the Lord’s disciples are called to live as a community which is the salt of the earth and the light of the world (cf. *Mt* 5:13-16). We are called to bear witness to a constantly new way of living together in fidelity to the Gospel. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community! (EG 91, 92)

Our lifestyle, which must be open and welcoming, invites us to share with others the communion of hearts and the experience of God, which are lived within the community. This way of being “in the midst of the people” is a prophetic sign of a new way of relating with people - one that is based on friendship and fraternity. It is also a prophetic statement about justice and peace in society and among peoples. (*Ratio Institutionis Vitae Carmelitana*, RIVC 47)

.... we are to renew our personal commitment to *being praying/contemplative fraternities at the service of the Church and the world*. We note that the non-negotiable elements of this community building are presence at community exercises: the liturgy, community meetings, meals, and fraternal gatherings and a healthy balance between solitude and activity. (2013 General Chapter Message, 4b)

Reflection and prayer

When living in community becomes a burden, when it gets in the way of the work we are trying to do, when it makes too many demands of us, when our friends are not in the community, when we stand at the door with the key in our hand and hesitate before going in...

Lord Jesus Christ grant us a healthy balance between prayer and fraternity to that we may reach others through a life of tenderness and compassion. Remind us of our calling and give us the grace of greater conversion, to renew our personal commitment whereby we can grow into praying, contemplative fraternities at the service of the Church and of the world. You are our God and you live and reign forever and ever.

3. A LIFE OF CLOSENESS TO THE POOR

If the whole Church takes up this missionary impulse, she has to go forth to everyone without exception. But to whom should she go first? When we read the Gospel we find a clear indication: not so much our friends and wealthy neighbours, but above all the poor and the sick, those who are usually despised and overlooked, “those who cannot repay you” (Lk 14:14). There can be no room for doubt or for explanations, which weaken so clear a message. Today and always, “the poor are the privileged recipients of the Gospel”, and the fact that it is freely preached to them is a sign of the kingdom that Jesus came to establish. We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor. May we never abandon them. Let us go forth, then, let us go forth to offer everyone the life of Jesus Christ. (EG 48, 49)

The heart of our witness is to embrace the contemplative dimension of the Order, to be lived, cultivated and transmitted. Let

us witness to the effectiveness of the gospel through transformed lives as well as engaging in dialogue with the poor, with cultures, religions, and systems. People will be drawn to Christ when they notice our gospel based lives of simplicity, solidarity with the marginalized.... (2013 General Chapter Message, 4f)

Reflection and prayer:

We may still ask, who are the poor? Are we not all poor, in some way? Yet Jesus knew who the poor were: the poor in spirit, the poor to whom the young man would give everything once he had sold all that he had, the blind, the lame and the crippled who stood and waited on the side of the road, the thousands whom he fed when he knew they were hungry.

Lord Jesus, forgive us if our way of life has given scandal; grant us the grace of living a life of closeness to the poor, so that hearing their cry and responding to it we may truly help them to find their place at the table of plenty which you have prepared for each one of us. You are God who lives and reigns forever and ever.

4. A LIFE OF FAITH, JOURNEYING WITH THE PEOPLE

Popular piety is “a legitimate way of living the faith, a way of feeling part of the Church and a manner of being missionaries”.... I think of the steadfast faith of those mothers tending their sick children who, though perhaps barely familiar with the articles of the creed, cling to a rosary; or of all the hope poured into a candle lighted in a humble home with a prayer for help from Mary, or in the gaze of tender love directed to Christ crucified. No one who loves God’s holy people will view these actions as the expression of a purely human search for the divine. They are the manifestation of a theological life nourished by the working of the Holy Spirit who has been poured into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). (EG 124, 125)

Indeed, our Order is rightly seen as a school of contemplation. Blessed Titus Brandsma reminds us that ‘God is so close to us. All things existing exist because of his work and in his presence... We should sense his presence and learn from our ancestors how they associated with him intimately, talked with him and listened to him. Life will look very different then’. Through our being we are to sensitize people to the fact that Carmels are spaces for the quest of God in silence and solitude. We feel called to building praying communities, whose major ministry is to teach people how to pray in the places where they are and in on-line ministry, by leading people into a culture of prayer, through our discourse, through our celebration of the liturgy in a way that is participative and contemplative, through the practice of *lectio divina* and our attention to other forms of prayer. (2013 General Chapter Message, 4a)

Reflection and prayer

When we see how the people pray, when we join in their celebrations, when we take the lead in organising their processions, when we enjoy praying simply with them, then we will know that the way of love and simplicity is the way that leads to God. Our theology and our liturgy help to confirm that.

Lord Jesus, you have taken away our heart of stone, and given us a heart of flesh. Help us to love tenderly, act justly and walk gently with your people. Together we seek your will and mercy, so that every kind of action and prayer may remind us of your goodness. You are our God and you live and reign forever and ever.

5. A LIFE TRANSFORMED, A LIFE Poured OUT

It is impossible to persevere in a fervent evangelization unless we are convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known him, not the same thing to walk with him as to walk blindly,

not the same thing to hear his word as not to know it, and not the same thing to contemplate him, to worship him, to find our peace in him, as not to. It is not the same thing to try to build the world with his Gospel as to try to do so by our own lights. We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with him it is easier to find meaning in everything. This is why we evangelize. A true missionary, who never ceases to be a disciple, knows that Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise. Unless we see him present at the heart of our missionary commitment, our enthusiasm soon wanes and we are no longer sure of what it is that we are handing on; we lack vigour and passion. A person who is not convinced, enthusiastic, certain and in love, will convince nobody. (EG 266)

The present situation of our world is not a cause of despair; rather what humanity is experiencing presents us with opportunities of expressing who we are. It is as if the world is saying: will Carmelites stand up and be counted? Let us therefore stand up and be seen to be authentic and credible witnesses in the Spirit. It is because of our adoption as sons and daughters of the Father and our faith in Christ, that in the power of the Holy Spirit, we see so many hidden opportunities in these challenges. Christ Jesus is the Word of hope and salvation and so we hope to make the difference in our communities and localities by the way we live. (2013 General Chapter Message, 5)

Reflection and prayer

When our image of ourselves is poor, when we feel we have very little to offer, when we are low on energy it is then we need to recall all that we have been given it is then that we may hear the words of Jesus to the Samaritan women, “If you only knew the gift....” (Jn 4:10a).

Lord Jesus, those who plant sparsely reap sparsely. Help us to recognise what you are doing in our lives and to return it to you having made ten talents more, for the building up of your kingdom here on earth. You are our God and you live and reign in love forever and ever. Amen.

6. A LIFE DRAWN TO THE PERIPHERIES

The word of God constantly shows us how God challenges those who believe in him “to go forth”. Abraham received the call to set out for a new land (cf. *Gen 12:1-3*). Moses heard God’s call: “Go, I send you” (*Ex 3:10*) and led the people towards the Promised Land (cf. *Ex 3:17*). To Jeremiah God says: “To all whom I send you, you shall go” (*Jer 1:7*). In our day Jesus’ command to “go and make disciples” echoes in the changing scenarios and ever new challenges to the Church’s mission of evangelization, and all of us are called to take part in this new missionary “going forth”. Each Christian and every community must discern the path that the Lord points out, but all of us are asked to obey his call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the “peripheries” in need of the light of the Gospel. (EG 20)

So the LORD said to him: "Move on to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have designated a widow there to provide for you." He left and went to Zarephath. As he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was gathering sticks there; he called out to her, "Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink." (IKgs 17:9-11)

We can no longer live as isolated realities, because events across the globe touch us, challenge us, engage us. The mendicant friar is not constrained by high walls, but enters the market place where many cultures interact. We are heirs to a great missionary tradition, opening our Order to new cultures and ideas, places where the

“seed of Carmel has been planted.” The harvest is rich! (RIVC 50)

Reflection and prayer

There is a cry in every human heart and every cry is the gift of the Spirit calling out to God for love and mercy. Distance makes it difficult to hear the cry. We have to draw close and be prepared to listen.

Lord Jesus Christ, help me to hear the call to go where you want me to be, to where there is a cry, for I will find you there and you will find me and together we will hear the cry and respond with tenderness and compassion. You are God and you live and reign in love forever and ever.

7. A LIFE SHAPED BY OUR LOVE FOR MARY

There is a Marian “style” to the Church’s work of evangelization. Whenever we look to Mary, we come to believe once again in the revolutionary nature of love and tenderness. In her we see that humility and tenderness are not virtues of the weak but of the strong who need not treat others poorly in order to feel important themselves. (EG 288)

With the divinest Word, the Virgin /made pregnant, down the road/ comes walking, /if you will grant her a room in your abode. (St. John of the Cross)

This ought to be the aim of our devotion to Mary, that we be another mother of God, that God should be conceived in us also, and brought forth by us. The mystery of the Incarnation has revealed to us how valuable man is to God, how intimately God wants to be united to man. This mystery draws the attention of our minds to the eternal birth of the Son from the Father as the deepest reason for this mystery of Love. In the celebration of the three Holy Masses on Christmas, the birth from the Father is first celebrated, secondly from the Holy Virgin Mary, thirdly God’s

birth in ourselves. This is not done without significance and this threefold birth must be understood to be a revelation of one eternal Love. (Bl. Titus Brandsma, Lectures on Carmelite Spirituality).

Reflection and prayer

Virgin of listening and contemplation, Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast, pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are, that she may never be closed in on herself or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.

Star of the new evangelization help us to bear radiant witness to communion, service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor, that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth, illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel, wellspring of happiness for God's little ones, pray for us. Amen. Alleluia! (Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium)

Prayer to Mary, woman of listening

Mary, woman of listening, open our ears; grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus among the thousands of words of this world; grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live, to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship.

Mary, woman of decision, illuminate our mind and our heart, so that we may obey, unhesitating, the word of your Son Jesus; give us the courage to decide, not to let ourselves be dragged along, letting others direct our life.

Mary, woman of action, obtain that our hands and feet move “with haste” toward others, to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus, to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did. Amen.

(Pope Francis)



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