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To all members of the Carmelite Family

Prot. 214/2025

MARY, MOTHER OF HOPE

MESSAGE OF PRIOR GENERAL ON THE OCCASION OF THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL
IN THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025

Brothers and Sisters,

Once again, we have the great joy of celebrating the solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel as a celebration of the Church and of the whole Carmelite Family throughout the world.

We do so this year as part of the Jubilee Year, an event that gives added significance to our novenas, processions and liturgical celebrations because this year, the late Pope Francis asked us to look at the hope that is in our lives and at the foundations of that hope, Jesus Christ and Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Because of them and what they represent we are able to live in hope with a hope that cannot disappoint. Jesus is the Incarnate Word of God. Mary is the handmaid of the Lord, ever obedient to his Word. Jesus, hanging on the Cross is the promise of resurrection, the victory over all that could hold us back. Mary stood and understood and without knowing what was happening, remained in hope and did not turn away as she saw her Son dying of crucifixion.

In this Jubilee Year, that sees us all as pilgrims of hope, our faith and hope are being tested. Each day we hear news of war in different places. The news from Gaza each day tells of 20, 30, 60 or even 90 people, men, women and children who can die in one attack. Each attack is the result of careful thought and planning and uses the best of human talent to make the attack possible.

I think of what it must be like to begin the day in Gaza, or in Kiev. It is hard to think that the people have slept but even so the new day has to begin. What will the new day bring, more death, more destruction, more rubble, and again the cry, when and how will it all end? What does one do when surrounded by rubble, when the home that was there yesterday is now a

total ruin and the blood of one's family has turned the stones to red? How often people must feel, we are lost, we have no hope, there is no one to save us?

The tragedy of war saddens us. News of natural disasters also saddens us. While we speak of natural disasters, we know that in many cases, so-called natural disasters can be prevented, or if not prevented, their consequences can be less severe. We believe that because of our advances in science there is a lot more we can do.

While the human heart must suffer deeply seeing what is happening, we still have hope and that hope does not disappoint. The Jubilee is an occasion for giving thanks to God, the author of life, listening deeply to his Word and putting things right in our relationships with God, with one another and with the earth that is our home, a home made for every child of God, and child of Mary.

Today we can give thanks because we have reason to hope. Every time we turn to the Gospel we discover again the reason for our hope and we give thanks. The Gospel speaks of Jesus revealing the love and mercy of the Father. The Gospel speaks of Mary receiving that word and putting it into practice. The Gospel speaks of a way of life that is all about love and treating every other human being as our brother and our sister.

This is the world that the Gospel offers to us. It is not just a pious thought. It is not merely an unreachable dream. It is a reality that we are able to achieve and it has been achieved by people who put their faith in Jesus Christ as Mary did, and sought to live a simple life of love and service to others. This is the life that millions of people strive to obtain, for themselves and for their families, but something has gone wrong. There is a part of our society that has let us down. It is that part that does not see human beings as brothers and sisters to one another, does not see other people as their sisters and brothers but rather as rivals, competitors, servants of their ambition, fodder for their greed. People with that mentality, preaching their gospel of power and exclusion of opulence and greed, have somehow convinced, captivated or corrupted too many leaders in this world, giving them permission to make laws that serve themselves and to turn away, exclude, and punish the masses who are the victims of this power game and who begin to feel there is no use in opposing this power and therefore the only thing to do is to accept it and become part of it. "If you cannot beat them, join them".

In the days of the prophets the situation was much the same. Again and again true prophets had to rise up and condemn the oppressive ways of the bad shepherds and restore the hope of the people in the shepherds who were dedicated to their people. Elijah arose like a fire. He abhorred what the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel was doing to the people, removing the identity of the people, taking away their reason for hope and taking the food out of their mouths to feed it to the horses. Elijah rose like a fire. Elijah was there to defend the dignity of the human person and the true image of God. How often today the name of God is used to support the most inhumane of causes!

In her time Mary could see the same truths. She saw that God raised up the lowly and removed the mighty from their thrones. She saw that God fed the starving and sent the rich away empty. She saw that God is faithful to his promises, as the small community began to take shape around her and she treasured the words spoken by Jesus from the cross, "Woman, behold your son". She knew that all that her Son had said was true, because all his words were words of salvation.

When he spoke of how blessed are the poor, the peace makers, the pure in heart, the prophets of justice, all of those words were words of salvation and they were true for that reason. When He spoke about building our house on a rock and not on sand all of that was true and when He

spoke of coming to serve and not to be served that too was true and when He spoke of loving God with our whole heart and soul and strength and our neighbour as ourselves, that too was true. All of these words are true because they are words of salvation. Now, today, we are deceived and disorientated by many words, spoken to defend causes that should not be defended because they offend the dignity of the human person and are not words of salvation.

The psalmist has a word for us, "My soul is waiting for the Lord, I count on his word. My soul is longing for the Lord, more than watchman for daybreak" (Ps 130). Do we find this confidence in ourselves, in the way that Mary found it, and does it give us the kind of hope that is as sure and safe and reliable as the dawn that will surely follow the night, as every watchman knows?

Where then is our hope, that sure hope that will not fail us and that we are encouraged to discover in this Jubilee year? That hope is in Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, in Mary, the Mother of the Incarnate Word, always obedient to that word. That hope is also in our sisters and brothers who have believed in that Word. We are not alone. As we ponder each year that story of Mary standing at the foot of the cross, we can think of the generations of people who received Mary as their mother and took Mary into their lives and their homes as her Children. We are not alone. When we pray for peace we are in union with thousands and thousands of people around the world, whose humanity is still alive and well, who have not bent the knee to Baal or any other cruel and hard hearted idol. We are not alone. Elijah once thought that he was all alone, that all the prophets had been killed and he alone was left and they wanted to kill him too (I Kg 19,18). Then he had to discover that no, he was not alone, there were seven thousand other prophets who had not bent their knee to Baal. Today we have to look around us in this Jubilee Year and see the vast array of people, of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, who cherish the humanity they have received from the Creator and long only to live in peace and harmony with their neighbour, have space and dignity for their families and play their part in building a world where there is space and dignity for all.

What must it be like to be homeless, to have small children that you cannot protect, to hear the sound of the enemy in the sky and seconds later see the destruction that one bomb, not mind a thousand, can wreak in a matter of seconds. What words, ideas, messages, ambitions, obligations are in the minds of the men and women who give the instructions, and the men and women, who carry them out? The Jubilee year comes to us as a time to give thanks for God and to God, and to build new relationships where the former relationships were not built on being brothers and sisters to one another. There is no limit to the number of sons and daughters that Mary received at the foot of the cross and there is no limit to the men and women who can accept Mary into their home as her children. Here we create a new humanity in which we recognise that the mother and brothers and sisters of Jesus, in life, on the cross and in the resurrection are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice. These are the people who hear words of salvation, cherish those words and make them their own. They are able to filter out and reject the words of violence and destruction, words of hatred and revenge, words of greed and ambitions to lord it over others.

Now in the world we hear some of our leaders saying that we must be prepared for war, that it would be naïve to think otherwise. We hear again that so-called wisdom that says, "If you want peace, prepare for war". We hear words that say to us, you have to bully others into peace: peace comes through strength, there is no other way. Peace through strength is true, but what kind of strength? Our faith in Jesus Christ will always say, our real strength is in our ability to rely on God's word and to reach out with that same word to touch the hearts of men and women who themselves have been touched by the love of God and long in the depths of their heart, there where the cry of humanity is loud and clear, to forgive one another and build new relationships of sisterhood and brotherhood for the good of all.

Now we must pause and see, what hope can do for us today. Our hope is in Christ Jesus and that hope does not disappoint but is it right to lose hope in humankind, in our sisters and brothers. The Psalmist tells us (Ps 117), "do not put your trust in princes, put your trust in the Lord and he will save you". Yet it cannot be right not to hope in our brothers and sisters, in human beings. If we did that we would be playing the game of those who would take away from us our vision of God and our understanding of the dignity of the human person, only to replace it with a very poor and sometimes disgusting image of the human person. God has put so much of God into humanity that we can see one another are true children of God, brothers and sisters to one another.

Our way of understanding is based on the Gospel, on the law of love, on the revelation of God and of God's love that has been given to us as exemplified in Mary and our saints, as exemplified in the Prophets Elijah and Elisha and given to us from the moment that we were called to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ.

Is there any way we can share that message with the world in a way that will convince minds and change hearts, so that those who have all the power will use it to serve and not to be served and those who do not have power will give that power to one another by receiving all that comes from God, and sharing it freely, so that that no one is left in need.

No one should be left in need of anything that is necessary for the human person to live a life of dignity in a world in which the dignity of every person is respected to the full. "Woman, behold your son, Son behold your mother". It is in these words coming from the mouth of the Son of God hanging dying on the cross we learn to hope in God and in one another, because of the truth of these words, because they are words of salvation. From these words we learn how much God has done for us and how much more he will do for those who turn to him and learn what it is to be meek and humble of heart. It is the same Son of God who says, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who work for justice, blessed are the meek.

I pray that our celebrations of the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in this Jubilee Year, may renew our hope, increase our joy and lead many others to find that hope and joy in Jesus the Incarnate Word, in Mary the Mother of Jesus ever obedient to his word, and in the people who adorn each day of our lives, as brothers and sisters, pilgrims of hope.

Rome, 7th of July, 2025



Míceál O'Neill, O.Carm.
Prior General