



Alone before God

Prayer is essentially a personal relationship, a dialogue between God and the human person. We are invited to cultivate it and to find time and space to be with the Lord. Friendship can only grow through “frequent one-to-one encounters with the One whom we know loves us” (St Teresa of Jesus, *Life*).

Our tradition suggests various ways of praying. The Rule invites us to prayerful attention to the Word, which must “live abundantly on our lips and in our hearts.” (Rule, 15) Mary, the prayerful woman who “cherished these things and pondered them in her heart,” (Lk 2:19, 51) is the sublime model for this form of prayer. From Elijah we learn to remain in God’s presence. As we become accustomed to his presence and as we learn to receive it silently, we begin to “breathe almost exclusively the essence of God, as we breathe the air around us” (Michael of St Augustine).

What is important, beyond all matters of form, is to cultivate a deep friendship with Christ: perfect prayer “does not consist in thinking much but in loving much” (St Teresa of Jesus, *Foundations*). In prayer, the loving heart reaches out towards God and rests in him.

Ratio Institutionis Vitæ Carmelitanæ (2013, 37)



ocarm.org



Liturgy and Prayer Commission

Curia Generalizia dei Carmelitani
Via Giovanni Lanza, 138
00184 Roma, Italia

 seggen@ocarm.org



Design by Matthew Price: Transformation by Design | transformationbydesign.au

ALWAYS WITH YOU DEAREST LORD

Liturgy and Prayer as a school of love: a series from the Liturgy and Prayer Commission





Sanctifying our time

Jesus lived in communion with the Father and said, “pray always, without tiring”. Seeking to follow this command, the Christian community has understood that it must strive to sanctify the time given to it, and this gradually evolved into the Liturgy of the Hours which, “among other liturgical actions, has as its characteristic... to sanctify the whole course of the day and night”.

As the baptised, in Carmel we are called to be “persevering... in communion, in the breaking of bread and in prayer”. Praying assiduously is an expression of the nature of the Church and praying together manifests the communitarian character of the Church. Carmel, then, has a way of praying closely dependent upon the Word of God. This is the essential element of the Liturgy of the Hours (Rule 10-11).

In the celebration of the Hours, we also create a deep communion, growing together as an authentic contemplative fraternity, and therefore we feel the obligation and joy of celebrating them in common, striving to ensure that all members of the community can participate.

Living in the presence of God

In the Carmelite tradition, the sanctification of time is characterised by “living in the presence of God”, continuously adoring and praising in an active relationship of love for Him. Non-liturgical prayer exercises, such as “aspirational prayer”, are thus developed, supporting the putting into practice of the Rule’s precept: “let each one remain in his own cell..., meditating day and night on the law of the Lord and keeping watch in prayer”. Praying in one’s own room and in one’s own heart behind closed doors “through Christ in the Holy Spirit” is essential to fully living the Carmelite vocation; also, because without it even liturgical prayer loses intensity and affection.

The commitment to consecrate time, therefore, “makes the Carmelite fraternity a witness to the living and mysterious presence of God in the midst of his people” who thus experience “the presence of the Word in history”.

Elijah & Mary

Looking at Elijah and Mary we grasp other elements for understanding the sanctification of time from the perspective of our charism.

Elijah cultivates a thirst for the one God and lives in his presence: he is the prophet, contemplative, mystic who “stands in the presence of the living God”. We, like him, allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit and the Word, witnessing to the divine presence in the world and accepting that God is truly God in our lives.

Mary is the woman overshadowed by the Spirit of God, the listening Virgin who meditates in her heart on the events and words of the Lord, the

faithful disciple of wisdom, who seeks Jesus and allows herself to be taught by his Spirit. Around her the disciples unite in prayer and with her they receive the first-fruits of the Spirit that fill them with zeal. Looking to her, we learn to stand before God as individuals and as brothers and sisters of the Lord, because Mary lives among us as mother and sister: she guides us to make holy and beautiful every act and moment of daily life, in liturgical prayer and in personal and solitary prayer.

From this familiarity, especially since the 16th century, Carmel has expressed Mary’s loving closeness to the people of God also through the devotion of the scapular: a sign of consecration to her and a vehicle for the faithful to belong to the Order, an effective mediation of evangelisation.

Conclusion

As members of Carmel, we are called, following the example of the early church, to liturgical prayer in common. by virtue of our Rule, by praying in solitude throughout the day and celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours, we are the Church that praises and “prays unceasingly” to God with one voice, and we collaborate “for the increase of the whole mystical body of Christ and for the good of the particular churches”.

Sources consulted:

- Bible: 1 Kings, Gospel of John and Luke, Acts of the Apostles
- principles and norms for the Liturgy of the Hours (9, 10, 11, 24)
- Rule (10-11)

