

## Nine Themes in Carmelite Spirituality

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Ever since I served the Most Pure Heart of Mary Province as the Delegate to the Lay Carmelites, from 1996 until 2002, I have had a deep interest in Lay Carmel and how it can best be grounded in an authentic Carmelite heritage. When one looks at various websites sponsored by some Tertiary (T.O.C.) and Secular Carmelites (O.C.D.S.) one notices various misconceptions about our Carmelite tradition. Sometimes I have seen things posted on the internet by various groups that are even foreign to the faith of our Catholic Church. There are parameters to our Catholic faith, and there are parameters to our Carmelite tradition. Carmel is not all things to all people. Carmel has unique gifts for the Church, gifts that are defined by eight centuries of tradition. Carmel's initial document, that is our charter from the Church and which defines who we are, is a document called *The Rule of Saint Albert*. It was given to the Latin Hermits on Mount Carmel by Saint Albert of Vercelli, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, eight centuries ago. *The Fiery Arrow* is another early document that bespeaks our Carmelite tradition and how it grew in its first century. *The Institute of the First Monks* (also known as *The Ten Books on the Way of Life and Great Deeds of the Carmelites*), the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, of St. Thérèse and Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, and so many others have clarified what is particular to our Carmelite Tradition.

When I was Provincial Delegate to the Lay Carmelites I inherited from my predecessors a custom of preparing an annual tape recording to be sent to each of the communities. The very first year that I was in the ministry of Provincial Delegate I made a recording entitled 'Nine Themes in Carmelite Spirituality.' Over the years the Lay Carmelite Office in Darien near Chicago has continued to reproduce and sell that tape for hundreds of Lay Carmelites and Lay Carmelite Communities. I am flattered that the tape has enjoyed such prominence. I am planning on recording a new edition of that tape in the near future. I am also preparing a book that will allow me to expand on each of the themes in more detail. But recently several Lay Carmelites have asked me if I would not give them the text of that tape out to study. I have decided to do that by submitting it as an article to *Carmel in the World* and *Assumpta* magazines. Over the years since I made the tape, I have rethought some of the ideas in the light of scholarship that has been done and this article reflects some of the changes in my own understanding of our tradition.

There is a need to clarify Carmelite life and spirituality and I originally proposed from our heritage nine characteristics that define us. I would stay with those nine, though the last theme I would slightly rephrase. I had originally said that the Carmelite tradition is first: Christocentric; second: Eucharistic; third: Scriptural; fourth: in harmony with the teaching office of the Pope and Bishops; fifth: theologically in the classic Catholic tradition; sixth: Marian, in the context of our Christological focus; seventh: Elijan; eighth: Communitarian, not individualistic; and ninth: lay, not clerical or monastic. I have never been happy with the

characterization of the Carmelite Tradition being 'lay' because that does not capture quite precisely the idea I am trying to communicate. It is a very complex idea, which you will see when we talk about that characteristic. I think I would be more comfortable today saying that Carmel is inclusive in as that it does not draw definitive dividing lines or distinctions between the vocation and spirituality of its lay and religious members.

I want to go through these nine characteristics in some detail. You may want to discuss these ideas yourselves in your community meetings as a guide to grow and develop more authentically in our Carmelite Tradition.

### **Carmel is Christocentric**

The first characteristic of Carmel is that we are Christocentric. Carmel is first and foremost about following Jesus Christ. The *Rule of Saint Albert* outlines the purpose of our vocation. It says: 'Many and varied are the ways in which our saintly predecessors laid down, how everyone, whatever one's station in life, or kind of religious observance one has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ, how pure in heart, stout in conscience, we should be unswerving in the service of our Master'. Carmelites live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ whom the Carmelite *Rule* calls: 'our only Saviour' (Chapter 19). I will mention Mary at a later point. But let me say now that while Carmel is a Marian Order it is not so in the same sense that St. Louis Grignon de Montfort advocated for his Institute. We Carmelites never take our eyes off Jesus Christ. The first Carmelites came to the Holy Land drawn by the places where Our Lord had lived. They wanted to read the Gospels, live the Gospels, in that land. They wanted to see what his eyes had seen, and to set their feet in the paths where he had walked. I think the Holy Land still is, and always will be, a very special place for Carmelites. Carmelites are profoundly incarnational in our approach to Jesus Christ. St. Teresa tells us in *The Interior Castle*, Book 6, Chapter 7: 'That even at the heights of the spiritual life we cannot leave behind us our focus on the humanity of Jesus Christ'.

Carmelite spirituality stresses the humanity of Jesus Christ. The humanity of Christ is often misunderstood today. Many good people buy into the Monophysite Heresy which perceived Jesus so divine that his human nature was eclipsed by his divinity. Yet this is not the faith of our Church. The faith of our Catholic Church celebrates two natures in the one person, Jesus Christ. Jesus has a divine nature exactly the same as the Father's, and a human nature exactly the same as ours. These two natures each remain intact, and distinct. One does not absorb or eclipse the other in any way. St. Teresa advises us that the humanity of Christ should be a constant source for our meditation. We should focus on his fears in the garden, as he struggled to be faithful to his Father's will. We should focus on his bewilderment that he had been obedient to his Father's will, but his faithfulness led not to glory but to shame - or so it would have seemed on that Good Friday. We should focus on his sense of abandonment by his friends. We should focus on the trial of faith he underwent in his passion. We need to know that the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* tells us that Christ was tempted in every way that we are, and we need to know as Paul tells us in the *Letter to the Philippians* that he did not consider his equality with God something to cling to, but he emptied himself taking on himself the nature of a slave being born in human estate. To understand our vocation as Carmelites we need to identify with Jesus as he goes into the desert for forty days to discover his Father's plan for him. We need to go with him up the mountain to spend the night in prayer. We need to go with him to the lonely place where we, like he did, can search our lives

to see if we are still on track with God the Father's will. The sacred humanity of Christ, sinless as it was, but beset by every other human condition and even tempted, tempted far greater than we are, to sin. The humanity of Christ is our life's breath for in his sacred humanity is the path to our salvation. As the Fathers of the Church teach us, God became human so that we might become God. In the humanity of Christ we see our invitation to share in his divinity. This is the end, the purpose of Carmel, like the end of the Christian life in general. It is transformation into Christ that we may share in the divinity of him who humbled himself to share in our humanity. That is why the *Rule of Saint Albert* calls him: 'Our Only Saviour' (Chapter 19). We never take our eyes off him. We never set our feet on any path but his. We walk after him in the company of Mary, his mother, and with the other disciples, but we run after him and him alone. Like the Syro-Phoenician Woman, we grasp at the hem of his garment for our salvation.

### **Carmel is Eucharistic**

The second characteristic I'd like to talk about is that Carmel is Eucharistic. Carmelite life has always been centred around the Eucharistic celebration. The first hermits on Mount Carmel gathered daily for the Eucharist. The Eucharist was their one, daily community exercise. That first generation of Carmelites prayed the Psalms alone in their cells. They ate their meals alone in their cells. The one time each day they came together was for Mass. We think of monks and nuns and friars as always having had daily Mass as part of their lives, but this is not so. Many Orders such as the Benedictines initially only celebrated Mass on Sundays and major feasts and introduced the practice of a daily Mass later in their history. But the Carmelites chose to be together for daily Mass from their first days on Mount Carmel. Now, notice that they were together for Mass every day, but unfortunately, in those days, people usually received the Eucharist rarely, and the first Carmelites most likely did not receive Holy Communion each day. Indeed they probably only received it several times a year as that was the custom of the time. It was only at the beginning of the last century that Pope St. Pius X authorized daily Communion. We are certainly glad of that practice because we know how important receiving the Eucharist has always been for Carmelites. We see it in St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, The Little Flower, St. Edith Stein, Blessed Titus Brandsma. They all write about the importance of receiving the Eucharist.

In our Carmelite tradition the emphasis has always been on participating in the Eucharistic liturgy, that is in the Mass. While Carmelites believe that Christ's presence continues in the Eucharist, reserved after Mass in the tabernacle, Eucharistic worship outside of Mass has never been a central part of Carmelite spirituality. We know that those hermits on Mount Carmel did not go to the chapel and pray to the Blessed Sacrament outside of Mass time. Their *Rule* explicitly commanded them to stay in their cells and to meditate there, in their cell, day and night on the law of the Lord. In Carmelite convents and monasteries in Europe before Vatican II, it was most often impossible for the friars or the cloistered nuns to even see the Blessed Sacrament on the altar of the Church because their choir was most often located on the far side of a wall behind the altar. Among the Franciscans and the Dominicans the custom arose of communities dedicated to perpetual adoration. Thus we have Poor Clares of Perpetual Adoration, or Dominican nuns of Perpetual Adoration. But this custom never arose in Carmel, primarily because the Carmelite has always prayed in the solitude of his or her cell and not in the oratory. Perhaps I should put the idea this way: the principal oratory of

the Carmelite is his or her cell, not the community chapel. The Carmelite certainly can participate in all the rites and ceremonies of the Church including Perpetual Adoration. But this devotion is not of itself part of our Carmelite tradition. The Carmelite finds his or her Eucharistic centre to be the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy of the Mass. And if called by the Church, one wonderful ministry that the Lay Carmelite can offer his or her parish is to be willing to bring the Eucharist from the Mass to the housebound to enable them to receive the Lord more often. Bringing the Eucharist to the sick we also come to them with the word of God in Sacred Scripture which is another characteristic of our Carmelite life and spirituality.

### **Carmel is scriptural**

We are a community centred on the word of God. The prayer book of the Carmelite is the Bible. *Lectio Divina* is a prayer form that the whole Order is rediscovering. *Lectio Divina* means the 'Sacred Reading', the prayerful, prayer filled, attentive reading of the Word of God. This takes place certainly in the liturgy, both in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Liturgy of the Word at Mass. But as we go about our day we continue to feed off the liturgy and in particular to feed off the scripture which we pray both in the Liturgy of the Hours and the Mass.

Our vocation is outlined in our Rule, *The Rule of Saint Albert*, and that is a text which echoes and re-echoes the Sacred Scripture. It is a pastiche of texts that are drawn from the Bible. The *Rule of Saint Albert* is a brief text. It's about three pages typewritten and yet in those three pages there are at least forty-two direct references to Scripture and an uncountable number of indirect references. This *Rule of Saint Albert* encourages, in fact it demands, that we be a people of the Word. It says in one of my favourite quotes: 'The sword of the spirit, the Word of God must abound in your mouths and hearts. Let all that you do have the Lord's word for accompaniment' (Chapter 19).

What is the heart of Carmelite life? Traditionally, following St. Teresa of Jesus (of Avila), we've always said that it is the part of *The Rule of Saint Albert* that says: 'Each one of you is to stay in your own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law (that is the Lord's Word in both Scripture and the person of Christ), day and night, and keeping watch at your prayer unless attending to some other duty' (Chapter 10). How do we Carmelites pray? Well, *The Rule of Saint Albert* tells us those who know their letters and how to read should read the Psalms appointed for each of the Hours of the Divine Office according to what 'our holy predecessors laid down, in the approved custom of the Church appointed for that hour.' In the revision of the *Rule* by Pope Innocent IV in 1247 this was changed to the recitation not only of the Psalms but of the entire Divine Office. In other words, the reading of the Psalms and, in particular, the Divine Office, is at the very heart of our Carmelite prayer life and all Carmelites should begin to use the Liturgy of the Hours.

The early Carmelites had a life that was impregnated with the Word of God. They interrupted their day seven times to pray the Psalms. After the revision of the *Rule* in 1247 they listened to the Sacred Scripture as they ate their meals. They listened to the readings for Mass each day, and throughout the day and into the night whenever they were not busy at some other task they pondered this Word of God. They reflected on it. They searched out its meanings. Furthermore, subsequent Carmelite spiritual authors were totally dependent on the Word of God. We can look at these documents, *The Fiery Arrow* or *The Institute of the First Monks* (*The Ten Books on the Way of Life and Great Deeds of the Carmelites*). We can look at the

writings of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross. We can look at the writings of St. Thérèse, who practically knew the gospel accounts by heart, or Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, whose writings are drawn from St. Paul's epistles. And we can see just how this entire Carmelite tradition has been shaped by knowledge of and an immersion into the Word of God. And so the Carmelite today must be a person who is impregnated with the Word of God. This is perhaps why Carmel has never much been given to devotional prayer. The sort of devotions that characterized some other orders, especially those from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries never took hold in Carmel. The prayer life of Carmel has always been simple: the Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, and meditation on the sacred text of Scripture.

Over the past two years I have given parish missions or other renewal programmes in various churches around the United States of America. And in each of about ten churches I asked the congregation to stand. Then, when they were all standing, I told those who had read the Scripture in the last twenty-four hours that they should be seated. Then I asked those who had read the Scripture in the last forty-eight hours please be seated; after that, the last seventy-two hours, and finally those who had read the Scriptures any time in the previous week. At this point in seven out of the ten congregations, more than fifty percent were still standing. That is to say, more than fifty percent had not looked at the Scripture in the last week. In the remaining three congregations, almost half sat down on the first cut. Almost half had read the Scriptures in the last 24 hours! Those three audiences were Lay Carmelite communities. I often tell Lay Carmelite communities that I do not want to see them with shiny new Bibles. Bibles are meant to be worn out.

### **Carmel is in harmony with the teaching office of the Pope and the bishops**

Carmel is a family within the hierarchical Church. This is very necessary, I think, for us to reiterate today. We are not a Church unto ourselves but we're one part of a Church that stretches around our globe, the Catholic Church. Our Prior General, Father Fernando Millán Romeral, is directly accountable to the Holy See. And every Carmelite friar, sister, and nun is answerable to the Bishop – not in matters of Carmelite observance, there we answer to the Order – but in our ministries to the People of God and the ways in which we relate pastorally to the bishop's flock. And so, too, with Lay Carmelites; in matters strictly Carmelite you take direction from the Order. For example, it is the Carmelite Family that determines the rules about prayers to be said daily or at community meetings, or the fasts and the feasts that we celebrate as Carmelites. But in matters pertaining to your participation in the larger Church you take direction from your pastors and your bishops. The Church is in crisis today because people are setting themselves up in place of rightful teachers. The teaching office of the Church belongs to the bishops in a unique way and yet it is being usurped both by 'liberals' and 'conservatives' who are teaching in contradistinction to the legitimate pastors of souls. Everyone seems to think that they are the authority on what the Church holds, but you and I are not interpreters of the Church's teaching. It is not for you to judge if your bishop or parish priest is being faithful to the Church. If a priest is working contrary to your bishop and his directives, it is up to your bishop to take the necessary steps to address the problem, not for you or your community to act on your own in rejecting his authority. And if you think your bishop is working contrary to the teaching of the universal Church, it is up to the Holy See to take the necessary steps, not for you or your community to sit in judgment on the bishop.

Until and unless they are removed from their positions, we are to show our bishops, priests and deacons obedience and respect.

The Church today is in great danger of being divided, even of being pushed into schism and this is not just because of 'liberals'. In fact, history shows us that schism is more likely to come from the right than from the left. There are some who claim that the current Mass text is heretical or deficient or invalid. Others reject the Second Vatican Council because of its teachings regarding Protestant Churches and non-Christian religions. Still others support the Church's teaching on abortion, but reject its teachings on war, on capital punishment, or on the rights of immigrants. Some of these people profess a great loyalty to the pope, but they think they can be disloyal to the bishop that the Holy Father has appointed to be their pastor. In the United States some years ago we saw the shocking scandal of one prominent American Catholic nun tell the people of Los Angeles that their Cardinal Archbishop is a heretic and should not be obeyed. There is no room for that sort of open rebellion in Carmel. The only way we can be sure that we are with the Church is to give obedience and respect to our bishops, and to trust the Holy See to keep the bishops in line. Our task is not to be 'liberal' or 'conservative.' It is to be faithful. And faithful means to be obedient to legitimate authority. And the bishop, whether we agree with him or not, is the legitimate authority. And it is for the Holy See, not for you or for me, to decide if he uses that authority wrongly. Right now the unity of the Church depends on our adherence to that authority.

This does not mean, of course, that we cannot think for ourselves. We need to read and study our faith and that means that we should not only be familiar with papal statements, but read good Catholic books and periodicals. God gave us intelligence and expects that we will use it. We need informed obedience to the Church, not blind obedience. There are many things which we can question. Issues of Church discipline, as opposed to Church doctrine, are not defined truths and we can have our opinions. The Church would be healthier if a well-informed laity asked the right questions – and expected thorough answers – about matters of administration and finances. Priests should get helpful feedback to their homilies and about the quality of parish liturgies. A healthy parish and diocese will have laity as full and well-informed participants in all their programs – and directing many of those programs, not just carrying out 'Father's orders.' Moreover, priests and bishops need to hear the life-experiences of the faithful. Many of our teachings on the role of our Christian faith in economic and political life, as well as family life and human sexuality seem yet to be incompletely formulated because while the input has been there from the bishops and the theologians, the experience of the faithful, the *consensus fidelium*, has not yet been given voice. Yet, in all these matters, while we may have our various thoughts and ideas, they must always find their voice in ways that build the unity of the Church and not undermine it. We question, we discuss, we even argue, but always with respect, with a willingness to submit to the authority of the Church, and with a passion to preserve the unity in charity which the Body of Christ requires.

Carmel's vocation, St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus tells us, is to be charity in the heart of the Church. And we cannot do that if we are involved in the frays that are tearing our Church apart. You and I do not need to go slugging on in these battles. Our task is to pray for the Church, to work for the Church, to build up the Church through charity. While others go and fight the battle, let us withdraw in prayer for them and for the Church. Let us devote ourselves to meeting all with charity. Let us devote ourselves to the simple background work

that makes the Church work. Let us devote ourselves to feeding the hungry, visiting the sick, comforting the elderly, working with the youth in our parishes. The mission and ministry of Carmel is to be charity in the heart of the Church, to be a contemplative centre for the Church. If you have a passion to defend orthodoxy, join the Dominican Third Order; that's their charism. Our task is to be charity in the heart of the Church. Let us build up the Church. Let us only say good things about people. Let us wage war for the truth not by our efforts by our fights and our quarrels, but by quiet prayer and unfailing charity. Related to this need to be in harmony with the Pope and bishops is the next characteristic we will examine: remembering that Carmel stands in the classic theological tradition of the Church.

### **Carmel is in the classic Catholic Tradition**

There are too many people in the Church these days hitting each other over the head with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or the decrees of the Second Vatican Council or the encyclical letters of the Pope, or decrees from Roman congregations. All these documents are good and fine, but we should remember that they are doorways into an ancient tradition. And too often people point to the doorway and say, 'see', when with doorways we are called not to look at them and admire them but to walk through them. Carmelites, because of our rich tradition of the spiritual masters – the masters of a century ago, St. Thérèse and Blessed Elizabeth, of four centuries ago, St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, of eight centuries ago, *The Rule of Saint Albert* and *The Fiery Arrow* – know that we have to go back and study the tradition. Our past defines and shapes our present. We cannot understand our present unless we go back to our past. And so the writings of our Carmelite tradition have a very special place in our reading and study and prayer. And so too must the writings of our Catholic faith. We are not simply a people of Vatican II or the *Catechism*. We are a people of St. Augustine, St. John Chrysostom, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Ambrose, all the Fathers/Mothers and Doctors of the Church. Look at the footnotes in the *Catechism* or the Council documents and you will see a vast and rich array of authors who have taught this Tradition through the centuries, through nineteen centuries, twenty centuries now. In fact, you cannot authentically interpret the *Catechism* or the Council documents without going back to the rich heritage of the twenty centuries of Christian faith that have preceded us.

Fortunately, today many of the essential writings, especially in the rich spiritual tradition, are easily available to us through sources like the *Classics of Western Spirituality* series published by Paulist Press. Also many parishes, retreat centres, and local colleges sponsor talks and workshops. Even the internet makes many of these sources available. It is the spiritual poverty of our 'Evangelical' brothers and sisters that so many of them have forgotten the nineteen centuries of faith that stand between us and Jesus. We Catholics must not lose the rich treasure we have in our theological tradition, a tradition dating not to the 1950s or even to the early part of the last century, but a tradition that dates back almost twenty centuries. And I would hope that Lay Carmelites would increasingly turn to the Fathers/Mothers and Doctors of the Church, to the great mystics and writers, without detracting from the primacy of Scripture in our spirituality. I hope we can turn to the Tradition and study it, to profit from it. Put down the other things you read – *The Radio Times* or *Hello!* or *The Racing Post* or (my favourite) *Gourmet Magazine* – and pick up something that matters, something that points us home, to our true home in God. Let me say one practical introduction to the Fathers/Mothers of the Church and the Doctors of the Church, in this rich

treasury of Christian literature, is in The Divine Office, which contains many fine sections of this classical Catholic tradition in the daily Office of Readings (in the full 3 volume breviary). Our faith will be much richer and deeper as we become more familiar with the thoughts of the men and women who were part of the great chain of Christians who received the faith from the apostles and handed it on to us.

### **Carmel is Marian**

The next characteristic I would like to speak about is that Carmel is Marian. We belong to Mary. But if you notice, Our Lady of Mount Carmel is always depicted as holding the Child Jesus. Carmelites love Mary and honour her as the one who introduces us to Jesus. Strangely Mary is never mentioned in *The Rule of Saint Albert*, the document that initially defines Carmel and its spirituality. In fact, Mary is mentioned relatively rarely in the ancient documents of the Order until the *Book of the Institution of the First Monks (The Ten Books on the Way of Life and Great Deeds of the Carmelites)* which was composed in the final quarter of the fourteenth century. (I don't mean by this to overlook John Baconthorpe's *Commentary on the Carmelite Rule* in which he explains the *Rule* outlining for the Carmelite a way of life in which we can incorporate in our lives all the virtues lived by Mary in hers.) Furthermore, Mary is mentioned surprisingly rarely in the writings of St. Teresa or St. John of the Cross. Even St. Thérèse of Lisieux or Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity or St. Edith Stein mention her but rarely. Yet she is always present in the Carmelite tradition and her presence, though somewhat inconspicuous, is fundamental.

When Mary is present in the Carmelite writings she is almost invariably eclipsed by her Son. It is a reminder that, even though we cannot see the moon when the sun is shining, the moon is always there, and it draws its light from the sun. In the same way, Carmelites remember that while our sight is focused on Jesus, Mary is still there. Like the moon she sheds not light of her own, but reflects the Light from her Divine Son.

One significant Carmelite author who does focus on the Blessed Virgin Mary is Michael of Saint-Augustine, a Carmelite friar of the seventeenth-century Touraine Reform in France. In many ways Michael of Saint-Augustine's writings anticipate the doctrines of St. Louis Grignon de Montfort. Devotees of St. Louis de Montfort tell us that in his writings he offers a Marian Spirituality, that is, a spirituality in which Mary plays the pivotal role in defining the relationship of the believer to her Son and to the Trinity. Michael of Saint-Augustine could be said to do the same. Yet a careful reading of their writings shows us that neither Montfort nor Michael of Saint-Augustine proposes a spirituality that does not begin and end in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the Marian emphasis of Michael of Saint-Augustine is quite unique to him among Carmelite spiritual writers. For the other authors in our tradition, Carmel offers a Christocentric spirituality in which Mary plays a key, but supportive, role. The Carmelite celebrates his or her devotion to Mary primarily by means of imitation of the Blessed Virgin. That is why we often reflect in our meditation on the mystery of salvation from Mary's point of view. We don't reflect on Mary. We reflect on Jesus as Mary saw him. We often, but not always, approach the Incarnation, for example, from Mary's perspective. What is it like for an angel to come to Mary? In what ways does God's angel come to me? What did it mean for Mary to say 'Yes!' to God's request? What does it mean for me to say 'Yes!' to God's request? How did Mary feel about carrying Jesus within her for nine months? In what ways do I carry Jesus in me? In what ways do I give birth to Jesus? In what ways do I nurse Jesus? In what

ways do I educate Jesus? In what ways do I feed the Child Jesus? Or, how did Mary feel when she saw her son naked and bleeding and dying on the cross? How do I feel when I see Jesus naked and bleeding and dying on a cross? When and where do I see Jesus dying on the cross? What was it like when the risen Lord came to his mother? Where and in what ways does the risen Lord come to me? The possibilities for prayerfully seeing Christ through the eyes of his mother are endless, and the Carmelite often turns toward them. For the Carmelite, Mary is always offering Jesus to us – Jesus, whom our *Rule* calls ‘our only Saviour’ (Chapter 19). The Carmelite knows and always remembers that Jesus is our only hope, our only mediator of salvation, our only intercessor with God the Father. The Carmelite always looks at Mary smiling, as she puts your hand into the hand of her Son, and as she sees your gaze turn from her to him and the love that you have for him come alive in your heart as it has in hers ever since that moment when the angel gave his greeting.

For us Carmelites, the principle sign of our devotion to Mary is imitation. And the outward manifestation of our Carmelite devotion to her is the Brown Scapular. Unfortunately in the years since the Fatima apparitions, the connection between the brown scapular and the Carmelite Order has been broken. And many people who wear the scapular do not even know that this badge of devotion is the gift to the Church of our Carmelite family. We need to wear the scapular. We also need to learn what the Church and what the Order is teaching about the scapular. Much has changed in this regard. Very much has changed in this regard in the last four decades and we have a need to re-educate ourselves on this beautiful symbol. It must be a priority for the Order to continue to develop new catechetical materials on the scapular.

Many Carmelites find Mary and prayers and devotions such as the Rosary tremendous helps in their spiritual life. And the Order encourages us in this devotion. These devotional prayers never replace the Prayer of the Church, that is, the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours, though the individual Lay Carmelite may decide from time to time, even with some frequency, to substitute the Rosary for the private recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours. The Lay Carmelite community, like the friars and the nuns when they gather in prayer, always focuses on the Liturgy of the Hours which it prays as part of the official Prayer of the Church. This praying the Liturgy of the Hours is one of the signs of the unity of the Carmelite with the universal Church. It is our goal, and our hope, and our ambition, that the Liturgy of the Hours will be part of the prayer life for each and every Carmelite in their private life and also part of the meeting of each and every Lay Carmelite community. Similarly, while Carmelites are always prepared to honour the Mother of God we do so, as we normally do all our prayer, in the solitude of our cells. Carmelites may occasionally go on a pilgrimage but it is not our spirituality to go running from site to site in search of miracles and signs. We have the only sign that we need and that is the sign of Jonah. We find our joy in contemplating the mystery that just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale for three days and three nights, so was the Son of Man in the belly of the earth, in the grave, until he was raised. And while the opportunity to visit Lourdes or Fatima or other approved shrines can be a source of tremendous grace, the Carmelite doesn’t feel the need or the inspiration to chase Mary from site to site of approved or alleged apparitions. Furthermore we always follow the authority of the Church which alone approves or can disapprove of an apparition. If you want to honour Mary then listen to her Son and put his teaching into practice in your lives.

## Carmel is Elijan

That means we look to the prophet Elijah, the great prophet who lived on Mount Carmel eight centuries before Jesus, and we find great inspiration in him. Carmelites from the very beginning of the Order have looked to Elijah for inspiration. They saw in the prophet everything that they wanted to be. He was a man of deep contemplation, one who sought solitude in the wadi Carith or in the cave at Mount Horeb. All Carmelites need to know the Elijah stories that we find at the end of the *First Book of Kings*, and in the beginning of the *Second Book of Kings* in the Bible.

We see in these stories that Elijah was a restless man. He was filled with energy for God like we want to be, and he was anxious to spend that energy on God's kingdom. But he was always searching to know what God asked of him. He is the model, along with Mary, for each of us Carmelites. Elijah was a fearless prophet who stood strong and tall against the injustice of his day. He defended the farmer and the peasant against the mighty kings and lords. And that is why the Order of Carmel today has stood with the Church in making the preferential option for the poor. Carmel chooses to stand up for the cause of the poor. We stand with the teachings of Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and now Pope Benedict XVI, and with their teaching about the rights of immigrants and the rights of workers and the rights of women and the rights of all human persons for housing, health care, and education. Carmel stands for nothing more than what the popes have stood for in their brilliant encyclical letters when they call for rights of the poor to be protected.

The trouble is that many Catholics do not know what the Church teaches in the areas of social justice. Let me say that, tragically, our bishops and our priests often have not done their job in this area. Too often the laity intimidate them from speaking the truth. Too often some clergy preach only that part of the Church's magisterium that their congregations already agree with. But we Carmelites cannot depend on others for our knowledge of the Church's teaching. Carmelites have an obligation to learn the social gospel of the Catholic Church and to put it into practice. I am going to be very blunt on this point. If our politics aren't formed by our Christian and Catholic faith then we're not good Christians, good Catholics or good Carmelites. Some Catholics think that all they have to do is vote for the candidates that are opposed to abortion, but while the protection of human life from the moment of natural conception until the moment of natural death will always be the chief priority, the social teaching of the Catholic Church is far broader than that one issue. We must know our faith. We must be familiar with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Papal Encyclicals. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the Papal Encyclicals belong in our hands as we vote, even as they belong in our hands for every decision we make in our lives. Some might say 'Render to God what is God's and to Caesar what is Caesar's,' but I can tell you what is not Caesar's business and where in my life I don't have to be obedient to Caesar. But you tell me where you don't have to be obedient to God. You tell me what in life is not God's concern, what is not subject to God's authority. The whole world belongs to God. And our whole life belongs to God. And every decision we make must be according to the will of God. The Carmelite, like Elijah, is enflamed with the spirit of God and stands for truth in the face of every obstacle. The Carmelite, like Elijah stands up for the poor, for the victims of injustice, for those who have no voice of their own with which to cry out to heaven.

## **Carmel is about Community**

The next characteristic I want to talk about is the fact that Carmel is communitarian. One of the most frightening phenomena of the twentieth century has been the breakdown of community at almost every level of society. Pope John Paul II repeatedly wrote and spoke on this subject. And he was particularly critical of North American Society on this account, and not without reason. Both the United States and Canadian peoples tend to be individualists. We are very strong on individual rights. And we are suspicious of any grouping that demands a loyalty over our own personal interests. Two hundred years ago when the Frenchman Alex de Tocqueville visited the United States he characterized the then new nation as a nation of individualists. He saw this as one of the great strengths of American society. But it is also one of the great weaknesses. Indeed individualism has become a cancer that has eaten our cultural soul from within. Look at the problem. People are no longer interested in the common wheel. They're interested only in their own personal good. The most frightening breakdown of community has been the collapse of the family. Most families no longer eat a meal together daily. And where there is no supper table there is no longer any family. People take their food from the common table and move it to the television, to their own room, to the computer, to the patio. They read the paper or a book while eating. One person eats now; another in a half hour; the third ate an hour ago. We have televisions in different rooms. We have our dens to escape to. We have our own workshop or sewing room. And while it is good for each of us to have our own space, it eats away our soul for us to have no common time and no common space whatsoever with our families.

Carmel must be committed to restoring community on every level, in our families, in our Lay Carmelite groups, and in our parishes. Our parishes, are they communities? Maybe the liturgies are lively, or our social outreach is strong, but do people know each other? Do they have a sense of belonging to one another? Can they turn to one another for help, or advice or encouragement? For many, the Church is simply a place where you go; it no longer is a group of people to whom you belong. And that is not the Church founded by Jesus Christ. There are those for whom the Church is a private affair, their time alone with the Lord. They come early and they silently kneel. They bury their face in their hands during the liturgy. They remain afterwards gazing at the tabernacle. And they leave without ever having spoken a word to anyone. They think they've encountered Jesus in the Eucharist, but unless they have met their sister and their brother in charity they have replaced the Eucharistic Lord with a Jesus of their own imagination. Until we understand that the Church itself is the Body of Christ, we will not authentically encounter Jesus in the Eucharist. Lay Carmelites must be an invigorating force for community within their parishes, even as the friars and nuns are called by their vocation to be a witness to the value of community in the larger Church.

As a priest, I am frightened by how few people really know Jesus. So many have invented a fantasy figure of their own devotion whom they call Jesus, but they couldn't find 'The Sermon on the Mount' if they had a reserved seat for it. The Jesus whom they have invented is simply an imaginary figure who reinforces their own opinions and whom they can conveniently tuck away when it is time to get on with the tough decisions of daily life. As Catholic Christians we know that there is an essential connection between Jesus in the

community of the faithful and Jesus present in the Eucharistic banquet; between Jesus present in the least of his brothers and sisters, and Jesus speaking in the Scriptures. It is one Christ.

As Catholic Christians our life takes its meaning not from our individualism but from our belonging to a community of people who together belong to the Lord. There is no salvation for those who remain individuals. Salvation comes, we Catholics believe, from being in the bark of Christ in the community of the faithful. So Carmel is essentially communitarian. Carmelites, because of our origin as hermits, value silence and solitude, but we do not value individualism. Our roots are among a community of hermits. Notice: a community of hermits. We too, while we are happy and content to be alone much of the time, we come together to pray, we come together to encourage one another, and we come together to help each other follow Jesus because no one can follow Jesus alone. Carmel is communitarian. We are about communities. Part of our mission is to form communities. And Lay Carmelites must be rooted in their communities, faithful to their communities, praying with their communities, in touch with each other, supportive of one another. When Lay Carmelites move somewhere where there is no Lay Carmelite community they need to start one. We need to find other good Catholic men and women and invite them into community, into the community of Carmel.

Scott Peck, the pop psychiatrist, writes and writes well that: 'The future of the world is community'. And he's right. It is our future, our only future. It was the plan of Jesus when he established the Church, and it was the plan of those first hermits on Mount Carmel, and it is our plan today. We must be a community of Carmelites. We have no future if we're not a community and there is no future if we do not learn how to be a community.

### **Carmel has its roots in the Laity**

My final point in the tape recoding that I made twelve years ago for the American Lay Carmelites was that Carmel is essentially a lay organization. I must admit that I have never been happy with that formulation because it is not quite accurate. In this regard, it is easier to say what we are not, rather than what we are. We are not, at least if we are faithful to our roots, either a clerical or monastic society. We Carmelites began as laymen who embraced the eremitical life. Our spirituality is one that reflects our origins among the laity. The first Carmelites were laymen. There may have been a priest or two among them, we do not know for certain. But we do know that the hermits who gathered in the *wadi en'esiah* in the first decade of the thirteenth century were not monks but lay hermits, ordinary men who had grown somewhat disillusioned with their world and what little it really had to offer them. They were people like ourselves who wanted to find some meaning to their lives, a meaning that only God could give, a meaning that was defined not by the world around them but by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At an earlier time in the history of the Church - in the fourth or the fifth centuries - these hermits would have become monks. Monks in those first centuries were groups of lay men or lay women who withdrew from the rush and clamour of the society around them to devote themselves to prayerful rumination on the Scriptures in an attempt to lead a more intense Christian life. Over the centuries, however, monasticism had developed from its simple foundations in the deserts of Egypt and Syria into a complex organizational structure, closely tied into the hierarchy of the Church and earthly kingdoms of the day. The simplicity of the hermitage had been exchanged for the magnificent architecture and elaborate ritual of the great abbeys, and the monastic life was limited almost exclusively to

the children of the land-owning nobility who supported the monasteries. The vision that had impelled men like Antony Abbot or John Cassian to the desert to live in solitude and simplicity, mediating day and night on the Word of God, had to find new ground in which to grow. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries many laymen wishing to follow Christ more intensely began to live in simple fraternities of hermits in the countryside of Europe. One such group, drawn from Europeans who had come with the Crusaders to the Holy Land, settled on the slopes of Mount Carmel. Their spirituality was monastic in as much that they were driven by the same spiritual hungers that had called the desert monks of old, but they were ordinary laymen who had sought their bishop's blessing on their living a hermetical life that empowered them to follow Christ in listening to his Word. They did not aspire, initially, to be either religious or priests. But after twenty years or so of the simple hermetic life, some of the hermits began being ordained, probably so that they could occasionally preach, or hear confessions of the pilgrims who came to Mount Carmel on their way to Jerusalem.

Once those hermits began establishing hermitages in Europe it became more important for them to be ordained. And so about fifty years after they were started the Carmelites developed into a clerical community, but they never lost their affiliation with the laity. While I was Provincial Delegate for the Lay Carmelites in my province, I had the opportunity to attend the Lay Carmelite congress in Fatima, Portugal. Each evening many of us went down to the Basilica for the procession at the shrine that marks the site where the apparitions took place. I noticed that whereas all the clergy who were present marched together as a group of priests and deacons around the statue of Our Lady, the Carmelites, both priests and brothers, walked with the laity. No one told us that we had to do this; it just seemed to be the natural thing for us to do. We were comfortable with our Lay Carmelite brothers and sisters and wanted to be with them. Carmel has never lost that affiliation with the laity. In Carmel the priest-brothers have always worn the same habit as the lay brothers. For many centuries the priests were not called 'Father' but both priests and brothers used the same title 'Fra', a title which simply means 'brother'. In some places today, such as France and Brazil, Carmelite priests are called 'Brother.' Through our history, ordained brothers and lay brothers have lived in the same communities, prayed at the same time and in the same place, worked side by side, and shared a common life. The life of the Carmelites is reminiscent of the great quote from St. Augustine which I will paraphrase as 'With you, I am a Christian, for you, I am a priest'. The Carmelites and the Franciscans, unlike the Dominicans, have always distinguished very little between the priest friars and the lay friars, and have always maintained a strong connection with the laity. I say this as a way of beginning a warning: Lay Carmelites should not try to be a 'friar in the world' or a 'nun in the world'. Your vocation as a Lay Carmelite is to be just that, a Lay Carmelite in the world. You need to dress like a lay person. You need to eat or to fast like a lay person. You need a home appropriate to a lay person. You need to pray appropriately as a lay person does. You need to be what the Church has called you to be, a Christian lay person who witnesses to the values of the gospels in daily life. Your clothes should be appropriately modest, both in design and in cost. Your food should be moderate in cost but healthy. Your home should be without excess in a world where so many of God's children lack basic necessities. And your prayer should be the Prayer of the Church: the Eucharistic banquet and the Liturgy of the Hours should enjoy the pride of place in your prayer life that they enjoy in the prayer life of the Church.

Sometimes, when I was Provincial Delegate, the question would come to us in the Lay Carmel Office in Darien, near Chicago, about Lay Carmelites taking a new name at the time of reception or profession. Lay Carmelites are free to 'take a name' if they wish, though many provinces discourage it, and you should always consider that the only name by which God knows you is the name given to you in Baptism, and so there is no name more appropriate to any one of us than our baptismal name. I would not want to do away with the option of taking a new name for the friars and nuns because sometimes parents do thoughtless, even cruel, things. And if the religious members of the family can 'take a name' then I suppose the lay members of the family should be able to also, even though they would not use that name in public. Most of the friars and nuns and sisters today, however, keep their baptismal names. Rather than taking a new name, I would encourage you in following the Discalced Carmelite custom and take a title - something you can meditate on, some aspect of our Blessed Lord's life, or in the life of his Mother. However, the practice that some communities once had of calling each other 'Brother' or 'Sister' should be discontinued where it is not already ceased. As you are lay people (or in a few cases diocesan clergy) you should not use titles commonly reserved for those in religious life. And incidentally through most of the Order the friars, nuns and sisters call each other by their first names and not their titles. Even our Father General, Fernando, is usually known among the friars by his given name. We are a family after all. Most of the friars prefer to be called by their names, even by the laity. Carmel has never been a very formal place. Our spirituality is one of letting go, not of adding on, so let go of the little customs and focus on the only thing that matters: the love of God for you revealed in Christ Jesus who became human for your sake, and who offered his life on the cross for the forgiveness of your sins. Get rid of everything else that is not this. Everything else is simply garbage. You can't be a contemplative, and you can't be a Carmelite, if you are holding on to anything else but Jesus Christ.

### **Some final thoughts**

I am very concerned about the rapid growth of Lay Carmel. Recently one of my Discalced Carmelite confreres said: 'The good news is that we are growing very fast and the bad news is that we are growing very fast'. We are growing faster perhaps than we can shape Lay Carmel in harmony with the larger Order. We do not want ideas and practices that are not consistent with our 800 year-old tradition to worm their way into Carmel. We want to work together to keep that tradition pure so that Carmel can continue to offer the Church what it has always offered, a spirituality of following Jesus Christ in solitude and silence, in charity for our neighbour, and nourished by contemplative prayer and the support of our brothers and sisters. I know that this concern is shared by all the friars of both observances, the O.Carms and the Discalced. I have not only studied the traditions extensively, and not only do I teach the tradition to our students in formation as well as sabbatical students, but I spend a great amount of time working with the friars and nuns of the Discalced observance as we work together to preserve and propagate this tradition. Carmel is not 'make it up as you go along'. Carmel is a well defined spiritual tradition in the Church, and we must work to keep it pure and authentic. If it does not speak to you, do not try to change it, but leave it and find a group of Catholics who better reflect where the Holy Spirit is leading you. If this sounds blunt, know that it is the same advice I would give a vocation to the friars or the nuns who want to make Carmel over into something different than it has been for its eight centuries. We come

to Carmel to be shaped by it, not to shape it into something of our own liking. Carmel has proved itself to be of great value to the Church through these eight centuries. We have provided three Doctors of the Church: Teresa, John of the Cross, and now, Thérèse of the Child Jesus. We have provided countless saints and blesseds. Pope John Paul II canonized and beatified many saints from our family: Blessed Titus Brandsma, Saint Edith Stein, Saint Raphael Kalinowski, Saint Teresa of the Andes, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, the Martyrs of Compiegne, Blessed Isidore Bakanja, and others. Pope Benedict is continuing the flood of Carmelites being raised to the altars. I could go on and on and on. The Carmelite path is tried and true. Carmel is giving you the call, 'Come and follow Jesus Christ with us'. Turn to Teresa and John, Thérèse and Edith and Titus to learn what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. You don't need to be a priest or a friar or a nun. You don't need to wear a habit or a veil. You don't need to live in a monastery. You don't need anything but to follow Jesus Christ like those first hermits on Mount Carmel eight centuries ago, like the great saints of the Order, like the thousands of men and women around the world today who live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ.