

## Leadership Conference Talk, March 12-15, 2018

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### **SPIRIT OF GENEROSITY**

Good Afternoon! In our last presentation, Lynn brought us a great teaching on Spirituality of Leadership. Now we are going to move on to talk about the Spirit of Generosity.

What do you think of when you think of a person who has the Spirit of Generosity? (Elicit Answers) Perhaps someone who gives? Can we think of some more descriptions? Perhaps someone who is warmhearted, free? Fair? Noble? Thinking of others before themselves? These are all descriptions that we can apply to another person.

What would be some descriptions we would apply to God? (Elicit them) The definition of generosity in the dictionary is: readiness or liberality in giving, freedom from meanness or smallness of mind or character. Marked by abundance or ample proportions. Synonyms for generosity are: bigheartedness, bountifulness, bounty, largesse, munificence, openhandedness, openheartedness, unselfishness. This definition even falls short, for it is who God is!

Yes, God is Generosity! Out of His Self-giving, he created the heavens and the earth and us, just out of love. No reason! Just because He is love and wants to share that love! For us that can be hard to comprehend, because we know we are not always lovable. The good news as Jesus has conveyed throughout the gospel, is that God is not like us!! And Thank God for that. I think if we were to ask God what his definition of generosity is, He would say one word – Jesus! And Jesus would say yes! For Jesus completely gave Himself up to Love!

For us as Christians, God's gift of Himself through Christ represents the ultimate form of generosity and serves as a model for all human generosity.

We can also be reminded of God giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavens to be able to live a life of generosity, gratitude, love and joy and peace. We, as humans, aren't always aware of this and that is when we get self-centered and live for ourselves, putting God off to the side because of life's difficulties and not handling them according to God's will. But when we turn to God, He is always there to help and bring us back to himself.

Turning now, let's look at the spirit of generosity in our Carmelite life, let's look at how we live in community based on God wanting us to be his friends, and live in love, joy and peace with one another.

However, at times it can be difficult to live in community. Our communities are human institutions and as such are fraught with the problems and issues of various personalities and ways of doing things. Regardless, whether it be our family, friends, in our workplace, in our parish community or our Carmelite community – these all have people with all kinds of backgrounds, experiences and opinions. And these difficulties can block the spirit of Generosity, stopping us from loving one another.

If we were to ask St. Teresa, what is the Spirit of Generosity in Carmel, what do you think she would say? She has already told us in *The Way of Perfection*, Chap 4:7..... She said, "*All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*" It doesn't get any clearer than that!! "*All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*" Let's say that together..... "*All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*"

So how do we do that? Thanks to our Constitutions, we have our help!

Before we look at them, I would like each of us to see St. Teresa, today in a special way as our Spiritual Mother, here with us – in your imagination, let her be with you, allow her to look at you straight in the eyes with love or allow her to stand before you as if she was going to speak to you. We are going to allow her to speak

to us today in our hearts with some clear common sense and orders from our Constitutions.

So as we begin, I would like to focus on our Constitutions, on the section of Fraternal Communion Section IIIB. I am going to pull out some of the sections that would pertain to Teresa speaking to us, and when she is done with each phrase, I would like us to pause, reflect on what she has said to us for a few seconds and then, I will lift my hand for your response which will be: “All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped” as an antiphon. So let us listen to her speak to us through the constitutions.....

- 24b) Teresa says, “I have initiated a new model of community life. My ideal is based on the certainty of faith that the risen Jesus is in the midst of our community and that it lives under the protection of the Virgin Mary. We must be aware that you and I are gathered together to help the church to collaborate in its mission.” Pause & reflect. **Antiphon:**  
*“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*
- She continues, “Relations are marked by the virtues of a love that is genuine, gratuitous, free and unselfish, as well as by detachment and humility. These are fundamental virtues for our spiritual life and they will bring us peace both internally and externally.” Pause and reflect. **Antiphon:** *“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*
- St. Teresa says, “I am aware of the importance of mutual support on the road of prayer and the importance of friendship, culture, the human virtues, gentleness, empathy, prudence, discretion, simplicity, kindness, joy and availability, as together, you and I seek to walk in truth before God and one another and all people.” Pause and reflect, **Antiphon:** *“All*

*must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*”

- St. Teresa continues, “I appreciate the assistance of another in the spiritual life: love grows where there is respectful dialogue, the purpose of which is to know oneself better so as to be pleasing to God.”  
Pause and reflect. **Antiphon:** “*All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*”
- She continues, “The doctrine of John of the Cross points to union with God by means of the theological virtues. Based on this principle, I see the purifying and unifying effect of the theological virtues in our sisterly and brotherly relations. That is particularly so in the exercise of love for each other: For John says “where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love”, because that is what the Lord does: by loving us, He makes us capable of loving.” Pause and reflect. **Antiphon:** “*All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*”

Moving on now, every once in a while during the rest of my talk, I will raise my hand for your response to the antiphon to allow these words of St. Teresa to become part of us.

Because living in community, can be difficult at times, I’d like to look at a few particular incidents in the life of St. Therese where she struggled with St. Teresa’s ideal of community living. Let’s allow her to be beside us, as if sitting next to us sharing with as a friendly, compassionate Sister in Carmel to teach us how to be generous friends of Jesus and how to be generous to one another .... **(Antiphon)** *All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*

Therese says, as you know I had difficulties, temperamental and emotionally since I was a child. As I was trying to live with the Sisters in community, some of the sisters were very displeasing to

me and caused me to get upset inside. One in particular, displeased me in her ways, her words, and in her character, in everything! Frequently when I was at recreation and had occasion to work with this Sister, I used to run away like a deserter whenever my struggles became too violent.

At another time, as I was at evening meditation, I sat in front of a Sister who had a strange habit. As soon as the Sister arrived, she began making a strange little noise which resembled the noise one would make when rubbing two shells, one against the other..... I felt perspiration all through me and I made a prayer of suffering, however, while suffering, I searched for a way of doing it without annoyance and with peace and joy, at least in the interior of my soul. **(Antiphon)**

There were times too, when I wasn't treated right by the nuns – I would tell myself that Jesus was telling me that it is this Sister who must be loved, she must be prayed for even though her conduct would lead me to believe that she doesn't love me. Not wishing to give in to the natural bad feeling I was experiencing, I told myself that, charity must not consist in feelings but works.

Then there was the time when I was in Chapel and the Sister behind me kept banging her rosary beads. Or in the laundry room when one of the sisters kept splashing water in my face.

One sister mocked me for not being able to do domestic chores well. She even nicknamed me, "the big goat kid." These kinds of things brought up many feelings of anger, frustration, guilt, withdrawal and avoidance of the other, because my feelings were hurt.

**(Antiphon)**

You see, when I speak of imperfect souls I don't want to speak of spiritual imperfections since the most holy should & will be perfect only in heaven; but I want to speak of a lack of judgment, or lack of good manners, touchiness in certain characters' all these things which don't make life very agreeable. I know very well that these kinds of things can be habitual, and they are not easily changed.

In my writings of these memories, I was describing the everyday, ordinary experiences of living in a group and among all those trying to live holy lives – these were ordinary common interactions.

Because of my sensitivities, they aroused strong feelings, feelings of impatience, hostility and animosity of being inadequate and not respected, of being taken for granted and used, of being intimidated and threatened. They were the feelings of being a victim, helpless, with no personal power or control. They were not the feelings of love that I wanted. **(Antiphon)**

One day, I was meditating on the words of Jesus, Matthew 5:44, “love your enemies”. How, I wondered would this apply to me living in the convent among women committed to a life of prayer and charity? I thought, we don’t have any enemies in Carmel! None of the sisters intentionally saw anyone else as an enemy, nor did anyone see me as being an opponent of anyone. But on the level of feelings, I did experience some of the sisters as being difficult and contentious. And too, I was becoming aware that the sisters were arousing the same hostile feelings among themselves. In my reflection, I thought with resounding honesty and humility – **we don’t’ have enemies in Carmel, but there are feelings!!!**

Let’s stop and reflect now on what St. Therese discovered.....

Here Therese was noticing an important truth! She realized that natural feelings were not the enemy. She saw that her feelings of animosity and ill will, could be blocking her from loving as Jesus loved. Here she was making a significant connection between her feelings and the identification of “the enemy”. The enemy, Therese was beginning to understand, was the label she placed on any person who caused in her feelings of dislike, displeasure and resentment. She thought if one she could let go of her unfriendly feelings and ill will, perhaps she would be able to retain her inner freedom and act compassionately with love. In that way, even though she did not feel love, one would be actually loving and be able to act loving. **(Antiphon)**

In her capacity to humbly acknowledge and deal with her feelings, Therese recognized and noticed that her emotions actually invented enemies; that the enemy was a unique creation stirred up in her own thoughts and feelings. Therese now, had discovered a way of loving “the enemy” and spiritually profiting from the feelings as well. Therese had found her feelings to be both a blessing and a curse. Now her sensitive feelings, helped her to become aware of what was going on within herself blocking her from being charitable. Therese accepted the spiritual challenge to bear her feelings of repugnance as calmly as she could and moved to the next level of faith. With prayer, she managed not to let her feelings overcome her own deepest truth or prevent her charitable acts. She did not deny or bury her feelings by passing over them, nor did she ignore them; instead she tried not to let them manipulate her. She could not allow the violence to herself, yet she had to respond to her own disturbed feelings.

Therese understood clearly the connection between feelings and faith. She understood that on the one hand, the new command of Jesus was not a command to override her own feelings in an attempt to be charitable to her sisters. When she could not cope, she had to leave the scene as not to do violence to herself or to do violence to the other sister. Desertion, for her, was a realistic understanding of her own weaknesses and an awareness of her need to maintain her inner freedom and thereby to love herself.

As a result of what she discovered about herself, she found a way to live Teresa’s command of living in peace in community for the benefit of herself and for the sisters around her, this became her little way. This she found in being generous to herself and in that generosity she was able to be generous to her sisters. **(Antiphon)**

We too, must find a way of living in community in generosity for we all have feelings and experience the same feelings as Therese did.

I’d like to share with you my experience and my struggles with feelings. Many times I have been hurt in community – my feelings of anger, retaliation, resentment, jealousy, competition, my wanting

to be accepted, loved and approved – to name just a few. These feelings made me wonder if I had a vocation. I struggled with them during formation, especially when reading what I was supposed to be as a Carmelite and I fell short every time.

You see, I had come to my first experience of the love of God in the charismatic renewal in the Church. The Charismatic renewal was very good at helping to cast out the demons. So every time I got angry or jealous or dissatisfied with myself, I believed I was being attacked by the demons and I began casting them out! And the more I cast out, the more intense were the feelings. Needless to say, I was frustrated and wondered, what was wrong with me and where was God in all this? This went on for years with much inner struggle and also with counseling for anxiety.

You see, in my relationships with people when they turned difficult, I would flee, withdraw or write the people out of my life. Then I would feel guilty, doing violence to myself by putting myself down. You see, I would have the thought, that if these people were not in my life, I would not have bad or hurt relationships, because it was all their fault. I found this not to be true, it only made things worse. So I buried my feelings or passed over them.....for a time! But I always seemed to run into the same situation, just different scenarios.

In our formation studies in Carmel, especially with St. John of the Cross, I began to understand the purgative way but still didn't know how to do it..... I believed I had to do it, not God! One day as I was upset with a friend, whom I loved, I felt myself beginning to dislike her. I asked myself – why am I getting so upset over this???? Lord, what is going on inside of me???? Bingo!!! That was the question that opened the floodgates of the real beginnings of self-knowledge. (I like to think Teresa was very happy with me!!!) Then the insight came, and I realized I was casting out the wrong spirit – I was casting out the Holy Spirit not the demon! The Holy Spirit was answering my prayers by working to reveal my weaknesses and imperfections and sins, only I wasn't seeing them



that way – it was only by the light of the Holy Spirit, that I began to see with new eyes.

With this new insight, I began to become aware of my feelings and how they triggered thoughts in my head that weren't real!! I learned these were stories, scenarios of the situation that I made up in my head to justify why I was feeling hurt or to justify my behavior. Some of them made me absolutely sick!!!! I realized I often lived for days in an illusion of my thoughts going around and around in my head, which were not true..... what a waste of time and energy doing violence to myself and projecting the same on others. This was all humiliating – especially since I realized I was doing all this in front of God!!! And even inviting him into my thoughts, instead of myself turning my gaze on Him and thinking of Him. How could he possibly love me? His generosity knows no bounds even to a “worm”. (Teresa would like that one too)

As I became more aware of this new found “self-knowledge”, when it came to community, I was able to let go of the need to be important, to be approved and accepted..... I saw what was going on within when my feelings would get triggered. With gratitude, I began to thank God for his generosity to teach me. In his generosity, no one but He knew what was really going on inside of me, it was only between Jesus and I – I was humbled only in the sight of God. What a grace, for the gratitude began to well up within me to realize, that my prayers to become like Jesus and to be a closer friend of His, was happening in a deeper way. For the more grateful I became, the more aware I became of my need to be grateful and generous and this flowed to others. For I began to like myself and really began to feel I had something to give to others and wanted to serve all the more!! I began to love my community more and more and to go out to them, taking the risk to love no matter the cost. I was sure I had a vocation and that no un-pleasurable thought or feeling would take that away.

As I reflect on what I shared with you about Therese and myself – I can relate with Therese as a sister, knowing that in Carmel there are no enemies, just feelings and feelings can be a grace and a

curse. It's up to me and my choice, as it was up to her, as to how to respond. I am encouraged by Therese's insight about feelings as enemies – now they have become a way to be a better friend in Jesus. I hear her say to me, to us, “Love consists in works not feelings”. I look at her as one who has struggled like myself with the same struggles of feelings, and yet she became a Saint. Perhaps there is hope! **(Antiphon)**

As far as St. Teresa – I hear her say over and over, **(Antiphon)** “All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear and all must be helped!” That means all – God, myself and others – all through the generosity of God's spirit. God is in the All business, no one is left out! So when I get to the place of struggle with feelings, I hear Teresa in my heart say, “suck it up Margaret” and I laugh! She is a true spiritual mother who doesn't take any excuses..... or when I get feeling sorry for myself, feeling melancholy, I hear her say, “knock it off and eat something, get real”! **(Antiphon)**

I hear her say, if we really understood that our vocation comes from God, and that He has prepared for us all the graces we need to live it out, we should not allow ourselves to be disheartened by the sacrifices it requires. Selfishness, preoccupation with self, and discouragement are all enemies of generosity; they are ‘earth and lead’ that weigh down our spiritual life, making it more fatiguing and keeping us from soaring to the heights. In *The Interior Castle*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Dwelling, 2, Teresa says “*Why should we reduce ourselves to walking at a hen's pace when God has made us capable of flying like the eagle?*” and “*How I wish we would become dissatisfied with this habit of always serving God at a snail's pace,*” and “*As long as we do that we shall never get to the end of the road. Do you think that if we could get from one country to another in a week, it would be advisable to take a year?*” I love her humor, so down to earth and common sense, but so true!!

She began the reform of Carmel by just doing the little she could do and she calls us to do the same, telling us to keep our eyes on Jesus and we can reach the heights of prayer, even just saying the

Our Father, if we persevere. She knows she is but a “worm” in God’s sight and at the same time she could tell Jesus how badly he treats his friends. She knew how to play the tambourine and how to eat an éclair with fun and class! She was all that God needed to reform Carmel with a heart generously given to Him, in response to Jesus, so generously, giving his heart to her. She is exactly what is needed for Carmel to see to it that **(Antiphon)** *“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*

In all the communities represented here, every person comes from different backgrounds and brings with them to Carmel their life experience. As we each work through becoming friends of Jesus, we run and rub up against each other in un-pleasurable situations. Whether it’s in Council meetings, dealing with decisions of vocations, learning to teach classes, elections, social settings, who gets to do what and why wasn’t I chosen..... Anything can trigger feelings that may be unresolved and we get emotional. We have opinions, and ways of thinking that we think are right. We have to learn to become obedient and let them go to a higher cause of charity for the love of the Risen Jesus in our midst to live true fraternal communion with the spirit of generosity.

I’d like to move now to think of ways to promote the Spirit of Generosity in ourselves and our communities.

1. The Daily Exam is the best place to begin since we already do this on a daily basis.

So we begin with ourselves and pray for awareness: we have to be aware of ourselves and what goes on within us – meaning what are our feelings and how they are they triggered. This is self-knowledge.

2. As we are aware of them, we can investigate what is the cause. I have realized that feelings usually come up for me centered on feelings of being unsafe and insecure, feelings of low self-esteem, and the feeling of being out of control. These are the same feelings we saw in Therese’s life. These feelings are all centered on the ego or the false self as John talks about in the purification process in

the Ascent. I allow the feeling to be and I ask myself and the Holy Spirit, what is going on inside that I am feeling this way, perhaps feeling unloved and unaccepted? For an example: maybe I wanted to be the Director of Formation and was not chosen, therefore my thoughts tell me I am not good enough or she was liked better than I just to rationalize why I was not chosen. This is all an illusion going on in my head, my thinking – it's a story I make up to stop the pain.

3. When we are aware of the feeling, we stop and give ourselves time to pause before we speak or act. Be true to yourself.

4. Realize these are my feelings and they have nothing to do with the other person – another person cannot make us feel.....

Feelings are our own!! It may be my reaction to what was said or done, but they are still my feelings and I keep them inside instead of projecting them on to the other person. Inside, I cry to Jesus for help in all charity and humility surrendering to Him. This is the very difficult part because we are in pain and we don't like it, we are humbled, but the Holy Spirit will give the strength to hold the pain instead of unleashing it on the other. There are not any persons that deserve to carry our cross or our pain except Jesus! This is the cross, the dying to self, the nada that John talks about – doing that which is most difficult for love of the other. The surprising effect of this, is that the grace is always there to love, and the joy follows, but we have to act on it. **(Antiphon)**

Now, I would like to go back to the beginning of my talk and ask us to listen again, perhaps with new ears and a new heart, to Teresa speak to us again about her ideal of community. We will go through the same process we did – we listen, pause and reflect and say our antiphon.

- 24b) Teresa says, “I have initiated a new model of community life. My ideal is based on the certainty of faith that the risen Jesus is in the midst of our community and that it lives under the protection of the Virgin Mary. We must be aware that you

and I are gathered together to help the church to collaborate in its mission.” Pause & reflect. **Antiphon:**

*“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*

- She continues, “Relations are marked by the virtues of a love that is genuine, gratuitous, free and unselfish, as well as by detachment and humility. These are fundamental virtues for our spiritual life and they will bring us peace both internally and externally.” Pause and reflect. **Antiphon:** *“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*
  
- St. Teresa says, “I am aware of the importance of mutual support on the road of prayer and the importance of friendship, culture, the human virtues, gentleness, empathy, prudence, discretion, simplicity, kindness, joy and availability, as together, you and I seek to walk in truth before God and one another and all people.” Pause and reflect, **Antiphon:** *“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*
  
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Pause and reflect. **Antiphon:** *“All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.”*
  
- She continues, “The doctrine of John of the Cross points to union with God by means of the theological virtues. Based on this principle, I see the purifying and unifying effect of the theological virtues in our sisterly and brotherly relations. That is particularly so in the exercise of love for each other: For

John says “where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love”, because that is what the Lord does: by loving us, He makes us capable of loving.” Pause and reflect. **Antiphon:** “*All must be friends, all must be loved, all must be held dear, and all must be helped.*”

In closing, I pray that through the generosity of God’s generous love and grace, may we be given the capacity, through being in touch with our own humanity and self-knowledge, the grace to die to ourselves and live for the realization of the risen Christ living among us in our communities? Perhaps we can be as the communities in the New Testament, an example and witness to others by the same words said about them of “see how they love one another”.

And too, as it’s been said about the bible,” you may be the only bible others may read”, in a similar way, “you may be the only Carmelite others see or may know.” Our privilege as Carmelites holds a great responsibility to the Order and to the Church.

Everything that has been said here, in all the presentations and everything we have done together, is all in the keeping of our Constitutions, Statutes, Carmelite life and vocation, all this, in the name of the Lord Jesus helping us to be His imitators in the Spirit of Generosity for all. Thanks be to God!

**(Antiphon)**

Q&A???

Resources: *Everything is Grace, The life and Way of Therese of Lisieux & Walking the Little Way of Therese of Lisieux* by Joseph F. Schmidt, FSC







