

The Path of Mount Carmel

The Perfect Spirit

Ongoing Formation

Volume I

**National Formation Program
Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites**



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California-Arizona Province of St. Joseph, Oklahoma Semi-Province of St. Thérèse,
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Dedication

This volume of ongoing formation is sincerely dedicated to Fr. Aloysius Deeney, O.C.D., (1948-2024). It is important to recognize the immense contribution that Fr. Deeney made to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites. The Secular Order is very much indebted to him for his many years of dedication and service as the first General Delegate to the Secular Order (1998-2012), most importantly for raising awareness of the identity of the Secular Carmelites and their responsibilities. Fr. Deeney's name will always remain synonymous with the history of the Secular Order and its mission. May his soul rest in peace.



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FOREWORD



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Ongoing formation has become an important topic in society in general all over the world. In his article, *What is Ongoing Formation?*, Hugh O'Donnell, CM,¹ states that “ongoing formation is a process for keeping up with the times in one’s chosen profession. Initial formation and professional training are only the foundations of a lifelong process of being current and up-to-date.” Initial formation, as important and essential as it is, is not enough. The world is always changing and we need to be prepared to face the new challenges and welcome the opportunities that the modern world brings.

The Catholic Church, especially after the Second Vatican Council, has remarked the importance of being up-to-date. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, Pope Paul VI states that “the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (4). In order to do so, men and women have the responsibility to be committed to ongoing formation.

The Discalced Carmelite Order has taken seriously the importance of ongoing formation. In the document, *Being Discalced Carmelite Friars Today, Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism*, approved by the OCD General Chapter in 2021, it is mentioned that “the whole life of a Carmelite becomes a journey without rest, knowing that when we do not move forward, we remain stationary, and that whoever does not increase, decreases (cf. 7M 4:9). Above all, we are invited to live in an attitude of constant willingness to learn and grow with a true *docibilitas* which opens us to permanent updating” (9). In Carmel ongoing formation is an essential part of the vocation of all its members.

Being aware of the importance of formation, the OCDS members of the US Task Force, published the *National Formation Program* that covers the different stages of initial formation in the OCDS. The program has been very well received and has become an excellent instrument for formation throughout the country, and even abroad people have recognized its value as a formation program.

Responding to the requests of many US OCDS communities, the Task Force recognized the benefits of an Ongoing Formation program that would promote and value the Discalced Carmelite charism while allowing the freedom and flexibility that each OCDS community needs to adapt the program to their specific needs. The importance given to ongoing formation by society, the Catholic Church, and the Carmelite Order, led the US Task Force to develop a comprehensive program for ongoing formation, which further led them into the challenging task

¹ *Vincentiana*, March-April 2005

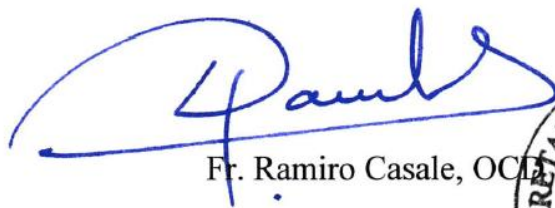
of brainstorming and outlining the specific topics that resonate within the Carmelite charism. At the initial stages they became aware of the need for clarity and the turbulent process of translating abstract ideas into text. Different perspectives were explored and relevant information and a wide range of resource materials were also considered in the development of an ongoing formation program.

After much work and dedication, the efforts of the US Task Force have become a reality. They have been able to create a roadmap for the writing process and identified the major themes and points that truly nurture the Spirit of Carmel. The ongoing formation program they developed is divided into two books and gives special attention to the writings of the three Carmelite doctors of the Church, the Word of God, Church documents and the writings of other Carmelite saints and blessed.

The first handbook, *The Path of Mount Carmel – The Perfect Spirit*, explores important themes such as how to grow in the charism of prayer, reflects on the apostolic dimension of the OCDS and gives prominence to St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross. The second handbook, *Human Transformation and Union According to the Writings of St John of the Cross* is the continuing study and reflection on the major writings of our Holy Father. The themes in these handbooks are to be applied in one's daily life. The members of the US Task Force recognize that Carmelite Spirituality is meant to be lived in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives because God communicates not so much through books and abstract ideas, but rather through the witness of life and interactions with others.

We thank all the members of the US Task Force for their work and dedication that have made possible for all OCDS in the United States to have these handbooks in their hands. We are certain that this ongoing formation program is a precious instrument and an excellent resource for all OCDS communities and individuals.

From our General House in Rome on June 15, 2025, Solemnity of Most Holy Trinity.


Fr. Ramiro Casale, OCD
General Delegate of the Secular Order
of the Discalced Carmelites



GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“It is not that I have reached it yet or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize, if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ [Jesus]...I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead” (Phil. 3:12-13).

After the National Formation Program was implemented, many communities requested assistance with ongoing formation for definitively professed members. The following program is intended to serve as a model and resource. The program provides flexible and versatile options, and it differs from the structured format of initial formation (Aspirancy, Formation I and II). Communities can use this formation program with flexibility by adapting the content to meet their unique needs and goals. With the guidance of the local council, participants may use the entire program as outlined, or they may choose an individual topic (such as a Church document or St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, etc.). Again, with the guidance of the local council, participants may choose other books for study and discussion while following the program’s format.

Our ongoing formation program contains two volumes.

Volume I is divided into two parts covering the relevant sources of information. Part I addresses the topics of interest for study and reflection and incorporates some specific guidelines of community formation/discussion. Part II includes a comprehensive list of resource materials, giving prominence to the three Carmelite doctors of the Church (St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux).

Volume II explores the teachings of our Holy Father, St. John of the Cross, pertaining to ongoing purification, transformation, and union with God.

The Purpose of Ongoing Formation

The purpose of ongoing formation for the definitively professed is the support and continued development of their human, Christian, and Carmelite maturity (see Ratio 93). The call to “mysterious union with God by way of contemplation...” (Const., Art. 9:b) “...will awaken in [them] a desire for greater apostolic commitment...” and faithfulness to the Promise they have made. Through active participation in community life and the sharing of their unique gifts, they will serve as role models for their community, and work to fulfill their obligation for service to the Church and the needs of the world by living lives that make God known and loved (see Ratio 48).

As noted, the Discalced Carmelite family is present in the world in three distinct forms: the friars, the nuns, and the seculars. “It is the one Order with the same charism” (Const., Preface). “It is one family with the same spiritual possessions, the same call to holiness and the same apostolic mission” (Ratio 38).

“There is an intellectual aspect to the formation of a Discalced Carmelite. There is a doctrinal basis to the spirituality and identity of one who is called to the Order. As the friars and nuns, the seculars too ought to have a good intellectual and doctrinal formation since as members of the Order they represent and give witness to a **mature** and **profound** spirituality” (Ratio 79, emphasis added). “This intellectual basis is the beginning of an attitude that is open to study. It leads to a deeper interest in Scripture, the teachings and the documents of the Church. The tradition of spiritual reading, *lectio divina*, and time for reading is the backbone of the spiritual life” (Ratio 80).

St. John of the Cross wisely observes that many books are written on the sensory level of purgation, but hardly anything is said of spiritual purgation in sermons or writings (see *Dark Night*, 1. 8.1:2). Likewise, St. Teresa observes that “we always hear about what a good thing prayer is, and our constitutions oblige us to spend so many hours in prayer. Yet only what we ourselves can do in prayer is explained to us; little is explained about what the Lord does in the soul, I mean about the supernatural” (*Interior Castle*, 1.2:7). Hence, it is important that we delve deeply into the study of spiritual purgation of our faculties – intellect, memory, will; and further into passive purification.

Studying the writings of our Carmelite saints and exploring materials relating to Carmelite topics are essential. If considering non-Carmelite sources, the local council needs to weigh how the material supports the members’ growth in the Carmelite charism. *Materials should not be chosen based simply on personal preference or interest.* It is important to choose the facet of the charism for ongoing formation that should be studied *before* selecting a book title. Many communities make the mistake of choosing the book title or author first, without considering the area in which they want to see growth.

Major Themes and Suggestions for Ongoing Formation

The essence of the Carmelite charism is to live and experience (by the action of divine grace) the gradual transformation and divine union that are the fruits of spiritual purification, meditation, and loving contemplation of the Triune God. Ongoing purification and human transformation are the recurring themes of Carmelite spirituality. These qualities find concrete expression in the lives of the saints, blessed, and many religious of the Discalced Carmelite Order. They lived by the spirit of the Gospel and made a major contribution to our understanding of our spiritual journey in Christ. We find in them immense depths of insight, encouragement, and practical wisdom. These holy and courageous witnesses clearly point toward a multitude of ways to reach our goal of union with God.

Additionally, some of the recommended Church documents direct all the faithful in the Church and beyond to connect with the mystical tradition of the Church and point specifically to the three Carmelite doctors of the Church, namely St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Hence, it is pivotal for the definitively professed members to continue reading, reflecting, and incorporating the teachings of our holy parents. Equally important is reading, reflecting, and incorporating Thérèse’s “little way” into our lives. In addition to *Story of*

a Soul, her poems, plays, letters, and prayers reflect the simplicity of her life of prayer as our example, where every thought, word, and deed has meaning and potential to share His love.

Note: Rereading and reflecting on the materials contained in Formation I and II, relating to Teresa, John, and Thérèse, is crucial for the overall success of ongoing formation.

The following are possible topics for ongoing formation. These will be further explored in depth for the purpose of study and reflection. In these writings, we will be looking for practical wisdom to guide us on this journey to union with God.

1. The Word of God and The Rule of Carmel: “‘The sword of the spirit, the word of God, must abound in your mouths and hearts. Let all you do have the Lord’s word for accompaniment.’ This invitation was directed to the hermits of Mount Carmel through the Rule of St. Albert. The word of God is both the person of Christ and the scriptures that offer us Christ; and the brethren of Carmel were to live out the richness of Christ within themselves” (Superior General, Fr. Camilo Maccise, O.C.D.). Definitives (definitively professed members) will read and reflect upon the Rule of St. Albert along with the article on the Rule of St. Albert by Fr. Camilo Maccise, O.C.D., and other writings related to this topic. The discussion will include the influence of the Primitive Rule of St. Albert in the Carmelite reform of St. Teresa; also, some essential points from *Verbum domini* (On the Word of God) by Pope Benedict XVI.

2. The Theological Virtues – Faith, Hope and Love: The Three Encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI: “The three encyclicals of Benedict XVI are grounded in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. [*Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love), *Spes Salvi Facti Sumus* (In Hope We Are Saved), *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth)]. They provide inspiration and hope in the midst of violence and sin; and they direct the faithful towards Christ, the Incarnate Love of God, who is the true hope of the world.”

“Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the **encounter** with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 1, emphasis added). Under this topic, the Definitives will read and reflect on the essential points of all three encyclicals along with a few articles and reviews.

3. Finite and Eternal Being: Under this topic, we study and reflect on the thoughts of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D. “What has been handed down to us as the philosophy of the Christian centuries contains essential ingredients deriving from Christian ways of thinking. Moreover, the world itself had assumed a new meaning once it was seen with the eyes of faith: ‘From then on, the world was manifestly given to us as the work of the **Word**, the Second Person of the Trinity, and everything in it — addressing itself to those **finite** spiritual beings who know themselves as spiritual beings — henceforth proclaims the **infinite spirit**’... There are existents which are beyond the reach of natural experience and natural reason but which have been made known to us by revelation; and they confront the receptive human mind with entirely new tasks” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, chapter I, pg. 21, emphasis added).

4. Indwelling Spirit of the Holy Trinity: Members will read and reflect on the letters and major writings of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity. Her spiritual journey highlighted the mystery of the Trinity, present by grace in the soul of every baptized person. Her name tells her she is the “house of God” in which live the Three Divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

“She ardently longs to become for Christ ‘another humanity in which He can renew His whole Mystery’ including conformity on the Cross and participation in His saving work in the world” (*Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works, Vol. 1, Foreword, pg. 2, ICS Publications*).

5. The Practice of the Presence of God: Under this topic, the members will read and reflect on the practical wisdom of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. “For three centuries his simple wisdom has crossed denominational boundaries and theological differences to inspire spiritual seekers throughout the world. The universality of his appeal is extraordinary, but it is due in large part to the very ordinariness he taught [and reflected]. God is available in ordinary life, in the commonest places and most mundane activities. The practice of God’s presence can be as simple as a little interior glance, as plain as a bare desire.” (Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Foreword to the American Edition, pg. ix, ICS Publications).

6. Ongoing Purification, Transformation, and Union with God: Trials, temptation, and suffering that lead to one’s purification are not an end in themselves. Both St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross understood that they are means to a glorious transformation and union with God. As St. John Paul II observed: “It is a journey totally sustained by grace, which nonetheless demands an intense spiritual commitment and is no stranger to painful purification (the ‘dark night’). But it leads in various possible ways, to the ineffable joy experienced by the mystics as ‘nuptial union.’ How can one forget here, among the many shining examples, the teachings of Saint John of the Cross and Saint Teresa of Avila?” (His Holiness John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, Art. 33). The major themes on purification and human transformation are further divided into three separate sub-themes for proper understanding of purification, human transformation and union within the context of Christian and Carmelite formation. For this study, members may read and reflect on the major writings of our Holy Father St. John of the Cross.

- A. Active Purification – Active night of the sense (*Ascent*, Book 1) Active night of the spirit, faith, hope, and love (*Ascent*, Books 2 and 3)
- B. Passive Purification – Summary of the dark night leading to God’s action (*Dark Night*, Books 1 and 2)
- C. Glorification – Understanding the concept of transformation and union – Trinitarian life (*Spiritual Canticle* and *Living Flame of Love*)

Note: An in-depth study of all four major works of St. John of the Cross – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love* — is addressed separately in Volume II of Ongoing Formation.

In addition, the history and reform of Carmel should be part of ongoing formation. Our focus should not be so much on chronological dates and numbers; instead, our study should unravel the transformation of consciousness/awareness throughout the history of the Order, within the context of the Carmelite charism of prayer. Most specifically, one should recognize in the history of Carmel the saving hands of God, His presence, and contemplation in all events, trials, and struggles. The letter written by Teresa at the time of her first foundation is a clear indication of God’s presence in all her undertakings. “I have written you a long letter about a matter that for many reasons I could not escape doing since God’s inspirations are the

source..." (ltr. 2:2). "What is important is that Teresa has a clear awareness of doing it 'inspired by God'" (*St. Teresa of Avila: 100 Themes on her Life and Work*, pg. 133).

The above recommended materials and themes are not all-inclusive. There are many, many excellent books and documents suitable for ongoing formation. There is also the option of choosing recorded materials for the members to watch (or listen to) and discuss, such as recordings made by OCD friars, OCDS Congress sessions, retreat conferences, etc. Councils are encouraged to explore options and search for materials that will help members grow in their vocation and understanding of the Carmelite charism.

Reading and reflection make up a large part of our ongoing formation. However, as a matter of abundant caution, we must emphasize that formation is not just about reading many books or attending various retreats and conferences. The goal is to be a loyal witness for Christ, remaining subject to ongoing purification, transformation, and ultimate union with God. The Carmelite spirituality is meant to be lived in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. God communicates not so much through books and abstract ideas, but rather through the witness of life.

"When they forbade the reading of many books in the vernacular, I felt that prohibition very much because reading some of them was an enjoyment for me, and I could no longer do so since only the Latin editions were allowed. The Lord said to me: 'Don't be sad, for I shall give you a living book.' ... I understood very clearly, because I received so much to think about and such recollection in the presence of what I saw, and the Lord showed so much love for me by teaching me in many ways, that I had very little or almost no need for books. His Majesty had become the true book in which I saw the truths" (*Life* 26.5).

This experience of our Holy Mother St. Teresa is essential to our overall understanding of formation in the OCDS. Her words demonstrate that we should be a living witness — a "living book" to the ongoing transformation in Christ. Teresa thus puts the focus on turning our attention to love and desire for Christ and our dedication to do "what we should" in thought, word, and deed.

May all Carmelites find in the teachings of the Church and the voices of our Carmelite saints, blessed, and religious the necessary guidance to complete the journey that leads to eternal life.

*The Lord will give you the bread you need
and the water for which you thirst.
No longer will your Teacher hide himself;
but with your own eyes you shall see your Teacher;
and a voice shall sound in your ears: "This is the way; walk in it."*

Is. 30: 20-21

General Principles

Because there are no deadlines to finish materials in ongoing formation, the members are free to go into greater depth. It is allowable to continue a session over several months or to spend more than a year on a single theme or book.

Once we are definitively professed and taking on more responsibilities in our community, it is tempting to give ongoing formation a lower priority. It is too easy to sacrifice the “important” to the “immediate.” The other side of the same coin is to feel we have “graduated” and can take things easy. This is unfortunate, because to serve well, to assist others, and to grow in prayer and virtue, we need to continually feed our souls and mature in our vocation.

Initial formation is the foundation for life-long ongoing formation. No one stands still in their spiritual life; we either continue to advance on the way of perfection or eventually grow lukewarm.

The challenge for Definitives is to guard against complacency. We need to maintain our first fervor, return to our roots, and keep our eyes on the prize. Our ultimate goal is eternal union with God. This is the pearl of great price, all that really matters.

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first” (Rev. 2:4-5).

“Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do” (James 1:22-25).

Our hope and prayer is that communities will give ongoing formation the attention and effort it requires to increase the Carmelite charism of those who have made their Definitive Promise. These guidelines are intended to help local councils, communities, and provinces do just that.

Responsibilities of the Local Council

“The Council, composed of the President and three Councilors and the Director of Formation, constitutes the immediate authority of the community. The **primary responsibility of the Council** is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community” (OCDS Const., Art. 46, emphasis added).

After prayerful discussion and discernment, the local Council as a whole chooses themes and materials that are appropriate for the definitively professed members of their community. While the decision ultimately rests with the Council, it is good practice to ask the definitively professed members for their input.

The Council chooses the areas of formation for deeper growth. Once the area of formation is decided upon, then pertinent book titles may be discussed, as opposed to deciding on a specific book before discussing areas for deeper growth.

The Council, with the help of the members in ongoing formation, decides who will facilitate the discussions. This could be several members who trade off every month. Or even better, everyone should take a turn facilitating. Having everyone take a turn lets the members practice some of the skills needed to be a formator.

A facilitator does not have to be more “learned” than the other Definitives to do the job. The facilitator’s role is to keep the discussion on topic and see to it that everyone has a chance to participate.

As can be seen here, it is the responsibility of the local Council, and **the definitively professed members themselves**, to ensure that all definitively professed members receive and participate in ongoing formation with their community. Such formation involves a life-long study of solid spiritual materials that will enhance their Carmelite vocation, offering opportunities to share, live, and grow in accord with God’s grace. Therefore, it is important to frequently return to the fundamentals of our charism.

Recognizing that some definitively professed members are called to serve as formators, local councils may wish to find ways for the formators to receive their own ongoing formation.

Some suggestions for facilitators and the participating members

- Begin each session with prayer, invoking the Holy Spirit.
- Ask if anyone has any questions about last month’s topics or about the reading assignment. Ask how the past month’s reading assignment went for them.
- Discussion points may be used to get the conversation started. **Avoid questions that require the members to search through the book for specific answers.**
- The purpose of our discussions is to give each other mutual support and encouragement. Participants help each other better understand and live our vocation, grow in prayer and virtue, live out the Gospel values in the world, and grow in the spirit of faith, hope, and love. Our goal is continual faithfulness and growth in our vocation, not simply to master a book’s contents.
- Don’t feel that you must stop a good discussion to get to the next point. Going into depth on a useful topic will help the members more than working through a checklist of questions.
- Help everyone have a chance to speak. This may mean gently restraining the more talkative members and asking the quieter members to share their thoughts.
- Make an effort to stay on topic. While the discussions should be a free give-and-take among the participants and there is almost always personal sharing, try to keep it relevant to the matter at hand.
- Be respectful of differing points of view.

- Everyone is responsible for coming prepared for the discussion. This includes attentively reading the materials ahead of time. Members are encouraged to write down thoughts and insights as they read and/or highlight passages they found especially helpful. Everyone is responsible to make an effort to actively participate in the conversation.
- Some elements for discussion:
 - What is the author trying to say?
 - What did I read that has personal meaning for me?
 - What, if anything, does the Holy Spirit want me to share with others?
 - What can I take from what I have read to incorporate into my daily life as a Christian and as a Secular Carmelite?
- Some points for personal reflection could be:
 - How do I see the Holy Spirit at work in my life and drawing me toward greater holiness?
 - With my gifts, talents, background, and situation, what aspect of Christ am I called to show to the world, both individually and as a member of my community?

As said above, there is no constraint to finish the materials within a set period of time, leaving the participants free to go into greater depth in their study and discussions. Planned sessions may continue over several months, as needed.

As a reminder, the discussion facilitator is not the “teacher.” The Holy Spirit is the guide — the one forming us. If we do not still ourselves, become recollected, and reserve quiet time for study and reflection, we are not allowing the Holy Spirit to enlighten us. As Fr. Donald Kinney, O.C.D., says: “This is why you cannot ‘speed read’ your formation.”

Introductory explanation – the Ongoing Formation Program:

- The Ongoing Formation Program supports members’ understanding and growth in the Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer. This program continues to emphasize the transformative process of human development within the context of Christian and Discalced Carmelite spirituality.
- The program is intended to *serve as a model*. It covers many themes and sub-themes that resonate with our charism of prayer.
- OCDS ongoing formation differs from the structured format of initial formation (Aspirancy, Formation I and II).
- Communities, with the guidance of the local council, may use this formation program with flexibility by adapting the content to meet their needs and goals.
- Communities may use the entire program as outlined, or they may choose an individual topic (such as a Church document or St. Elizabeth of the Trinity).
- The Carmelite charism of prayer has an apostolic dimension, and it overflows with missionary fervor based on a passionate and dedicated interior life. “The vocation to the Secular Order is truly ecclesial. Prayer and apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable” (OCDS Const., Art. 26).

General Introduction

- The handbook gives prominence to St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. Continuing study of their writings is crucial to the overall understanding of our Order's charism. We have emphasized the importance of revisiting the materials contained in Formation I and II relating to Teresa, John, and Thérèse.
- When studying the history and reform of Carmel, our focus should not be so much on chronological dates and numbers; instead, our study should unravel the transformation of consciousness/awareness throughout the history of the Order, within the context of the Carmelite charism of prayer. Most importantly, one should recognize in the history of Carmel the presence of God in all events, trials, and struggles.
- Reading, reflection, and discussion make up a large part of ongoing formation. However, we must remember that formation is not just about studying many books or attending retreats and conferences. The goal is to be a loyal witness for Christ, remaining subject to ongoing purification, transformation, and ultimate union with God.
- Carmelite spirituality is meant to be lived in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives. God communicates not so much through books and abstract ideas, but rather through the witness of life and interactions with others.
- Our focus is always on turning our attention to love and desire for Christ and our dedication to do "what we should" in thought, word, and deed.
- The essential points, themes, sub-themes, and read-along materials included in this handbook may be used effectively for community discussion as well.
- Open-ended questions (questions that allow one to give a "free form" answer, as opposed to specific questions) should be part of the discussion points.

PART I

THE WORD OF GOD AND THE RULE OF CARMEL

“The sword of the spirit, the word of God, must abound in your mouths and hearts. Let all you do have the Lord’s word for accompaniment.’ This invitation was directed to the hermits of Mount Carmel through the Rule of St. Albert. The word of God is both the person of Christ and the scriptures that offer us Christ; and the brethren of Carmel were to live out the richness of Christ within themselves” (Superior General, Fr. Camilo Maccise, O.C.D.).

Introduction

Western monasticism emerged in the late third century and had become an established institution in the Christian church by the fourth century. The first Christian monks who were attracted to asceticism and prayer quickly realized the need for a “rule” to guide their way of life in a community setting. The monastic rules were texts that were written to identify the charism of a particular monastic order and its lifestyle. These rules also gave guidance for managing the day-to-day affairs and practices that formed the backbone of community life. The earliest example of well-known rules includes the Rule of St. Augustine (c. 400), the Rule of St. Benedict (c. 530), the Rule of St. Albert (between 1206-1214), and the Rule of St. Francis (1223). The Word of God — the person of Jesus is the focus of their lifestyle through the pages of these rules:

“The Lord grant that you may observe all these precepts in a spirit of charity as lovers of spiritual beauty, giving forth the good odor of Christ in the holiness of your lives: not as slaves living under the law but as men living in freedom under grace” (The Rule of St. Augustine, chapter VIII).

“When we wish to suggest our wants to persons of high station, we do not presume to do so except with humility and reverence. How much the more, then, are complete humility and pure devotion necessary in supplication of the Lord who is God of the universe!” (The Rule of St. Benedict, chapter 20).

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

“The Rule and life of the Friars Minor is this, namely, to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without property, and in chastity” (The Rule of St. Francis, chapter 1).

Surprisingly, their greater emphasis on daily routine and virtuous living in imitation of Christ attracted the married/single men and women living in the secular world as well. The Vatican, recognizing the needs of the time, allowed the creation of Secular/Lay Orders within the

monastic communities. The Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites is one such institute that takes St. Albert's Rule as a guiding principle to live a life of holiness along with the Friars and Nuns of the Order.

"Carmelite Seculars, together with the Friars and Nuns, are sons and daughters of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Teresa of Jesus. As a result, they share the same charism with the religious, each according to their particular state of life. It is one family with the same spiritual possessions, the same call to holiness (cf. Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:15) and the same apostolic mission. Secular members contribute to the Order the benefits proper to their secular state of life" (OCDS Const., Art. 1).

Secular Carmelites are Catholic laypersons over the age of 18 (married or unmarried) or ordained diocesan priests or deacons.

The following information is taken from the conference by Fr. Ramiro Casale, O.C.D., at the OCDS Congress in Wakefield, MA, Aug. 22-25, in 2024:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFdui_HkkBA&list=PLqSaY3pJZotkPaRMx9VyAJQIRzAn1J3Nv:

[As of 2021] The OCDS is present in 97 countries with a total of 772 communities canonically erected and 338 in formation. The total number of members is 28,824 with temporary and definitively professed members. The country with the most OCDS in the world is the United States with approximately 6,279 members in three provinces.

Members are to read and reflect upon the Rule of St. Albert along with the article on the Rule by Fr. Camilo Maccise, O.C.D., and other writings related to this topic. The discussion will include the influence of the Rule of St. Albert in the Carmelite reform of St. Teresa, and some essential points from *Verbum domini* (On the Word of God), by Pope Benedict XVI.

Required Reading: *The Carmelite Tradition: Spirituality in History*. Fr. Steven Payne, O.C.D., Copyright, Liturgical Press, 2011. Read pages 1-9 – The Carmelite Rule, (c. 1207) (All quotes in the main texts are taken from this edition.).

Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol One, *The Book of her Life, Spiritual Testimonies and Soliloquies*. Read Life, chpts. 32-33.

Recommended Reading: *Journey to Carith: The Source and Story of the Discalced Carmelites*, Peter-Thomas Rohrbach, O.C.D. Copyright, 1966, printed and distributed by ICS Publications. Read pages 41-53.

In Context – Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Their World, chapters, 5 and 6, Mark O'Keefe O.S.B.

Read-along materials: The Word of God and the Rule of Carmel (included below), Fr. Camilo Maccise, O.C.D., Superior General. Condensed by John Brooks Randle, OCDS. *Carmel Clarion*, Oct-Nov. 2000.

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition, “The Rule and Its Spirit,” chapter III, by Paul-Marie of the Cross, O.C.D. ICS.

Verbum domini (On the Word of God), His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, 2010.

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_ben-xvi_exh_20100930_verbum-domini.html

Note: Participants may include essential points from the above articles in their ongoing discussion. The following sessions’ essential points could be used effectively for community formation as well.

Session One: An Introduction to the Rule of St. Albert

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Participants are asked to read the text beforehand and note points they would like to discuss.

These questions from Fr. Donald Kinney, O.C.D., would be appropriate:

- What can I take from these readings to incorporate into my daily life as a Christian and a Secular Carmelite?
- What did I read that has personal meaning for me?
- What, if anything, does the Holy Spirit want me to share with others?

Required Reading: *The Carmelite Tradition: Spirituality in History*, Fr. Steven Payne, O.C.D., pages, 1-5.

Note: Sub-titles are added to the main text for clarification.

Explanatory Note: “Apart from the Bible itself, no text is more fundamental for Carmelite spirituality than what has come to be known as the Rule of St. Albert. It has shaped generation after generation of Carmelites and is the original articulation of the spiritual ideal to which all Carmelite renewal movements have attempted to return. Yet at least in its earliest form it is not technically a “rule” at all in the strict canonical sense, but a simple formula vita (formula of life), composed for a single community of medieval hermit-penitents on Mount Carmel in Crusader Palestine, by someone who was not himself a member” (*The Carmelite Tradition: Spirituality in History*, pg. 1).

From *The Carmelite Tradition*:

St. Albert of Jerusalem:

St. Albert of Jerusalem was born around 1150 in the diocese of Parma [Italy], and later joined the canons regular of Mortara before being chosen as bishop of Bobbio in 1184. A year later he was named bishop of Vercelli, a post he ably filled during the next two decades. In 1205 he was elected patriarch of Jerusalem and subsequently took up official residence in Acre, near Mount Carmel, because Jerusalem itself remained under Muslim control. During his distinguished career he played a role in drawing up rules for several religious groups and carried out many important diplomatic missions for the pope. He was martyred in 1214.

Hermits on the Western Slopes of Mount Carmel:

Much about the first recipients of the Rule of St. Albert remains obscure. We do not even know their names. Tradition has given the name “Brocard” to their leader, though only his first initial, “B,” appears in the earliest manuscripts. Most scholars today agree that they were a group of “Latin” hermits who assembled sometime around the beginning of the thirteenth century in the wadi-ain-es-Siah near the “spring of Elijah” on the western slopes of Mount Carmel, already sacred to the memory of the prophet Elijah as the site of his contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs. 18:20-46). Europe was in the midst of a religious revival and devout Christians everywhere were seeking a more “apostolic” life (that is, one more closely imitating the poor and simple lifestyle of Jesus and His apostles) in contrast to the perceived complacency and wealth of the traditional monastic orders. At the same time, as noted earlier, a deepening

spiritual focus on Christ's humanity inspired many to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land to visit the sites associated with Jesus, and sometimes even to remain, dedicating themselves to prayer and penance.

Such were the first Carmelites. We do not know precisely when they settled on Mount Carmel. Presumably, it was some time after the Third Crusade (1189-1192), that is, after Richard the Lionhearted had recaptured from Saladin's Muslim troops the narrow coastal strip that included Acre, Mount Carmel, and the wadi-ain-es-Siah. In all probability, the hermits had been living on Mount Carmel for some time before they requested Albert's intervention. The Rule of St. Albert bears no date, but we know that it must have been delivered to the Carmelites between 1206, when Albert first arrived in Acre, and 1214, when he was assassinated.

"Formula Vitae" – Rule of St. Albert:

The text is in the form of a letter from the patriarch of Jerusalem to "his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring on Mt. Carmel" (para. 1). Albert notes at the outset that there are already "many and varied" approved ways of living "a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ ... pure in heart and steadfast in conscience, ... unswerving in the service of [one's] Master" (para. 2). Indeed, at the time, new groups like the Carmelites were being pressured to conform to more familiar models of religious life by adopting one of the existing rules. But Albert evidently approved of what he observed in this hermit community and wished to grant their request for a particular *formula vitae* "in keeping with your avowed purpose" (para. 3), which suggests to many commentators that there had been some kind of consultation process. The hermits may even have presented him with a preliminary draft indicating what they hoped would be included. In any case, the fact that this document differs so dramatically from other legislations seems to imply that it was based on what the hermits were already living, or aspiring to live, rather than on some alien model.

Thus, despite many points of contact with the earlier desert and monastic traditions, and traces of the influence of John Cassian throughout the document, these first Carmelites consciously opted for an alternative to the Benedictine model, at least as it was being lived at that time.

Note: John Cassian was a Christian monk and theologian celebrated in both the Western and Eastern churches for his mystical writings. Cassian is noted for his role in bringing the ideas and practices of early Christian monasticism to the medieval West.

Albert required first that they have a prior chosen for the office by common consent (see para. 4). Unlike the traditional monastic abbot who served for life as the supreme authority and spiritual father of his community, the Carmelite "prior" was to be simply the first among equals, chosen for a set term of office, and making decisions in regular consultation with the brethren he served. Again, in contrast with the Benedictine tradition of dormitory living, each Carmelite hermit was to have his own cell, presumably to better support a life of intense personal prayer.

Albert goes on to offer a few general guidelines regarding the duties of the prior, the daily schedule, community prayer, common ownership, fraternal correction, fasting, abstinence, and so on. He instructs the hermits, as they prepare for their spiritual battles, to "clothe yourselves in God's armor" (para. 18), which includes chastity, holy meditations, holiness of life, faith, and the word of God. The longest paragraphs in this *formula vitae* are devoted to work and silence.

Particularly notable throughout is the spirit of freedom and balance. Albert was content to lay down a few key points and leave the rest to the ongoing discernment of the group. His use of many qualifying phrases— “if necessary,” “if it can be done without difficulty,” “unless bodily sickness, or feebleness, or some other good reason, demand a dispensation”—allows for great flexibility (cf. paras. 14-16). And though, in closing, Albert encouraged the brothers to ever greater generosity of spirit, he reminded them to use holy *discretio*, which is “the guide of the virtues” (para. 24). Thus, the text reveals far more about the original spirit of the thirteenth-century hermits in the wadi-ain-es-Siah than about the details of their daily life, which is why it has proved so durable an inspiration for generation after generation of their successors living in vastly different times and circumstances.

Returning West and Adaptations of the Rule:

Nevertheless, the hermits themselves soon felt the need for some adaptations as they began returning West in the face of mounting Muslim pressures in Palestine. They quickly discovered that the eremitical lifestyle they had followed in the wadi did not easily translate to the very different climate and culture of western Europe, where they also were suspected of violating the Fourth Lateran Council’s 1215 ban against the further founding of new religious orders. Accordingly, they were eager to seek papal approval as well as certain “clarifications” and “mitigations” of their *formula vitae*. Responding to their request, Pope Innocent IV promulgated a slightly revised version in 1247. The changes he approved included meals and canonical office in common, some moderating of the requirements regarding silence and abstinence, and most importantly, permission to establish foundations “where you are given a site suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order” (para. 5). The Carmelites interpreted this clause as allowing houses in the towns and cities, where they soon began assimilating themselves to the ranks of the mendicants (Franciscans, Dominicans) and began sending their students to the universities. In 1432, Pope Eugene IV granted further dispensations, which many saw as symptomatic of a decline in religious observance.

Reform of St. Teresa and the Primitive Rule of Carmel:

Thus when Teresa of Avila in the sixteenth century called for a return to the spirit of the “Primitive Rule” of Carmel, she actually had in mind the Innocentian version, which Carmelites of her time described as “primitive” when contrasted with the mitigation of Eugene IV. In fact, with its stronger emphasis on the communal dimension of Carmelite life, the Innocentian version, though not the earliest, was better suited to her reform efforts. Today it is Albert’s *formula vitae*, with the Innocentian modifications, that stands at the head of most Carmelite legislation. The following pages, therefore, present the reconstructed original version of Albert’s Rule, with the Innocentian modifications and additions indicated in italics.

The Essence of the Rule of Carmel:

What, then, is this Rule all about? Many authors of the past have insisted that its “heart” lies in the precept that “each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord’s law [i.e., Scripture] day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty” (para. 10). Thus, in *The Way of Perfection* St. Teresa writes that “our primitive rule states that we must pray without ceasing. If we do this with all the care possible—for unceasing

prayer is the most important aspect of the rule—the fasts, the disciplines, and the silence that the order commands will not be wanting” (Way, 4.2). Some more recent commentators, however, would also insist on the centrality (both in the text and in the life of the first hermits) of the “oratory” where the Carmelites are “to gather each morning to hear Mass” (para. 14), and of the elements of life in common sketched out in the surrounding paragraphs. But, however one interprets the balance between personal prayer and community life in Albert’s *formula vitae*, certainly both are crucial in the Carmelite tradition.

More surprising are the apparent omissions. Albert’s text says nothing directly about the apostolate, although we know the first hermits had established themselves near a source of fresh water along the main pilgrim route, and so presumably attracted many visitors. Moreover, the two biblical figures who would assume such importance in the later Carmelite tradition, Elijah and Mary, are not even mentioned by name. Their presence must be found “between the lines.” Albert addresses his text to the hermits living “near the spring,” known to the locals as the “spring of Elijah;” thus, the first Carmelites had founded at a site resonant with memories of the great prophet. Likewise, the “oratory” that Albert had directed them to build they dedicated to Mary, who thus became the “Lady of the place” and their adopted patron. Such seemingly small details had a decisive impact in shaping Carmelite spirituality ever after.

Session Two: The Carmelite Rule (c. 1207)

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Required Reading: *The Carmelite Tradition: Spirituality in History*, pgs. 5-9.

Explanatory Note: The following is Saint Albert's *formula vitae* (formula of life), with the 1247 additions and modifications by Innocent IV indicated in italics. In cases where Innocent IV replaced some of Albert's text, the two versions are indicated by [Alb.] or [Inn.] (*The Carmelite Tradition*, pg. 5-9).

Note: Sub-titles and Scripture references are added to the Rule for clarification and understanding of the text from the biblical perspective.

Points for reflection/discussion:

It is recommended that the participants take the time necessary to discuss the Rule for deeper understanding, including its implications for Seculars today.

Opening Word – Salutation or Prologues

1. Albert, called by God's favor to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, bids health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring [of Elijah] on Mount Carmel.

Starting Point – Exordium

2. Many and varied are the ways [cf. Heb. 1:1] in which our saintly forefathers laid down how everyone, whatever his station or the kind of religious observance he has chosen, should live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ [cf. 2 Cor. 10:5] — how, pure in heart and stout in conscience, [cf. 1 Tim. 1:5] he must be unswerving in service of his Master.

Exposition (narration)

3. It is to me, however, that you have come for a rule of life [*formula vitae*] in keeping with your avowed purpose, a rule you may hold fast to henceforward; and therefore:
4. The first thing I require is for you to have a Prior, one of yourselves, who is to be chosen for the office by common consent, or that of the greater and maturer part of you; each of the others must promise him obedience—of which, once promised, he must try to make his deeds the true reflection [cf. 1 Jn. 3:18]—[Inn.] *and also chastity and the renunciation of ownership.*
5. [Inn.] *If the Prior and brothers see fit, you may have foundations in solitary places, or where you are given a site that is suitable and convenient for the observance proper to your Order.*
6. Next, each one of you is to have a separate cell, situated as the lie of the land you propose to occupy may dictate, and allotted by disposition of the Prior with the agreement of the other brothers, or the more mature among them.

7. [Inn.] *However, you are to eat whatever may have been given you in a common refectory, listening together meanwhile to a reading from Holy Scripture where that can be done without difficulty.*

8. None of the brothers is to occupy a cell other than that allotted to him, or to exchange cells with another, without leave of whoever is Prior at the time.

9. The Prior's cell should stand near the entrance to your property, so that he may be the first to meet those who approach, and whatever must be done in consequence may all be carried out as he may decide and order.

10. Each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night [cf. Ps. 1:2; Joshua 1:8] and keeping watch at his prayers [cf. 1 Pet. 4:7] unless attending to some other duty.

11. [Alb.] Those who know their letters, and how to read the psalms, should for each of the hours, say those our holy forefathers laid down and the approved custom of the Church appoints for that hour. Those who do not know their letters must say twenty-five "Our Fathers" for the night office, except on Sundays and solemnities when that number is to be doubled so that the "Our Father" is said fifty times; the same prayer must be said seven times in the morning in place of Lauds, and seven times too for each of the other hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.

[Inn.] *Those who know how to say the canonical hours with those in orders should do so, in the way those holy forefathers of ours laid down, and according to the Church's approved custom. Those who do not know the hours must say twenty-five "Our Fathers" for the night office, except on Sundays and solemnities when that number is to be doubled so that the "Our Father" is said fifty times; the same prayer must be said seven times in the morning in place of Lauds, and seven times too for each of the other hours, except for Vespers when it must be said fifteen times.*

12. [Alb.] None of the brothers must lay claim to anything as his own, but your property is to be held in common [cf. Acts 4:32; 2:44]; and of such things as the Lord may have given you each is to receive [cf. Acts 4:35] from the Prior—that is from the man he appoints for the purpose—whatever befits his age and needs [cf. Acts 4:35]. However, as I have said, each of you is to stay in his allotted cell, and live, by himself, on what is given out to him.

[Inn.] *None of the brothers must lay claim to anything as his own, but you are to possess everything in common; and each is to receive from the Prior—that is from the brother he appoints for the purpose—whatever befits his age and needs.*

13. [Inn.] *You may have as many asses and mules as you need, however, and may keep a certain number of livestock or poultry.*

14. An oratory should be built as conveniently as possible among the cells, where, if it can be done without difficulty, you are to gather each morning to hear Mass.

15. On Sundays too, or other days if necessary, you should discuss matters of discipline and your spiritual welfare; and on this occasion the indiscretions and failings of the brothers, if any are found at fault, should be lovingly corrected.

16. You are to fast every day, except Sundays, from the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter Day, unless bodily sickness or feebleness, or some other good reason, demands a dispensation from the fast; for necessity overrides every law.

17. [Alb.] You are always to abstain from meat unless it has to be eaten as a remedy for sickness or great feebleness.

[Inn.] *You are to abstain from meat, except as a remedy for sickness or feebleness. But as, when you are on a journey, you more often than not have to beg your way, outside your own houses you may eat foodstuffs that have been cooked with meat, so as to avoid giving trouble to your hosts. At sea, however, meat may be eaten.*

18. Since man's life on earth is a time of trial [cf. Job 7:1], and all who would live devotedly in Christ must undergo persecution [cf. 2 Tim. 3:12], and the devil your foe is on the prowl like a roaring lion looking for prey to devour [cf. 1 Pet. 5:8], you must use every care to clothe yourselves in God's armor so that you may be ready to withstand the enemy's ambush [cf. Eph. 6:11].

19. Your loins are to be girt [cf. Eph. 6:14] with chastity, your breast fortified by holy meditations, for, as Scripture has it, holy meditation will save you [cf. Prov. 2:11]. Put on holiness as your breastplate [cf. Eph. 6:14], and it will enable you to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength [cf. Deut. 6:5], and your neighbor as yourself [cf. Mt. 19:19; 22:37-39]. Faith must be your shield on all occasions, and with it you will be able to quench all the flaming missiles of the wicked one [cf. Eph. 6:16]: there can be no pleasing God without faith; [and the victory lies in this—your faith]. On your head set the helmet of salvation [cf. Eph. 6:17] and so be sure of deliverance by our only Savior, who sets his own free from their sins [cf. Mt. 1:21]. The sword of the spirit, the word of God [cf. Eph. 6:17], must abound [cf. Col. 3:16] in your mouths and hearts [cf. Rom. 10:8]. Let all you do have the Lord's word for accompaniment [cf. Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 10:31].

20. You must give yourselves to work of some kind, so that the devil may always find you busy; no idleness on your part must give him a chance to pierce the defenses of your souls. In this respect you have both the teaching and the example of Saint Paul the Apostle, into whose mouth Christ put his own words [cf. 2 Cor. 13:3]. God made him preacher and teacher of faith and truth to the nations [cf. 1 Tim. 2:7]: with him as your leader you cannot go astray. "We lived among you," he said, "laboring and weary, toiling night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you; not because we had no power to do otherwise but so as to give you, in your own selves, an example you might imitate. For the charge we gave you when we were with you was this: that whoever is not willing to work should not be allowed to eat either. For we have heard that there are certain restless idlers among you. We charge people of this kind and implore them in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they earn their own bread by silent toil" [2 Thess. 3:7-12]. This is the way of holiness and goodness; see that you follow it [cf. Is. 30:21].

21. The Apostle would have us keep silence, for in silence he tells us to work [cf. 2 Thess. 3:12]. As the Prophet also makes known to us: Silence is the way to foster holiness [cf. Is. 32:17]. Elsewhere he says: Your strength will lie in silence and hope [cf. Is. 30:15].

[Alb.] For this reason I lay down that you are to keep silence from Vespers [Evening Prayer] until Terce [the third hour of daytime prayer] the next day, unless some necessary or good reason, or the Prior's permission, should break the silence.

[Inn.] *For this reason, I lay down that you are to keep silence from after Compline [Night Prayer] until after Prime [first hour of daytime prayer] the next day.*

At other times, although you need not keep silence so strictly, be careful not to indulge in a great deal of talk, for, as Scripture has it—and experience teaches us no less—sin will not be wanting where there is much talk [cf. Prov. 10:19], and he who is careless in speech will come to harm [cf. Prov. 13:3]; and elsewhere: The use of many words brings harm to the speaker's soul [cf. Sir. 20:8]. And our Lord says in the Gospel: Every rash word uttered will have to be accounted for on judgement day [Mt. 12:36]. Make a balance then, each of you, to weigh his words in, keep a tight rein of your mouths, lest you should stumble and fall in speech, and your fall be irreparable and prove mortal [cf. Sir. 28:29-30]. Like the Prophet, watch your step lest your tongue give offense [cf. Ps. 38:2], and employ every care in keeping silent, which is the way to foster holiness [cf. Is. 32:17].

22. You, brother B., and whoever may succeed you as prior, must always keep in mind and put into practice what our Lord said in the Gospel: Whoever has a mind to become a leader among you must make himself servant to the rest, and whichever of you would be first must become your bondsman [servant] [Mt. 20: 26-27; cf. Mk. 10:43-44].

23. You other brothers too, hold your prior in humble reverence, your minds not on him but on Christ who has placed him over you, and who, to those who rule the Churches, addressed the words: Whoever pays you heed pays heed to me, and whoever treats you with dishonor dishonors me [Lk. 10:16]; if you remain so minded you will not be found guilty of contempt, but will merit life eternal as fit reward for your obedience.

Conclusion (Conclusio)

24. Here then are the few points I have written down to provide you with a standard of conduct to live up to: but our Lord, at his second coming, will reward anyone who does more than he is obliged to do. See that the bounds of common sense [*discretio*] are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues.

Session Three: The role of St. Albert's Rule in the Carmelite reform of St. Teresa

Required Reading: *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. One. *St. Teresa's Life*, chpts. 32-33.

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition, "The Rule and Its Spirit," chapter III, by Paul-Marie of the Cross, O.C.D. ICS.

In Context: Teresa, John of the Cross and Their World, chapter 6, by Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B. ICS.

Explanatory Note: The Carmelite Rule played a significant role in Teresa's reform in sixteenth century Spain. The Carmelite Order has no known founder but sprang from the "desire of the heart" of those first hermits to follow Christ in love and dedication. The Rule of St. Albert and the experience of the Carmelites gave definitive depth and shape to the Carmelite charism of prayer.

Points for reflection/discussion:

- Teresa had been a nun of the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila for twenty-five years (1535-1562) when she began the Discalced Reform. She always spoke affectionately of her monastery. However, in the *Life*, she speaks with concern about the decline of the spirit of the Carmelite charism of prayer in her monastery.
- Referring to the papal bull of Pope Eugene IV and his further modification of the Rule of St. Albert – "...the Rule was not kept in its prime rigor but was observed the way it was in the whole Order, that is, according to the bull of mitigation" (*Life*, 32:9).
- She further observes several other problems associated with the life of prayer and contemplation in the monastery due to the mitigation of the Rule. Nuns were allowed to go outside of the monastery to attend to the needs of the benefactors, and Teresa was one of them. "There are other disadvantages ... even though I was one who did so a great deal, was now a serious one for me because some persons to whom the superiors couldn't say "no" liked to have me in their company; and when urged, the superiors ordered me to go. So, by reason of their commands I wasn't able to remain in the monastery much" (*Life*, 32:9).
- The life of enclosure – essential for a life of tranquility, silence, and contemplation – likewise suffered. All of these were bound to undermine the broader sense of observation of the Rule and spirit of recollection in the monastery as St. Albert envisioned: "Each one of you is to stay in his own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord's law day and night and keeping watch at his prayers..." (Rule #10).
- The Carmelite General Rubeo (Giovanni Battista Rossi, 1566-1567) and Teresa seem to have had different views of what Carmelite reform would mean. "Rubeo's aim was to bring the Incarnation more fully into conformity with the mitigated rule of 1432 ...
- Teresa, on the other hand, wanted her reform to return more fully to the eremitical and contemplative focus of the mitigated rule of 1247 with an eye to the founding vision of the Carmelites, as she understood it" (*In Context*, by Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B., chpt. 6).
- For these reasons, Teresa founded her first reformed monastery of St. Joseph in 1562.
- The Rule played a vital role in founding the monasteries with greater silence and solitude in an enclosed environment. "We observe the rule of our Lady of Mt. Carmel

[the Rule of St. Albert] and keep it without mitigation as ordained by the Friar Cardinal Hugo of Saint Sabina and given in 1248, in the fifth year of the pontificate of Pope Innocent IV” (*Life*, 36:26).

- Teresa is referring to their giving up the text mitigated by Eugene IV, which was observed as ordained by Innocent IV. This was the juridical and spiritual point of departure for her reform (see footnote to *Life*, 36:27).
- The Discalced Carmelites were established as a separate province within the Order in 1581. Finally, on December 20, 1593, Pope Clement VII established the Discalced Carmelites as an independent religious order with their own superior general and administration. Thus, her first monastery and her subsequent foundations were to follow the primitive Rule of our Lady of Mount Carmel – St. Albert’s Rule of 1247, which is still followed by the whole Order to this day.
- Teresa wanted a small community to follow Christ’s counsels as perfectly as possible. This implies careful observance of the Rule, and for Teresa the essential element of the Carmelite rule is unceasing prayer.
- “Had Carmel remained truly faithful to this central precept of prayer, recollection [contemplation], and a life of union with God – yet at the same time without giving up its apostolate – no Teresian reform might have been necessary. Perhaps there is no better way than this of showing how essential to Carmelite spirituality is this priority of contemplation [as the source of all apostolic] action that alone makes possible the preservation intact of its true ideal” (*Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, pg. 33).
- In all her subsequent writings, Teresa did not fail to recall the Rule of St. Albert and the eremitical spirit of Carmel:
With pleading, she reproves: “We don’t keep some of the very ordinary things of the rule, such as silence, which isn’t going to do us any harm” (*The Way of Perfection*, 10:6).
 - “... you have a rule that commands you to pray unceasingly – for that’s what it commands us – and that you have to keep it” (*Way*, 21:10).
 - “So, I say now that all of us who wear this holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. This call explains our origin, we are the descendants of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers on Mount Carmel who in such great solitude ... sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation” (*Interior Castle*, 5:1.2).
- “She was a realist, so she understood that the whole life of Carmel had to be reconsidered as a function of contemplative life. Strict enclosure, silence, work in solitude must be [established] so that union with God could develop in most favorable surroundings. Under an original yet basically traditional form, Carmel was to live again the life and spirit of its origins, thanks to Saint Teresa” (*Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, pg. 36).
- “The best proof of this is given us by the response the Carmelites themselves made to the reform. If St. John of the Cross and the first discalced were won over to the reform, it is because they discovered in it what we have attempted to analyze: this primitive spirit [of the Rule], this original soil, without which nothing would flower, without which Carmel would cease to be” (*Teresian Tradition*, pg. 36).

- “Once again, Teresa has rediscovered and completely renewed the spirit of her Order [within the context of St. Albert’s Rule], which has two purposes, one dependent on the other: contemplation that unites the soul with God and reveals the infinite value of souls, then overflows in the apostolate” (*Teresian Tradition*, pgs. 43-44).

Session Four: On the Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church

***Verbum Domini* and the Rule of St. Albert**

Explanatory Note: “The rule is brief, unlegalistic, and scripturally oriented. Despite its brevity there are thirty-seven [or more] citations from the pages of Scripture, either in the form of direct quotations or Biblical allusions... The Carmelite rule is a rule of renewal, a return to the unfettered spirituality of the Gospels” (*Journey to Carith*, pgs. 43-44).

“The spirituality of Carmel has no difficulty in developing the basic elements drawn from its biblical origins within an evangelic life of perfection. Henceforth, it is in the light of Jesus Christ and in dependence on him, characteristics of the Rule from its very first lines, that Carmel’s spirituality must be considered” (*Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition*, pg. 23).

In this session, we will read and reflect on some essential points from *Verbum domini* (On the Word of God) by Pope Benedict XVI.

“The interpretation of sacred Scripture would remain incomplete were it not to include listening to *those who have truly lived the word of God: namely, the saints*... The most profound interpretation of Scripture comes precisely from those who let themselves be shaped by the word of God through listening, reading and assiduous meditation. It is certainly not by chance that the great currents of spirituality in the Church’s history originated with an explicit reference to Scripture” (*Verbum domini*, #48).

Points for reflection/discussion:

The Saints and the Interpretation of Scripture:

- “Every saint is like a ray of light streaming forth from the word of God,” observes Pope Benedict in his encyclical, *Verbum domini* (On the Word of God) (*Verbum domini*, #48). He specifically recalls the writings of the Carmelite saints and their love for Gospel teachings:
 - “The Carmelite Saint Teresa of Avila, who in her writings constantly uses biblical images to explain her mystical experiences, says that Jesus himself revealed to her that ‘all the evil in the world is derived from not knowing clearly the truths of sacred Scripture’ (*Verbum domini*, #48 The Saints and the interpretation of Scripture, Footnote, St. Teresa of Avila, Life, 40:2).
 - “Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus discovered that love was her personal vocation by poring over the Scriptures, especially chapters 12 and 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians; the same saint describes the attraction of the Scriptures: ‘No sooner do I glance at the Gospel, but immediately I breathe in the fragrance of the life of Jesus, and I know where to run’” (*Verbum domini*, #48 Saints and the interpretation of Scripture, footnote, Story of a Soul).
 - “Then, after speaking in many and varied ways through the prophets, ‘now at last in these days God has spoken to us in His Son’ (Heb. 1:1-2)” (*Verbum dei*, Part 1 of *Verbum domini*, an allusion to the writings of St. John of the Cross and his interpretation of the Bible text).

- “God could answer as follows... Fasten your eyes on him alone because I have spoken and revealed all and in him you will discover even more than you ask for and desire... For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested and revealed to you by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom, and reward” (*Ascent*, 2.22:5).
- “...and then the martyrs of Nazism and Communism, represented by Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), a Carmelite nun...” (*Verbum domini*, #48 Saints and the interpretation of the Scripture).
- “Through the intercession of these saints..., let us ask the Lord that our own lives may be that ‘good soil’ in which the divine sower plants the word, so that it may bear within us fruits of holiness, ‘thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold’ (Mk. 4:20)” (*Verbum domini*, #49).
- “Holiness inspired by the word of God thus belongs in a way to the prophetic tradition, wherein the word of God sets the prophet’s very life at its service. In this sense, holiness in the Church constitutes an interpretation of Scripture which cannot be overlooked. The Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred authors is the same Spirit who impels the saints to offer their lives for the Gospel. In striving to learn from their example, we set out on the sure way towards a living and effective hermeneutic of the word of God” (*Verbum domini*, #49).

The need to transcend the “letter”:

- “In rediscovering the interplay between the different senses of Scripture it thus becomes essential to grasp the passage *from letter to spirit* [as the saints did] ...To attain to it involves a progression and a process of understanding guided by the **inner movement** of the whole corpus, and hence, it also has to become a vital process. Here we see the reason why an authentic process of interpretation is **never purely an intellectual process** but also a lived one, demanding full engagement in the life of the Church, which is life ‘according to the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:16)” (*Verbum domini*, #38, emphasis added).

The Word and Silence:

- “The word, in fact, can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. Rediscovering the centrality of God’s word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose” (*Verbum domini*, #66). “Silence is the way to foster holiness” (Rule of St. Albert, #21).
- “We must never forget that all authentic and living Christian spirituality is based on the *word of God proclaimed, accepted, celebrated and meditated upon in the Church*” (*Verbum domini*, #121).

On the reading of Scripture:

“It is truth that must be sought in Holy Scripture, not beauty of expression. It should be read with the same spirit in which it was written. We must seek the good of our soul rather than literary style... Think more of what is said than the one who said it. Humans soon pass away; God’s truth remains forever. Through the Scripture God speaks to us in many ways, despite those He uses as instruments. Too often we are led by curiosity to read Holy Scripture and want to understand and argue passages we should simply pass over. If you wish to profit by the reading of Scripture, then do so with humility, simplicity, and faith, and never try to acquire a reputation for being a scholar. Inquire, and then listen meekly to what the saints tell you” (*The Imitation of Christ*, chapter 5, St. Joseph edition).

*“May the Holy Spirit awaken a hunger and thirst for
the word of God, and raise up zealous heralds
and witnesses of the Gospel.”
Verbum domini, #122*

Carmelites celebrate the Feast of the author of the Carmelite Rule, St. Albert of Jerusalem, on September 17th. Albert did not impose his own ideas on the group of hermits who came to him – he listened to what they told him about their way of life, and he adapted it and gave it structure.

Prayer
*Lord God,
through Saint Albert of Jerusalem
you have given us a Rule of life according to your Gospel,
to help us attain perfect love.
Through his prayers may we always live
in allegiance to Jesus Christ, abide by his Rule, and
serve faithfully in the Church and communities.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ,
your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.*

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Read-Along Material

The Word of God and the Rule of Carmel

Camilo Maccise, O.C.D.

The following article was written by Superior General Fr. Camilo Maccise, O.C.D., and has been condensed by John B. Randle, OCDS. It is reprinted [in Carmelite Digest] by permission from Carmel Clarion, Oct.-Nov. 2000.

“The word of God must abound in your mouths and hearts. Let all you do have the Lord’s word for accompaniment.” The invitation was directed to the hermits of Mount Carmel through the Rule of St. Albert. The word of God is both the person of Christ and the scriptures that offer us Christ; and the brethren of Carmel were to live out the richness of Christ within themselves. The vocation of the brothers on Mount Carmel was to put on Christ and live his mystery within themselves. So it was to the scriptures that they turned in order to draw an understanding of the things of God and gain practical wisdom, spiritual resources, and the certitude they needed as believers who were called to travel the road of Christian integrity and fidelity.

Faith is the obedience of the mind and heart to the Divine Lordship that is revealed and acted out in the Gospel. It points out that the baptized, as persons subject to Christ the Lord, are called to serve him in faithful and total dedication. *Dei verbum* states that the obedience of faith is an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God.

St. Albert’s plan is the ideal for community life that fully reproduces the form and spirit of the first Christian community of Jerusalem given as an example of Christian community in the Acts of the Apostles. Two elements together in the Rule give it tension. First, fraternal union in community is the bridge for a new rich life of allegiance to Christ. Second, despite living in community and seeking evangelical perfection in fraternal unity, the Carmelite will fight the battle of Christian faithfulness in the “hermitage” while keeping a solitary, ordered vigil in prayer. Two principal parts of the Rule are the “institutional” contained in the structure-giving elements, the fraternal communion and the cult and ascetical practices (from 1-17). In the second “exhortative” part is the evangelical dimension and spiritual purpose of the way of life (from 18-21).

We look at three points progressively: (1) a plan for common life inspired by the witness of the Acts of the Apostles, (2) a daily spiritual combat armed with the solitude of the hermitage, and (3) a creative tension between these in the service of the Gospel.

Communion and Community

In Ephesians, St. Paul writes that the faithful are called to lead a life worthy of the faith in the same grace, in that newness of being and sets them apart as people living in the presence of God. With all humility and gentleness and with patience, they are to support each other in love. Take care to preserve the unity of the Spirit that binds you together (Eph. 4:2-3). This is fraternal communion lived in a practical fashion. The newness of Christ is a mystery of unity (Eph. 4:4-6).

It is necessary to remember that fraternal unity, the lived expression of evangelical love, is a hallmark of the life proposed in the Rule of Carmel. It is reflected in the way the prior or prioress is elected (para. 4); in how each one will have an assigned cell (para. 6); the common table and listening to the reading of scripture (para. 7); the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours together (para. 11); possessing material things in common, each one receiving whatever befits his/her age and needs (para. 12); the daily celebration of the Eucharist together (para. 14); regular meetings of the community and faults lovingly corrected (para. 15); benevolent discretion in the corporal penances proposed (para. 16 & 17); the prior or prioress as humble servant of the community (para. 22); and the exhortation to humbly reverence the prior or prioress (para. 23). Charity is what “builds up” the Church and gives the people of God the possibility of living as a community of brothers and sisters. It includes patience and humility, goodness and compassion, kindness and mutual respect, generosity and service, and understanding and pardon.

United Heart and Soul

St. Albert saw in Acts that union is what is original in a sincere living of Christianity and a “cornerstone” of the first communities. The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul (Acts 4:32). It was a community where each individual, invested intimately with divine energy from the Spirit, had received “a new heart and spirit.” No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common (Acts 4:32b). Poverty befits a community “united heart and soul,” bound in practice to give witness to Christian unity (Acts 2:44-45 & 4:34-35). Poverty is experienced as a sign of fraternal union and as a witness to that unity of hearts, the communion that distinguishes the people of the New Covenant. The Rule of Carmel has the same approach towards poverty; none of the brothers and sisters must lay claim to anything but are to possess everything in common. And each one is to receive from the prior or prioress—that is from the one appointed for that purpose—whatever befits his or her age and needs (para. 12).

The Fountainhead of Fraternal Communion

The brothers and sisters in Christ are united in the practice of love because a unifying mystery is operating within them, a gift from above that is ever welcomed and made to thrive. The first believers of Jerusalem were “united heart and soul,” because the source of their charity was the teachings of the Apostles, the breaking of bread, and prayer. These three values grow out of the very structure of the Christian way of life proposed by St. Albert.

The Teaching of the Apostles

The teaching of the Apostles sets out the truth of Christ, the life-giving grace of Christ, the new law of Christ. The religious of Carmel will listen to the word of God by meditating on it, letting themselves be filled by its riches.

Faithful to the Breaking of the Bread

In Acts 2:46 is a reference to a daily Eucharist. The unity of charity is expressed in the “breaking of bread” and deriving from “a participation in the body of Christ.” St. Albert gives prominence to the Eucharist in Carmelite community life. “Each morning” all the brothers and sisters will

take part together in the Eucharistic celebration, the source of heavenly strength and fraternal unity. The Rule specifies that the Eucharist will be celebrated in an oratory built for this purpose “among the cells”: a center point signifying something that is life-giving and unifying, signifying the search for unity centered on the body of Christ.

Keeping Watch in Prayer

The Council says that the Church is fed by the bread of life of the table, both of the word of God and of the body of Christ. Carmelites are called to the same table each day. In Acts 2:42, Luke adds the practice of prayer. In prescribing a life characterized by frequent prayer for the brothers and sisters of Carmel, St. Albert had a similar vision in mind. In the solitude of prayer and the daily celebration of the psalms, the religious would praise God for the mystery of his grace and express the richness of evangelical life and fraternal communion particularly through petition and thanksgiving.

Clothe Yourself in God’s Armor

The hermits to whom the document of St. Albert was addressed came from the Latin West with the intention of taking part in different ways in the restoration of Christianity in the Holy Land and the conquest of the holy city of Jerusalem. The so-called “war of God” fought with earthly weapons against infidels was replaced with the conquest of the heavenly Jerusalem with the weapons of solitary prayer; holy penance; and of faith, hope, and charity. The way to be trodden is marked by combat and constancy, vigilance, and perseverance. This earthly journey will be full of obstacles and snares.

Withstand the Enemy’s Ambush

Biblical references open the “exhortative” section of the Rule introducing the theme of Christian combat. Man’s life on earth is a time of trial and struggle. Repose is not for the present but the final fulfillment. This general truth calls the Christian with decided urgency. Anybody who tries to live in devotion to Christ is certain to be persecuted. Suffering is inevitable, because Christian fidelity struggles against the hostility of a world seduced by tendencies contrary to the Gospel. Such hostility is part of the evil intent of the tempter. He is the invisible “enemy on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.” And so, the brothers and sisters of Carmel are to be aware of this, having recourse to suitable means to confront it. Clothe yourselves in God’s armor so that you may be ready to withstand the enemy’s ambush. St. Albert’s expression is to thwart the tempter from piercing the defenses of your souls. St. Albert keeps insisting we put on “the armor of God,” the baptismal grace of Christ within the heart. Christians defend themselves with the supernatural weapons of faith, hope, and charity with the prudent courage and perseverance of a soldier.

The Imperative of Christian Commitment

The faithful person fights with the weapons that lie within, the riches of new life in which Christ becomes present. St. Albert, in the Rule, develops all the elements contained in *the Letter to the Ephesians*, with the exception of the so-called “footgear.” St. Albert described a spiritual combat for the following values: chastity with holy thoughts; justice in the framework of love of God and neighbor; faith, without which it is impossible to please God; trust in the one and only

Savior; and the word of God, which should be effective in the heart of each brother and sister and be a guide for all our actions.

A Distinctive Religious Proposal

Paragraphs 20 and 21 of the Rule are on work and silence. St. Albert directs them: “You must give yourself work of some kind, so that the devil may always find you busy. No idleness on your part must give him a chance to pierce the defenses of your soul.” As for silence, biblical texts such as the following are cited: “Your strength will lie in silence and hope” (Is. 30:15); “Sin will not be wanting where there is much talk” (Prov. 10:19); “The use of many words brings harm to the speaker’s soul” (Sir. 20:8). He warns us again of the need for vigilance lest we fall because of the tongue.

Community Life with an Eremitical Orientation

A loving fraternal union of this colony of hermits should not let them forget the original purpose of their Rule. An eremitical ideal should not be suffocated by the new structures, rather this ideal should be given form in a more complete and organized religious form of life.

The Biblical Proving Ground of the Desert

From the Rule’s viewpoint, the time of trial is lived through and overcome like the biblical proving ground of the desert: by persevering in the journey undertaken; being guided by hope in the promised inheritance; waiting on the salvation of the one and only Savior; and believing in the face of all contrary circumstances in God, who promises mercy and faithfully keeps his promises. Heavenly hope, the sign of the ideal hermit, has united them.

The Rule insists on having separate cells and the purpose for this: “each of you is to stay in your own cell or nearby pondering the Lord’s law day and night and keeping watch at your prayers unless attending to some other duty” (para. 10). Withdrawing into the hermitage of your cell, you challenge the enemy, as it were, to a duel, humbly confident of having in Christ the strength to make the enemy flee.

Keeping Watch in Prayer

Jesus said in the Garden, “Stay awake and pray not to be put to the test.” The spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak. “To pray” means to grow strong in the Lord with the strength of his power in order to stay firm in faith. “Vigilance” in the New Testament is a dynamic waiting and capacity for suffering in “blessed hope.” Christian waiting is uncertain and can be prolonged. It is a waiting in faith, like waiting through the night. As a result, this waiting is a strong test of the perseverance of the faithful. Thus the need to “keep on the watch” and to “be vigilant,” in the same sense as staying awake with eyes wide open and in a state of alert readiness. We must not allow ourselves to be overcome by the weight of a lengthy night. We must prevent the heart from growing weary thus becoming allergic to the things of heaven. It means not allowing the tautness of faith to grow slack, not to give in to the solicitations so secretive, seductive, and insidious of human nature and the tempter.

This vigilance is also sobriety, self-control, clear-headedness and sense of reality, and readiness and spiritual healthiness. The necessity to be vigilant is frequently associated with that of prayer. In the hermitage of the cell, the Carmelite will meditate on the word of God and keep

watch in prayer. This is the way to be “strong in the midst of tribulation, constant in faith, and joyful in hope,” advancing on in faithful combat as a trusty servant of Christ towards the prize of eternal life.

Conclusion

The two principal tendencies that an examination of the biblical data in St. Albert’s document shows us are: (a) life lived in common inspired by the *koinonia* of the first church at Jerusalem, and (b) eremitical commitment that includes spiritual combat for the purpose of conquering the heavenly Jerusalem. These do not form a dichotomy but are twin themes designed to be lived in deep harmony as a sign of baptismal commitment and evangelical radicalism.

St. Albert sees the religious, in the measured solitude of a hermitage cell, being enriched by the word of God, keeping watch in prayer with the awareness of a combatant called to “put on the armor of God,” to remain “constant in the faith,” to keep kindled in the heart the flame of hope for the heavenly inheritance. In this way, Carmelites every day make their own the victory of Christ the Lord. In community relationships, the religious live first of all the ecclesial perfection of love with its daily demands of fraternal unity, in this way giving witness that their eremitical undertaking is a genuine search for Christian fidelity.

It is impossible to separate them. Deep down it is about living out the implications of one’s baptism every day in faith, hope, and charity, gradually casting off the old man and being reclothed with the new. This call, joined to one’s personal dignity in Christ and the necessity of walking in the newness of Christ demands that this baptized soldier obtain strength from the Lord and from the grace of baptism in order to grow in love.

We cannot point out any other priority. There is certainly a tension present in St. Albert’s Rule, lying in the relationship between the ideal of community and eremitical commitment. However, it is a tension forming part of a unified ideal, a charismatic expression of the newness of Christ. As hermits committed to the combat of Christian faithfulness and gathered together as a sign of Christian communion, the hermits of Mount Carmel will exemplify the Church of God, gathered together in unity.

CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Introduction

Under this topic, the participants will read and reflect on the different papal documents and their significance. More precisely, the participants will explore in depth the three encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI: *God is Love (Deus Caritas Est)*; *In Hope We Are Saved (Spes Salvi Facti Sumus)*; *Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)*. “The three encyclicals of Benedict XVI are grounded in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. They provide inspiration and hope in the midst of violence and sin; and they direct us towards Christ, the Incarnate Love of God, who is the true hope of the world” (Dr. Robert Fastiggi, Professor of Systematic Theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary).

Read-along materials:

God is Ever New: Meditations on Life, Love, and Freedom, Pope Benedict XVI, Ignatius Press.

This book contains short summaries and snippets of information about Pope Benedict’s written and spoken communication during the tenure of his papacy. The selected texts were arranged under different categories of papal discourses including homilies, discourses given at the General Audience, messages for World Youth Days, addresses made to the seminarians, bishops and Christian families, brief summaries of encyclical letters, and much more. Reading and reflecting on Pope Benedict’s writings are the best way to understand the differences among the various types of papal communications.

Additionally, the brief extract of his teachings contains a lifetime of keen insights and godly wisdom. This book could be used effectively for community formation as well as individual meditation.

Session One: A brief guide to different papal documents

One way the Pope has guided the Church throughout the centuries is through papal documents. These are usually addressed to bishops, religious and the lay faithful of the entire Church. For many documents, the official text is in Latin, but translations into the vernacular are usually available. It is important to understand the differences between the various types of papal documents and their respective authority.

APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS

Apostolic constitutions are considered the most solemn kind of document issued by the Pope in his own name. Constitutions can define dogmas but also alter canon law or erect new ecclesiastical structures. In teaching, they include solemn magisterial acts of the Pope, such as dogmatic definitions. In 1950, Pope Pius XII declared the Assumption of Mary an official dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church teaches that the Virgin Mary having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.

ENCYCLICALS

Encyclicals are papal letters – the word “encyclical” means “circular letter.” These are formal documents usually addressed to Catholic clergy, religious, and the laity. It contains the Pope’s views on church teachings and doctrine in a particular area. While popes have been writing letters to the faithful since the early days of the church, the first pope to issue an encyclical (and call it such) was Benedict XIV, who released “On the Duty of Bishops” (*Ubi Primum*) in 1740. Since then, nearly 300 “circular letters” have been issued. Some of the more famous encyclicals include “*Quas Primas*,” Pius XI, 1925, which established the Feast of Christ the King, a reminder of the importance of Christ’s kingship on this earth. John Paul II’s “The Splendor of Truth” (*Veritatis Splendor*), 1993, which speaks about humanity’s ability to understand and know moral truth. Encyclicals of Pope Francis include: “On Faith” (*Lumen Fidei*), 2013; “On Care for our Common Home” (*Laudato si’*), 2015; “On Fraternity and Social Friendship” (*Fratelli tutti*), 2020.

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATIONS

Apostolic exhortations are papal reflections on a particular topic which are addressed to all the faithful. The form was first used by Pope Pius XII in 1939. Exhortations generally encourage a particular virtue or mission and are given on specific occasions. They are frequently written after a special synod. They are considered third in importance, after apostolic constitutions and encyclicals. Pope Benedict XVI wrote an apostolic exhortation, “On the Word of God” (*Verbum domini*) 2010, in which he encouraged, among other things, the practice of *Lectio Divina* (prayerful reading of scripture). On October 15, 2023, Pope Francis published an Apostolic Exhortation entitled “It is the Confidence” (*C’est la Confiance*) to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.

APOSTOLIC LETTERS

These letters are usually designed to clarify doctrinal matters in the Church but can also address other important topics. On October 19, 1997, John Paul II wrote an Apostolic letter “The Science of Divine Love” (*Divini Amoris Scientia*) proclaiming Thérèse of Lisieux a Doctor of the

Universal Church. On March 28, 2015, Pope Francis wrote an Apostolic Letter to the Superior General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites on the 500th anniversary of the birth of Saint Teresa of Jesus (Avila).

PAPAL BULLS

At times popes will issue an official declaration or announcement. These documents traditionally bear a round seal. The Latin word for a round seal or medallion is “*bull*.” The documents with this kind of seal became known as papal bulls. Papal bulls played an important role in the history of the Carmelite Order. On January 30, 1226, Pope Honorius III signed the Bull “*Ut vivendi normam*,” (“as a standard of living”) which approved St. Albert’s Rule and guaranteed the existence of the Carmelites (see *Journey to Carith*, The Birth of an Order, chpt. 1, pg. 45).

Again, on October 1247, the papal bull, “*Quae honorem*” (perhaps the most significant pontifical document in Carmelite history) was promulgated by Pope Innocent IV, slightly modifying the Rule of St. Albert. Under this document, foundations were not limited to desert places only, and the Carmelites were allowed to have their foundations in the cities as well. *Quae honorem* not only modified Albert’s Rule but also enrolled the Carmelite Order into the mendicant movement. The Carmelites, therefore, were officially constituted a mendicant order in 1247. Hence, *Quae honorem* permitted the Carmelite way of life to be more practicable in western society. This “Innocentian Rule” is to this day the official text of the Carmelite Rule throughout the Order.

MOTU PROPRIO

A *motu proprio* (Latin for “by his own hand”) is a letter issued by a pope himself and can be on any topic or governance issue. In 1999, Pope John Paul II issued a *motu proprio* proclaiming St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, St. Bridget of Sweden, and St. Catherine of Siena co-patronesses of Europe. In 2005, Pope Benedict XVI issued a *motu proprio* for the approval and publication of the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

In addition, papal addresses include homilies, audiences, discourses, and messages.

COMMON DECLARATIONS

A joint statement of the Holy Father and another religious leader concerning a common understanding of some teaching, for example, the document *Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*, also known as the “Abu Dhabi Declaration” or “Abu Dhabi Agreement,” is a joint statement signed by Pope Francis of the Catholic Church and Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, on February 4, 2019, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (included in the read-along materials below)

HOMILIES

These are discourses given by a pope at public or private Masses. On September 7, 2019, during his apostolic journey to Mozambique, Madagascar, and Mauritius, Pope Francis delivered a homily addressed to the nuns of the Discalced Carmelites.

GENERAL AUDIENCES

An opportunity for the faithful to hear and/or greet the Holy Father. Certain days of the week, ordinarily on Wednesday, when the Holy Father is in Rome, he will have a General Audience, either in the Paul VI Audience Hall or overlooking St. Peter's Square. An entry ticket, which is free, is required. The discourses for these Audiences generally develop a theme over time.

In 2011, during his weekly Audiences, Pope Benedict XVI gave a series of talks on the lives and works of saints including our three Carmelite doctors of the Church. When he focused his attention on St. John of the Cross, he said: "If a person bears great love in himself, this love gives him wings, as it were, and he can face all life's troubles more easily because he carries in himself this great light; this is faith: being loved by God and letting oneself be loved by God in Jesus Christ. Letting oneself be loved in this way is the light that helps us to bear our daily burden" (February 16, 2011, General Audience of Pope Benedict XVI).

PRIVATE AUDIENCES

The Pope holds private audiences with individuals or groups of pilgrims, at which he will usually speaks on a pertinent subject, such as on medical issues to groups of doctors, world affairs to diplomats, Church teaching and procedures to curia officials. The most famous and highly publicized Private Audience was that of St. Thérèse. During the papal audience of January 20, 1887, Thérèse broke protocol and directly asked Pope Leo XIII for the privilege to enter the nearby Discalced Carmelite Monastery at the age of fifteen. The rest is history.

DISCOURSES

Outside the usual Mass or audience settings, the Pope may give a less formal discourse to a group of people, for example: upon arriving or departing a place, before or after Mass, at a rosary, or in some other circumstance.

MESSAGES

Written or spoken messages, often conveying a personal greeting, to individuals or groups. These are usually briefer than a letter or normal talk.

With this knowledge of these different types of papal documents, we can have a better understanding of why the Holy Father may have released a document and develop a deeper appreciation for the Church's Magisterium.

Adapted from:

<https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/holysee/documents>

Note: Sessions two, three, and four are on the three encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI dealing with the theological virtues.

Session Two: God is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*)

The first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI

Required Reading: God is Love (*Deus caritas est*).

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html

Read-along material: *Three Encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI*, a summary by Dr. Robert Fastiggi, Professor of Systematic Theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary, (included below).

Dr. Fastiggi explains:

Pope Benedict XVI occupied the Chair of St. Peter from April 19, 2005, until his resignation on Feb. 28, 2013. During his papacy, he provided much wisdom in his general audiences, discourses, apostolic exhortations, letters, and homilies. His most significant papal writings, however, were his three encyclicals: God is Love (*Deus Caritas Est*); In Hope We are Saved (*Spes Salvi Facti Sumus*); Charity in Truth (*Caritas in Veritate*).

The following selected passages were taken from “God is Love” (*Deus Caritas Est*) for reading and reflection.

Note: While there are several points for discussion given here, participants are free to explore other passages in God is Love. (*Deus Caritas Est*).

- We have come to believe in God’s love: in these words, the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction (#1).
- Love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed “ecstasy,” not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God (#6).
- Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. John 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. John 19:34) (#7).
- Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent; they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not in itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church’s charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but

they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a “formation of the heart.” They need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirit to others. As a result, love of neighbor will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal. 5:6) (#31 a).

- We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programs. The Christian’s program – the program of the Good Samaritan, the program of Jesus – is “a heart which sees.” This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly (#31 b).
- A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. 1 John 4:8) and that God’s presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love. He knows—to return to the questions raised earlier—that disdain for love is disdain for God and man alike; it is an attempt to do without God. Consequently, the best defense of God and man consists precisely in love. It is the responsibility of the Church’s charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ (#31 c).

Side note: Pope Benedict’s thoughts on love are very much in line with the teaching of St. John of the Cross: “Now I occupy my soul/and all my energy in his service;/I no longer tend the herd,/nor have I any other work/now that my every act is love.” John goes on to explain: “that now all this work is directed to the practice of love of God, that is: All the ability of my soul and body (memory, intellect, and will...) move in love because of love. Everything I do I do with love, and everything I suffer I suffer with the delight of love. ... Hence whether her work is temporal or spiritual, this soul can always say, **‘Now that my every act is love’**” (*The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 28:8-9, emphasis added).

- Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor. 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing” (v. 3). This hymn must be the Magna Carta of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ (#34).
- This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world—the Cross—and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: “We are useless servants” (Lk. 17:10). We recognize that we are not acting on the basis

of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so (#35).

Side note: St. Teresa had a profound understanding of the virtue of humility. She observes that the characteristic of humility is closely connected to notion of truth and growth in self-knowledge. "... God is supreme Truth; and to be humble is to walk in truth, for it is a very deep truth that of ourselves we have nothing good but only misery and nothingness." (*Interior Castle* VI.10:7). To live in humility, according to Teresa, is to live in absolute truth; that is, to live in total confidence in God's mercy and guidance. It's no longer the self-absorbed "I" or my self-centered, egotistical will at work. As St. Paul proclaimed, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Consequently, one can carry on God's work without any superiority complex.

- Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbors, however extreme. In the example of St. Teresa of Calcutta, we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbor but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: "We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer" (#36).

Side note: St. Teresa points out in *The Interior Castle* that "the door of entry to this castle is prayer and reflection" (IC.I.1:7). There are many ways to pray; but Carmelite prayer is to be understood as being present to God, as relationship with God, rather than as an exercise to be performed. It is not just recitation and repetition.

Session Three: In Hope We Are Saved (*Spe salvi facti sumus*)

The second encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI

Required Reading: In Hope We Are Saved (*Spe salvi facti sumus*).

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html

The following selected passages from “In Hope We Are Saved” (*Spe salvi facti sumus*) are for reading and reflection.

Note: While there are ample points for discussion given here, participants are free to explore and discuss other passages in the main text of “In Hope We Are Saved.”

Hope is Performative – it can change our lives

- The Christian message was not only “informative” but “performative.” That means the Gospel is not merely a communication of things that can be known—it is one that makes things happen and is life-changing. The dark door of time, of the future, has been thrown open. The one who has hope lives differently; the one who hopes has been granted the gift of a new life (#2).
[Pope Benedict observes that Christians have a future]: It is not that they know the details of what awaits them, but they know in general terms that their life will not end in emptiness. Only when the future is certain as a positive reality does it become possible to live the present as well (#2).
- When *the Letter to the Hebrews* says that Christians here on earth do not have a permanent homeland, but seek one which lies in the future (cf. Heb. 11:13-16; Phil. 3:20), this does not mean for one moment that they live only for the future: present society is recognized by Christians as an exile; they belong to a new society which is the goal of their common pilgrimage and which is anticipated in the course of that pilgrimage (#4).
- In the eleventh chapter of *the Letter to the Hebrews* [11:1] we find a kind of definition of faith which closely links this virtue with hope... Faith draws the future into the present, so that it is no longer simply a “not yet.” The fact that this future exists changes the present; the present is touched by the future reality, and thus the things of the future spill over into those of the present and those of the present into those of the future (#7).

Eternal Life – what is it?

- [Pope Benedict observes that we have a “paradoxical attitude” towards life on earth]: On the one hand, we do not want to die; above all, those who love us do not want us to die. Yet on the other hand, neither do we want to continue living indefinitely, nor was the earth created with that in view. So, what do we really want? Our paradoxical attitude gives rise to a deeper question: what in fact is “life”? And what does “eternity” really mean? (#11).
- [What do we want? We want the eternal life:] In some way we want life itself, true life, untouched even by death... The term “eternal life” is intended to give a name to this

known “unknown.” ... To imagine ourselves outside the temporality that imprisons us and in some way to sense that eternity is not an unending succession of days in the calendar, but something more like the supreme moment of satisfaction, in which totality embraces us and we embrace totality... It would be like plunging into the ocean of infinite love, a moment in which time—the before and after—no longer exists. We can only attempt to grasp the idea that such a moment is life in the full sense, a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy (#12).

Prayer as a school of Hope

- A first essential setting for learning hope is prayer. When no one listens to me anymore, God still listens to me. When I can no longer talk to anyone or call upon anyone, I can always talk to God. When there is no longer anyone to help me deal with a need or expectation that goes beyond the human capacity for hope, He can help me. When I have been plunged into complete solitude...; if I pray, I am never totally alone (#32).
- When we pray properly we undergo a process of inner purification which opens us up to God and thus to our fellow human beings as well. In prayer we must learn what we can truly ask of God—what is worthy of God. We must learn that we cannot pray against others. We must learn that we cannot ask for the superficial and comfortable things that we desire at this moment—that meagre, misplaced hope that leads us away from God. We must learn to purify our desires and our hopes (#33).
- For prayer to develop this power of purification, it must on the one hand be something very personal, an encounter between my intimate self and God, the living God. On the other hand it must be constantly guided and enlightened by the great prayers of the Church and of the saints, by liturgical prayer... In this way we undergo those purifications by which we become open to God and are prepared for the service of our fellow human beings. We become capable of great hope, and thus we become ministers of hope for others. Hope in a Christian sense is always hope for others as well (#34).

Hope in Suffering

- We can try to limit suffering, to fight against it, but we cannot eliminate it. It is when we attempt to avoid suffering by withdrawing from anything that might involve hurt, when we try to spare ourselves the effort and pain of pursuing truth, love, and goodness, that we drift into a life of emptiness, in which there may be almost no pain, but the dark sensation of meaninglessness and abandonment is all the greater. It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but rather by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ, who suffered with infinite love (#37).
- We need witnesses—martyrs—who have given themselves totally, so as to show us the way—day after day. We need them if we are to prefer goodness to comfort, even in the little choices we face each day—knowing that this is how we live life to the full. Let us say it once again: the capacity to suffer for the sake of the truth is the measure of humanity. Yet this capacity to suffer depends on the type and extent of the hope that we bear within us and build upon. The saints were able to make the great journey of

human existence in the way that Christ had done before them, because they were brimming with great hope (#39).

Side note: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) is one such witness and martyr. She was killed at the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz. Her last words were addressed to her sister Rosa: “Come, we are going for our people.” Thus, she stood as a witness to hope in suffering.

Session Four: Charity in Truth (*Caritas in Veritate*)

The third encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI

Required Reading: Charity in Truth (*Caritas in veritate*)

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html

The following are selected passages from “Charity in Truth” (*Caritas in veritate*) for reading and reflection.

Note: While there are several points for discussion given here, participants are free to explore other passages in the main text.

Points for discussion:

- Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity. **Love — *caritas* — is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement** in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth (#1, emphasis added).

Side note: Pope Benedict’s observation that love is a “principal driving force” which compels people to act courageously for the sake of the Kingdom of God, is well explained in the teaching of St. Thérèse: “*I understood it was Love alone that made the Church’s members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood*” (*Story of a Soul*, Manuscript B, pg. 302, Study Edition).

- Charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine (CV #2). [Pope Benedict observes that just as Catholic social teaching addresses the common good and structures of society] charity can be recognized as an authentic expression of humanity and as an element of fundamental importance in human relations, including those of a public nature. *Only in truth does charity shine forth*, only in truth can charity be authentically lived. Truth is the light that gives meaning and value to charity. That light is both the light of reason and the light of faith, through which the intellect attains to the natural and supernatural truth of charity: it grasps its meaning as gift, acceptance, and communion (CV #3).
- Without truth, charity degenerates into sentimentality. Love becomes an empty shell, to be filled in an arbitrary way... It falls prey to contingent subjective emotions and opinions... In the truth, charity reflects the personal yet public dimension of faith in the God of the Bible, who is both Agápe and Lógos: Charity and Truth, Love and Word (CV #3).
- *Truth*, in fact, is *lógos* which creates *diá-logos*, and hence communication and communion. Truth, by enabling men and women to let go of their subjective opinions and impressions, allows them to move beyond cultural and historical limitations and to come together in the assessment of the value and substance of things. Truth opens and

unites our minds in the *lógos* of love: this is the Christian proclamation and testimony of charity (CV #4).

- In the present social and cultural context, where there is a widespread tendency to relativize truth [that is, what is true for one individual, or one social group, may not be true for another], practicing charity in truth helps people to understand that adhering to the values of Christianity is not merely useful but essential for building a good society and for true integral human development (CV #4).
- Every Christian is called to practice this charity, in a manner corresponding to his vocation... Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal *city of God*, which is the goal of the history of the human family (CV #7).
- Only in charity, illuminated by the light of reason and faith, is it possible to pursue development goals that possess a more humane and humanizing value (CV #9).
- *Authentic human development concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension.* Without the perspective of the eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing-space... It runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth; humanity thus loses the courage to be at the service of higher goods, at the service of the great and disinterested initiatives called forth by universal charity (CV #11).
- Only through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him or her and to mature in a love that "becomes concern and care for the other" (CV #11).
- In promoting development, the Christian faith does not rely on privilege or positions of power, nor even on the merits of Christians, ... but only on Christ, to whom every authentic vocation to integral human development must be directed (CV #18).

Side note: St. John of the Cross points to the interior motives and habitual imperfections of one who serves others: "...the soul usually has many unprofitable occupations by which she endeavors to serve her own appetite and that of others... She usually has desires to serve the appetites of others, which she does through ostentation, compliments, flattery, human respect, the effort to impress and please people by her actions, and many other useless things" (*The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 28:7).

- The scribes and Pharisees have succeeded Moses as teachers. However, their words are bold and their deeds are few. All their works are performed to be seen. They are fond of places of honor at banquets and the front seats in synagogues and marks of respect in public. Do not follow their example (see Mt. 23:1-7).
- [Pope Benedict acknowledges the benefits of modern technology in the daily lives of people. However, he cautiously reminds us of the limitations of such growth.] Charity does not exclude knowledge, but rather requires, promotes, and animates it from within. Knowledge is never purely the work of the intellect ... Human knowledge is insufficient, and the conclusions of science cannot indicate by themselves the path towards integral human development. There is always a need to push further ahead: this is what is required by charity in truth (CV #30).

- Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as a gift. Their ultimate source is not, and cannot be, mankind, but only God, who is himself Truth and Love. This principle is extremely important for society and for development, since neither can be a purely human product (CV #52).
- One aspect of the contemporary technological mindset is the tendency to consider the problems and emotions of the interior life from a purely psychological point of view, even to the point of neurological reductionism. In this way man's interiority is emptied of its meaning and gradually our awareness of the human soul's ontological depths, as probed by the saints, is lost (CV #76).
- It requires new eyes and a new heart, capable of *rising above a materialistic vision of human events*, capable of glimpsing in development the "beyond" that technology cannot give. By following this path, it is possible to pursue the integral human development that takes its direction from the driving force of charity in truth (CV #77).
- *Development needs Christians with their arms raised towards God* in prayer, Christians moved by the knowledge that truth-filled love, *caritas in veritate*, from which authentic development proceeds, is not produced by us, but given to us. For this reason, even in the most difficult and complex times, besides recognizing what is happening, we must above all else turn to God's love. Development requires attention to the spiritual life, a serious consideration of the experiences of trust in God, spiritual fellowship in Christ, reliance upon God's providence and mercy, love and forgiveness, self-denial, acceptance of others, justice and peace (CV #79).

May the Virgin Mary ... protect us and obtain for us, through her heavenly intercession, the strength, hope and joy necessary to continue to dedicate ourselves with generosity to the task of bringing about the "development of the whole man and of all men" (CV #79).

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Read-Along Materials

The Three Encyclicals of Pope Benedict XVI

by Dr. Robert Fastiggi. Dr. Robert Fastiggi is professor of systematic theology at Sacred Heart Major Seminary.

First Encyclical: *Deus Caritas Est*

Benedict XVI's first two encyclicals deal with the theological virtues of charity and hope. He was planning to write an encyclical on the theological virtue of faith, but he was not able to finish it because health issues led him to resign the papacy. He did, however, share his partial draft with his successor, Pope Francis, who published his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* (June 29, 2013), on faith. This encyclical incorporates many of the ideas that Benedict had drafted.

The title of Benedict's first encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (God Is Love), comes from John's first Epistle: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God and God in him." (1 John 4:16) The emphasis on love reflects the influences of St. Augustine and St. Bonaventure, but it also provides a response to the use of violence in the name of religion.

Part one of *Deus Caritas Est* (nos. 1-18) focuses on the nature of love, both divine and human. Part two deals with "the practice of love by the Church as a 'community of love.'" Benedict XVI examines the three main types of love recognized by the ancient Greeks: *eros* (desire), *philia* (love of friendship), and *agape* (charity or benevolence, which takes on a special importance in the New Testament). The Christian faith seeks to purify *eros* rather than eliminate it (no. 5). *Eros* must be purified from its ancient Greek association with frenzy, intoxication, and the divine madness manifested in various fertility cults (no. 4). *Eros* must also be purified of its contemporary reduction to pure "sex," which ultimately leads to the "debasement of the body" (no. 5).

Pope Benedict XVI points to Jesus Christ as the incarnate love of God, the Good Shepherd, who seeks his lost sheep with compassion (no. 12). As the incarnation of God's love, Jesus makes the invisible Father visible (no. 17; cf. Jn. 14:9). Moreover, he offers himself as an oblation on the Cross and, in the Eucharist, he gives "his very self, his body and blood as the new manna" (no. 13; cf. Jn. 6:31-33). The Eucharist provides a basis for a "sacramental mysticism" (no. 13) realized in a special way by the Church as Christ's body joined in the communion of the Eucharistic *agape*.

Pope Benedict emphasizes the Church's responsibility to proclaim the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*); to celebrate the sacraments (*leitourgia*); and practice charity (*diakonia*) (no. 25). In this regard, he notes that "the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State" (no. 29). Christian charity must be rooted in the faith and marked by humility (no. 35), prayer (nos. 36-37), hope and patience (nos. 36-39). Authentic Christian charity will recognize hope "even in the face of apparent failure," and it "accepts God's mystery and trusts him even in times of darkness" (no. 39).

Pope Benedict points to saintly figures — Martin of Tours, Francis of Assisi, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, and Teresa of Calcutta — as the "true bearers of light within history" (no. 40). Finally, he turns to Mary, the Mother of the Lord, as the "mirror of all holiness" (no. 41). He

ends his encyclical with a prayer to Mary asking her “to show us Jesus” and to “teach us to know and love him, so that we too can become capable of true love” (no. 42).

Second Encyclical: *Spe Salvi*

Pope Benedict XVI’s second encyclical, *Spe Salvi*, takes its title from the Latin of the book of Romans, “*Spe salvi facti sumus*” (In Hope We Are Saved) (Rom. 8:24). In the opening sections, the Holy Father shows the close connection between faith and hope. Citing Peter, — “always be ready to give an answer concerning the *logos*—the meaning and reason—of your hope” (1 Pet. 3:15)—he notes that hope, in many respects, is equivalent to faith (no. 2). Christian hope overcomes the despair of those who grieve because they have no hope (cf. 1 Thess. 4:13). Hope “shapes our life in a new way” (no. 10).

Spe Salvi not only discusses hope in a theological sense, it also provides some historical examples. One example is St. Josephine Bakhita (c. 1869-1947), who lived as a slave in Sudan and suffered multiple beatings. After her conversion to Christ and liberation from slavery, she learned that the supreme Lord of the universe, unlike her previous “masters,” loved and cared for her (cf. no. 3). Thus, the Christian faith gave her hope and meaning in life.

For Pope Benedict, hope must be nourished by prayer, which is a school of hope (nos. 32-34). Hope provides solace to those who suffer injustice in this life because only God can establish justice beyond this life (no. 43). Indeed, “a world without God is a world without hope” (cf. Eph. 2:12; no. 44).

Benedict discusses judgment after death with a particular focus on purgatory. For him, the fire of purgatory is a “blessed pain.” It is “the holy power of [God’s] love” that “sears through us like a flame,” and “the pain of love becomes our salvation and our joy” (no. 47).

The encyclical ends by pointing to Mary as the star of hope (nos. 49-50). She is like a star of hope in the dark and stormy voyage of life (no. 49), just as she was a source of faith and hope, “even in the darkness of Holy Saturday” (no. 50).

Third Encyclical: *Caritas in Veritate*

Pope Benedict XVI’s final encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* [CIV], is a major contribution to the social doctrine of the Church. It highlights four key points with regard to economics: (no. 1) the influence of original sin; (no. 2) the universal destination of the goods of the earth; (no. 3) the need for justice in economics; and (no. 4) the spirit of gift.

Original sin can incline man to believe that “he is the sole author of himself, his life and society” (CIV, 34). The “pernicious effects” of original sin can move man “to confuse happiness and salvation with immanent forms of material prosperity and social action” and to believe “that the economy must be autonomous” and “shielded from the ‘influences’ of a moral character” (CIV, 34).

The unity of the human race (cf. Acts 17:26) provides the basis for “*the universal destination of the goods of the earth*,” a principle found in Aquinas (*Summa theologiae* II-II, q. 66, a. 2, ad 1); and affirmed by Leo XIII (*Rerum novarum*, 19), Pius XI, (*Quadragesimo anno*, 58), Vatican II (*Gaudium et spes*, 69); Paul VI (*Populorum progressio*, 22); and John Paul II (*Centesimus annus*, 31). Because of the universal destination of the goods of the earth, we must transcend

economic projects “that are self-centered, protectionist, or at the service of private interests” (CIV, 42). The pursuit of *justice* in *economics* requires that the market economy should be subject not only to *commutative justice* — “which regulates the relations of giving and receiving between parties to a transaction” (CIV, 35; cf. CCC, 2411)—but also to “*distributive justice and social justice*” (CIV, 35).

The Christian approach to economics must go beyond contracts, regulations, and laws. It must involve “works redolent of the *spirit of gift*” (CIV, 37). The spirit of gift enables economic life to be authentically human and rooted in solidarity and justice. Charity is the hidden power behind solidarity, “which is first and foremost a sense of responsibility on the part of everyone with regard to everyone” (CIV, 38). Charity also moves us beyond “the binary model of market-plus-State” and reminds us that, “business activity has a human significance” (CIV, 41). The spirit of gift motivates “types of economic initiative which, without rejecting profit, aim at a higher goal than the mere logic of the exchange of equivalents, of profit as an end in itself” (CIV, 38).

The three encyclicals of Benedict XVI are grounded in the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. They provide inspiration and hope in the midst of violence and sin; and they direct us towards Christ, the Incarnate Love of God, who is the true hope of the world.

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Jun 01, 2023

Courtesy: <https://mosaic.shms.edu/the-three-encyclicals-of-pope-benedict-xvi>

The Holy See

Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to the United Arab Emirates

(3-5 FEBRUARY 2019)

A DOCUMENT ON HUMAN FRATERNITY
FOR WORLD PEACE AND LIVING TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION

Faith leads a believer to see in the other a brother or sister to be supported and loved. Through faith in God, who has created the universe, creatures and all human beings (equal on account of his mercy), believers are called to express this human fraternity by safeguarding creation and the entire universe and supporting all persons, especially the poorest and those most in need.

This transcendental value served as the starting point for several meetings characterized by a friendly and fraternal atmosphere where we shared the joys, sorrows and problems of our contemporary world. We did this by considering scientific and technical progress, therapeutic achievements, the digital era, the mass media and communications. We reflected also on the level of poverty, conflict and suffering of so many brothers and sisters in different parts of the world as a consequence of the arms race, social injustice, corruption, inequality, moral decline, terrorism, discrimination, extremism and many other causes.

From our fraternal and open discussions, and from the meeting that expressed profound hope in a bright future for all human beings, the idea of this Document on *Human Fraternity* was conceived. It is a text that has been given honest and serious thought so as to be a joint declaration of good and heartfelt aspirations. It is a document that invites all persons who have faith in God and faith in *human fraternity* to unite and work together so that it may serve as a guide for future generations to advance a culture of mutual respect in the awareness of the great divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters.

DOCUMENT

In the name of God who has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and who has called them to live together as brothers and sisters, to fill the earth and make known the values of goodness, love and peace;

In the name of innocent human life that God has forbidden to kill, affirming that whoever kills a person is like one who kills the whole of humanity, and that whoever saves a person is like one who saves the whole of humanity;

In the name of the poor, the destitute, the marginalized and those most in need whom God has commanded us to help as a duty required of all persons, especially the wealthy and of means;

In the name of orphans, widows, refugees and those exiled from their homes and their countries; in the name of all victims of wars, persecution and injustice; in the name of the weak,

those who live in fear, prisoners of war and those tortured in any part of the world, without distinction;

In the name of peoples who have lost their security, peace, and the possibility of living together, becoming victims of destruction, calamity and war;

In the name of *human fraternity* that embraces all human beings, unites them and renders them equal;

In the name of this *fraternity* torn apart by policies of extremism and division, by systems of unrestrained profit or by hateful ideological tendencies that manipulate the actions and the future of men and women;

In the name of freedom, that God has given to all human beings creating them free and distinguishing them by this gift;

In the name of justice and mercy, the foundations of prosperity and the cornerstone of faith;

In the name of all persons of good will present in every part of the world;

In the name of God and of everything stated thus far; Al-Azhar al-Sharif and the Muslims of the East and West, together with the Catholic Church and the Catholics of the East and West, declare the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard.

We, who believe in God and in the final meeting with Him and His judgment, on the basis of our religious and moral responsibility, and through this Document, call upon ourselves, upon the leaders of the world as well as the architects of international policy and world economy, to work strenuously to spread the culture of tolerance and of living together in peace; to intervene at the earliest opportunity to stop the shedding of innocent blood and bring an end to wars, conflicts, environmental decay and the moral and cultural decline that the world is presently experiencing.

We call upon intellectuals, philosophers, religious figures, artists, media professionals and men and women of culture in every part of the world, to rediscover the values of peace, justice, goodness, beauty, human fraternity and coexistence in order to confirm the importance of these values as anchors of salvation for all, and to promote them everywhere.

This Declaration, setting out from a profound consideration of our contemporary reality, valuing its successes and in solidarity with its suffering, disasters and calamities, believes firmly that among the most important causes of the crises of the modern world are a desensitized human conscience, a distancing from religious values and a prevailing individualism accompanied by materialistic philosophies that deify the human person and introduce worldly and material values in place of supreme and transcendental principles.

While recognizing the positive steps taken by our modern civilization in the fields of science, technology, medicine, industry and welfare, especially in developed countries, we wish to emphasize that, associated with such historic advancements, great and valued as they are, there exists both a moral deterioration that influences international action and a weakening of spiritual values and responsibility. All this contributes to a general feeling of frustration,

isolation and desperation leading many to fall either into a vortex of atheistic, agnostic or religious extremism, or into blind and fanatic extremism, which ultimately encourage forms of dependency and individual or collective self-destruction.

History shows that religious extremism, national extremism and also intolerance have produced in the world, be it in the East or West, what might be referred to as signs of a “third world war being fought piecemeal.” In several parts of the world and in many tragic circumstances these signs have begun to be painfully apparent, as in those situations where the precise number of victims, widows and orphans is unknown. We see, in addition, other regions preparing to become theatres of new conflicts, with outbreaks of tension and a build-up of arms and ammunition, and all this in a global context overshadowed by uncertainty, disillusionment, fear of the future, and controlled by narrow-minded economic interests.

We likewise affirm that major political crises, situations of injustice and lack of equitable distribution of natural resources – which only a rich minority benefit from, to the detriment of the majority of the peoples of the earth – have generated, and continue to generate, vast numbers of poor, infirm and deceased persons. This leads to catastrophic crises that various countries have fallen victim to despite their natural resources and the resourcefulness of young people which characterize these nations. In the face of such crises that result in the deaths of millions of children – wasted away from poverty and hunger – there is an unacceptable silence on the international level.

It is clear in this context how the family as the fundamental nucleus of society and humanity is essential in bringing children into the world, raising them, educating them, and providing them with solid moral formation and domestic security. To attack the institution of the family, to regard it with contempt, or to doubt its important role, is one of the most threatening evils of our era.

We affirm also the importance of awakening religious awareness and the need to revive this awareness in the hearts of new generations through sound education and an adherence to moral values and upright religious teachings. In this way we can confront tendencies that are individualistic, selfish, conflicting, and also address radicalism and blind extremism in all its forms and expressions.

The first and most important aim of religions is to believe in God, to honour Him and to invite all men and women to believe that this universe depends on a God who governs it. He is the Creator who has formed us with His divine wisdom and has granted us the gift of life to protect it. It is a gift that no one has the right to take away, threaten or manipulate to suit oneself. Indeed, everyone must safeguard this gift of life from its beginning up to its natural end. We therefore condemn all those practices that are a threat to life such as genocide, acts of terrorism, forced displacement, human organ trafficking, abortion and euthanasia. We likewise condemn the policies that promote these practices.

Moreover, we resolutely declare that religions must never incite war, hateful attitudes, hostility and extremism, nor must they incite violence or the shedding of blood. These tragic realities are the consequence of a deviation from religious teachings. They result from a political manipulation of religions and from interpretations made by religious groups who, in the course

of history, have taken advantage of the power of religious sentiment in the hearts of men and women in order to make them act in a way that has nothing to do with the truth of religion. This is done for the purpose of achieving objectives that are political, economic, worldly and short-sighted. We thus call upon all concerned to stop using religions to incite hatred, violence, extremism and blind fanaticism, and to refrain from using the name of God to justify acts of murder, exile, terrorism and oppression. We ask this on the basis of our common belief in God who did not create men and women to be killed or to fight one another, nor to be tortured or humiliated in their lives and circumstances. God, the Almighty, has no need to be defended by anyone and does not want His name to be used to terrorize people.

This Document, in accordance with previous International Documents that have emphasized the importance of the role of religions in the construction of world peace, upholds the following:

- The firm conviction that authentic teachings of religions invite us to remain rooted in the values of peace; to defend the values of mutual understanding, *human fraternity* and harmonious coexistence; to re-establish wisdom, justice and love; and to reawaken religious awareness among young people so that future generations may be protected from the realm of materialistic thinking and from dangerous policies of unbridled greed and indifference that are based on the law of force and not on the force of law;
- Freedom is a right of every person: each individual enjoys the freedom of belief, thought, expression and action. The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, sex, race and language are willed by God in His wisdom, through which He created human beings. This divine wisdom is the source from which the right to freedom of belief and the freedom to be different derives. Therefore, the fact that people are forced to adhere to a certain religion or culture must be rejected, as too the imposition of a cultural way of life that others do not accept;
- Justice based on mercy is the path to follow in order to achieve a dignified life to which every human being has a right;
- Dialogue, understanding and the widespread promotion of a culture of tolerance, acceptance of others and of living together peacefully would contribute significantly to reducing many economic, social, political and environmental problems that weigh so heavily on a large part of humanity;
- Dialogue among believers means coming together in the vast space of spiritual, human and shared social values and, from here, transmitting the highest moral virtues that religions aim for. It also means avoiding unproductive discussions;
- The protection of places of worship – synagogues, churches and mosques – is a duty guaranteed by religions, human values, laws and international agreements. Every attempt to attack places of worship or threaten them by violent assaults, bombings or destruction, is a deviation from the teachings of religions as well as a clear violation of international law;
- Terrorism is deplorable and threatens the security of people, be they in the East or the West, the North or the South, and disseminates panic, terror and pessimism, but this is not due to religion, even when terrorists instrumentalize it. It is due, rather, to an accumulation of

incorrect interpretations of religious texts and to policies linked to hunger, poverty, injustice, oppression and pride. This is why it is so necessary to stop supporting terrorist movements fuelled by financing, the provision of weapons and strategy, and by attempts to justify these movements even using the media. All these must be regarded as international crimes that threaten security and world peace. Such terrorism must be condemned in all its forms and expressions;

— The concept of *citizenship* is based on the equality of rights and duties, under which all enjoy justice. It is therefore crucial to establish in our societies the concept of *full citizenship* and reject the discriminatory use of the term *minorities* which engenders feelings of isolation and inferiority. Its misuse paves the way for hostility and discord; it undoes any successes and takes away the religious and civil rights of some citizens who are thus discriminated against;

— Good relations between East and West are indisputably necessary for both. They must not be neglected, so that each can be enriched by the other's culture through fruitful exchange and dialogue. The West can discover in the East remedies for those spiritual and religious maladies that are caused by a prevailing materialism. And the East can find in the West many elements that can help free it from weakness, division, conflict and scientific, technical and cultural decline. It is important to pay attention to religious, cultural and historical differences that are a vital component in shaping the character, culture and civilization of the East. It is likewise important to reinforce the bond of fundamental human rights in order to help ensure a dignified life for all the men and women of East and West, avoiding the politics of double standards;

— It is an essential requirement to recognize the right of women to education and employment, and to recognize their freedom to exercise their own political rights. Moreover, efforts must be made to free women from historical and social conditioning that runs contrary to the principles of their faith and dignity. It is also necessary to protect women from sexual exploitation and from being treated as merchandise or objects of pleasure or financial gain. Accordingly, an end must be brought to all those inhuman and vulgar practices that denigrate the dignity of women. Efforts must be made to modify those laws that prevent women from fully enjoying their rights;

— The protection of the fundamental rights of children to grow up in a family environment, to receive nutrition, education and support, are duties of the family and society. Such duties must be guaranteed and protected so that they are not overlooked or denied to any child in any part of the world. All those practices that violate the dignity and rights of children must be denounced. It is equally important to be vigilant against the dangers that they are exposed to, particularly in the digital world, and to consider as a crime the trafficking of their innocence and all violations of their youth;

— The protection of the rights of the elderly, the weak, the disabled, and the oppressed is a religious and social obligation that must be guaranteed and defended through strict legislation and the implementation of the relevant international agreements.

To this end, by mutual cooperation, the Catholic Church and Al-Azhar announce and pledge to convey this Document to authorities, influential leaders, persons of religion all over the world,

appropriate regional and international organizations, organizations within civil society, religious institutions and leading thinkers. They further pledge to make known the principles contained in this Declaration at all regional and international levels, while requesting that these principles be translated into policies, decisions, legislative texts, courses of study and materials to be circulated.

Al-Azhar and the Catholic Church ask that this Document become the object of research and reflection in all schools, universities and institutes of formation, thus helping to educate new generations to bring goodness and peace to others, and to be defenders everywhere of the rights of the oppressed and of the least of our brothers and sisters.

In conclusion, our aspiration is that:

this Declaration may constitute an invitation to reconciliation and fraternity among all believers, indeed among believers and non-believers, and among all people of good will;

this Declaration may be an appeal to every upright conscience that rejects deplorable violence and blind extremism; an appeal to those who cherish the values of tolerance and fraternity that are promoted and encouraged by religions;

this Declaration may be a witness to the greatness of faith in God that unites divided hearts and elevates the human soul;

this Declaration may be a sign of the closeness between East and West, between North and South, and between all who believe that God has created us to understand one another, cooperate with one another and live as brothers and sisters who love one another.

This is what we hope and seek to achieve with the aim of finding a universal peace that all can enjoy in this life.

Abu Dhabi, 4 February 2019

His Holiness
Pope Francis

The Grand Imam of Al-Azhar
Ahmad Al-Tayyeb

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FINITE AND ETERNAL BEING

Session One: Introduction and Biographical Sketch

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

- Participants are expected to read the material ahead of time and make notes of discussion points to share with the group.

Explanatory Note: For this study, reading a particular book is not required. Participants are instead asked to read and reflect on the following (selected) texts from books authored by St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D. (Edith Stein) in order to gain a better grasp of the central theme of *Finite and Eternal Being*.

Read-along materials are offered to further enrich the discussion points of each session.

Note: All quotes from Edith Stein's *Finite and Eternal Being*, are from the translation by Kurt F. Reinhardt, ICS publications, 2002. **It is not necessary to purchase this book; all pertinent quotes are included.**

The theme "*Finite and Eternal Being*" refers to an attempt to show the meaning of being – a way of living in the world to experience how the infinite God meets the finite mind. Putting it simply, the manner in which a being of finite existence (specifically the human "I") finds its ultimate ground and destiny in the eternal Divine Being, the Creator whose trinitarian nature is reflected throughout creation. "As finite being unfolds, an original and boundless ground is revealed which leads to Eternal Being" (*Finite and Eternal Being*, Editor's Preface, pg. xxiii). Consequently, her thoughts were centered on the *inquiry into the meaning of being*.

Under this topic, the participants will study and reflect on the thoughts of Edith Stein. She writes: "What has been handed down to us as the philosophy of the Christian centuries contains essential ingredients deriving from Christian ways of thinking. Moreover, the world itself had assumed a new meaning once it was seen with the eyes of faith: 'From then on, the world was manifestly given to us as the work of the *Word*, the Second Person of the Trinity, and everything in it — addressing itself to those *finite* spiritual beings who know themselves as spiritual beings—henceforth proclaims the *infinite spirit*'" (*Finite and Eternal Being*, chapter I, pg. 21).

Edith Stein observes that modern philosophy completely separated itself from revealed truth. "It no longer sees in revealed truth a standard of measurement with which to test its own findings... It not only considers it a duty to confine itself to the natural light of reason, but it is determined never to reach out beyond the world of natural experience. It wants to be an autonomous discipline in every respect. This ambition has caused modern philosophy to become, to a large extent, a **godless discipline**" (*Finite and Eternal Being*, pg. 5, emphasis added).

She goes on to write with conviction that "if philosophers then want to remain faithful to their goal...they will be compelled by their faith to extend their reflection beyond that which is naturally accessible to them. There are existences which are beyond the reach of natural experience and natural reason, but which have been made known to us by revelation, and they

confront the receptive human mind with entirely new tasks” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, chapter I, pg. 21). Hence, Edith Stein is very much in favor of assimilating “medieval thinking and vital present-day philosophy” for greater understanding of the meaning of “being” (Ibid. Preface, pg. xxviii).

Note: Edith Stein’s teaching that the philosophers should “extend their reflection beyond the reach of natural experience and natural reason” echoes the thoughts of St. John of the Cross: “The intellect gets ideas and concepts in two ways: Naturally and supernaturally. Natural knowledge includes everything the intellect can understand by way of the bodily senses or through reflection [including philosophical]. Supernatural knowledge comprises everything imparted to the intellect in a way transcending the intellect’s natural ability and capacity” (*Ascent*, 2.10:2). “The supernatural are represented passively [the initiative comes from God] without the work of the senses” (A.2.12:3).

She further states: “We shall earnestly strive to join our thinking to that of the ancient masters, and yet not only to these but also to those others who in our time have in their own manner and method resumed the identical inquiry. This latter procedure appears fully justified in view of the fact these modern thinkers have out of an **inner necessity** – not under the influence of any traditional intellectual ties – penetrated anew to the depths of the problem of being. They are living in closest proximity to its reality and can therefore help us to understand the original intentions and motives of the old masters” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, pgs. 11-12, emphasis added).

Edith Stein believes that this approach of incorporating the knowledge of ancient masters (St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. John of the Cross) to the different branch of philosophy is essential to the overall understanding of the being in the world. She writes in the third person: “This procedure seems especially appropriate in the case of the author of this book [*Finite and Eternal Being*]: Her philosophic home is the school of Edmund Husserl and her philosophic mother tongue is the language of the phenomenological thinkers. She therefore uses phenomenology as a starting point to find her way into the majestic temple of scholastic thought. She believes that her awareness of this ultimate goal suffices to permit her to choose it as her guide” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, pg. 12).

Note: Phenomenology is the study of “phenomena” such as the appearances of things, as they appear in our experience, or the ways in which we experience things from the subjective or first-person point of view.

“The reader untrained in scholasticism and phenomenology should not be surprised if some sections of this work [*Finite and Eternal Being*] seem dense and hard to follow. The effort required to follow Stein’s argument is regularly repaid by passages of great clarity and beauty... Edith Stein invites us all, scholars and ordinary readers alike, to follow in her footsteps as she attempts ‘an ascent to the meaning of being’” (Foreword to the ICS Publications, 2002).

Biographical sketch

The youngest of eleven children, Edith Stein was born in Breslau, Germany (today Wroclaw, Poland), on October 12, 1891 (the Jewish Day of Atonement). She was only two years old when her father died of ill health. Her mother, a devout Jew, immediately took control of the household and the family lumber business.

Edith Stein abandoned her Jewish faith as a teenager but continued her restless intellectual search. After her graduation from high school, she entered the University of Breslau, where she showed an interest in psychology. Subsequently however, she was drawn to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology and transferred to the University of Gottingen (1913-15) to study under the "Master" himself.

World War I (1914-1918) interrupted her studies. Wanting to help the dying and wounded, she volunteered at a Red Cross hospital for a few months in 1915. The following year, she completed her PhD summa cum laude at the University of Freiburg. She later became an assistant of Edmund Husserl, writing her doctoral dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy*. "Known as a brilliant philosopher in her own right, she was one of the most important contributors to the early stages of phenomenology, the influential philosophical movement that Husserl integrated" (Foreword to the ICS Publications 2002 edition, pg. xiii).

"Yet despite her remarkable accomplishments, she found that attaining a university professorship was not easy for women in pre-war Germany, no matter how brilliant the candidate. Moreover, with her Jewish ancestry, Edith Stein's academic prospects further dimmed as the Nazis rose to power" (Ibid. pg. xiii).

"In the meantime, however, she had undergone a profound conversion experience in 1921 upon reading the *Life* of St. Teresa of Avila, and the following year she was baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church" (Ibid. pg. xiii). She took a teaching position at St. Magdalena, a girl's high school run by Dominican sisters of Speyer, Germany (1923-31). During these years, she also translated writings of Thomas Aquinas and John Henry Newman and lectured widely on the education and vocation of women.

Her teaching position was terminated in 1933 due to Nazi legislation prohibiting Jews from holding public positions. In the same year, she found herself free to pursue a calling she had already felt for many years, entering the community of the Discalced Carmelite nuns in Cologne, Germany.

"But the darkening political situation outside the convent walls did not leave her untouched. On 31 December 1938, for safety reasons, she was transferred out of Germany to the nearby Carmel of Echt in the Netherlands, where she was joined by her sister, Rosa. But the imagined safety of this new assignment proved illusory when the Germans invaded and occupied Holland. In 1942, in retaliation for a letter of the Dutch bishops denouncing their anti-Semitic policies, the Nazi authorities rounded up Catholics in Holland of Jewish descent, including Edith and her sister. The prisoners were eventually taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where Edith and Rosa died on 9 August 1942, two among the millions of victims of Hitler's "final solution" (Foreword to the ICS Publications 2002 edition, pg. xiv).

Forty-five years later, on May 1, 1987, Edith Stein, whose religious name was Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was beatified by Pope John Paul II and was canonized on October 11, 1998. On October 1, 1999, she was named co-patroness of Europe, along with St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Catherine of Siena. In the following excerpt from his decree, he explains the significance of his proclamation.

“Today we look upon Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and, in her witness as an innocent victim, we recognize an imitation of the Sacrificial Lamb and a protest against every violation of the fundamental rights of the person. We also recognize in it the pledge of a renewed encounter between Jews and Christians which, following the desire expressed by the Second Vatican Council, is now entering upon a time of promise marked by openness on both sides. Today’s proclamation of Edith Stein as a Co-Patroness of Europe is intended to raise on this Continent a banner of respect, tolerance and acceptance which invites all men and women to understand and appreciate each other, transcending their ethnic, cultural and religious differences in order to form a truly fraternal society” (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio, October 1, 1999).

In February 2003, the Vatican released the letter written by Edith Stein to Pope Pius XI in April 1933. See below.

American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly dedicated its entire issue of Winter 2008 to St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross honoring her contribution to Philosophy and Theology. ICS Publications dedicated its Carmelite Studies 12 to St. Teresa Benedicta and honoring her with insightful and thought-provoking articles. The book – *Listening to Edith Stein: Wisdom for a New Century*, won the first prize CPA Award (Catholic Press Award) in 2019.

Soon after her canonization in 1998, speculation began that she might be proclaimed a Doctor of the Church. Her writings could very well warm the readers to that possibility (See *Edith Stein, Essential Writings*, John Sullivan, O.C.D., Preface, pg. 11).

Note: The Superior General of the Discalced Carmelite Order presented a petition to Pope Francis on April 18, 2024, requesting the declaration of St. Teresa Benedicta (Edith Stein) as a Doctor of the Church.

Text of Edith Stein’s 1933 Letter to Pope Pius XI

Courtesy: Catholicculture.org

Holy Father!

As a child of the Jewish people who, by the grace of God, for the past eleven years has also been a child of the Catholic Church, I dare to speak to the Father of Christendom about that which oppresses millions of Germans. For weeks we have seen deeds perpetrated in Germany, which mock any sense of justice and humanity, not to mention love of neighbor. For years the leaders of National Socialism have been preaching hatred of the Jews. Now that they have seized the power of government and armed their followers, among them proven criminal elements, this seed of hatred has germinated. The government has only recently admitted that excesses have occurred. To what extent, we cannot tell, because public opinion is being gagged.

However, judging by what I have learned from personal relations, it is in no way a matter of singular exceptional cases. Under pressure from reactions abroad, the government has turned to “milder” methods. It has issued the watchword “no Jew shall have even one hair on his head harmed.” But through boycott measures — by robbing people of their livelihood, civic honor and fatherland — it drives many to desperation; within the last week, through private reports I was informed of five cases of suicide as a consequence of these hostilities. I am convinced that this is a general condition, which will claim many more victims. One may regret that these unhappy people do not have greater inner strength to bear their misfortune. But the responsibility must fall, after all, on those who brought them to this point and it also falls on those who keep silent in the face of such happenings.

Everything that happened and continues to happen on a daily basis originates with a government that calls itself “Christian.” For weeks not only Jews but also thousands of faithful Catholics in Germany, and, I believe, all over the world, have been waiting and hoping for the Church of Christ to raise its voice to put a stop to this abuse of Christ’s name. Is not this idolization of race and governmental power, which is being pounded into the public consciousness by the radio [an] open heresy? Isn’t the effort to destroy Jewish blood an abuse of the holiest humanity of our Savior, of the most blessed Virgin and the apostles? Is not all this diametrically opposed to the conduct of our Lord and Savior, who, even on the cross, still prayed for his persecutors? And isn’t this a black mark on the record of this Holy Year which was intended to be a year of peace and reconciliation?

We all, who are faithful children of the Church and who see the conditions in Germany with open eyes, fear the worst for the prestige of the Church, if the silence continues any longer. We are convinced that this silence will not be able in the long run to purchase peace with the present German government. For the time being, the fight against Catholicism will be conducted quietly and less brutally than against Jewry, but no less systematically. It won’t take long before no Catholic will be able to hold office in Germany unless he dedicates himself unconditionally to the new course of action.

At the feet of Your Holiness, requesting your apostolic blessing,

Dr. Edith Stein, Instructor at the German Institute for Scientific Pedagogy, Munster in Westphalia, Collegium Marianum

Session Two: Conversion: “This is the Truth”

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Explanatory Note: St. Teresa Benedicta is known to the world as a brilliant philosopher in her own right and she was one of the most important contributors to the early stages of the phenomenological movement in Germany. Her literary legacy includes phenomenological studies, letters, autobiography, lectures, essays, and translations. After her baptism, her focus was on theological and Carmelite spirituality. For this study, the participants will read and reflect on the following selected passages from the writings of St. Teresa Benedicta, which include different themes of interest. The selections highlight her perception of God in her daily encounters, her search for truth and life of prayer, spiritual growth, and transformation. At the end of the study, participants can again choose a recommended book for further understanding and incorporating the saint’s manner of living in one’s daily life.

Points for reflection/discussion:

Note: The selected passages include St. Teresa Benedicta’s reflections on some specific events in her daily life that led to her eventual conversion to the Catholic faith:

- Edith writes about losing her childhood faith at the age of fifteen and giving up prayer: “Deliberately and consciously, I gave up praying here. I took no thought of my future although I continued to live with the conviction that I was destined for something great” (*Life in a Jewish Family*, 1891-1916, chapter IV. pg. 148, 1986, 2016, ed.).
- However, it was in Göttingen University (1913-14) Edith began to consider religious questions again. In her autobiography, Edith writes about Max Scheler, a German philosopher known for his work in phenomenology. He was invited to give lectures at the University of Göttingen when Edith was a student: “His influence in those years affected me, as it did many others far beyond the sphere of philosophy. I do not know in which year Scheler returned to the Catholic Church. It could not have been long before I met him. In any case, he was quite full of Catholic ideas at the time and employed all the brilliance of his spirit and his eloquence to plead with them. This was my first encounter with this hitherto totally unknown world. It did not lead me as yet to the Faith. But it did open for me a region of “phenomena” which I could then no longer bypass blindly. With good reason we were repeatedly enjoined to observe all things without prejudice, to discard all possible “blindness.” The barriers of rationalist prejudices with which I had unwittingly grown up fell, and the world of faith unfolded before me... I was content to accept without resistance the stimuli coming from my surroundings, and so, almost without noticing it, became gradually transformed” (*Life in a Jewish Family*, 1891-1916, chapter VII, pgs. 260-261, 1986, 2016, ed.).
- Many of her friends were Protestants and occasionally she accompanied them to the Protestant church services. But she was not attracted to the politically inspired sermons by the pastors. She writes: “In Göttingen I had learned to respect questions of faith and persons who had faith. With some of my women friends, I even went to one of the Protestant churches at times. (The sermons there, habitually mixing politics with religion, naturally could not lead me to a knowledge of pure faith; and they often turned

me off.) I had not yet found a way back to God” (*Life in a Jewish Family*, chapter VII, 1891-1916. pg. 316. 1986, 2016 ed.).

- Another simple incident in July of 1916 made a deep impression on Edith when she visited a Catholic Cathedral with her friend Pauline Reinach (Adolf Reinach’s sister). She recounts the incident in her *Life*: “We stopped in at the cathedral for a few minutes; and, while we looked around in respectful silence, a woman carrying a market basket came in and knelt down in one of the pews to pray briefly. This was something entirely new to me. To the synagogues or to the Protestant churches which I had visited, one went only for services. But here was someone interrupting her everyday shopping errands to come into this church, although no other person was in it, as though she were here for an **intimate conversation**. I could never forget that” (*Life in a Jewish Family*, 1891-1916, chapter X, pg. 401. 1986, 2016, ed., emphasis added).
- By 1917, Edith’s avid interest in the questions about God had grown stronger. This became especially intense when she was faced with the sudden death of her beloved professor, Adolf Reinach. She was deeply affected by Adolf’s passing; however, his wife Anna’s reaction to his death would have a profound effect on Edith’s outlook on spirituality. When Edith was invited by Anna to arrange the philosophical papers left behind by her late husband, she was hesitant to face a grieving widow but acquiesced. Upon entering Anna’s house, however, Edith saw a calm and well composed woman, accepting her deep sorrow as part of Christ’s cross for her to bear. Edith saw that, in her grief, the widow had turned to and solely relied upon the crucified Jesus for healing and transformation.
- This incident had a significant impact on Edith. She reportedly shared her experience with a German Jesuit priest, Fr. Johannes Hirschmann (1908-1981) shortly before her death. The priest was living in Holland near Echt during World War II. “This was my first encounter with the Cross and the divine strength that it inspires in those who bear it. For the first time I saw before my very eyes the Church, born of Christ’s redemptive suffering, victorious over the sting of death. It was the moment in which my unbelief was shattered, Judaism paled, and Christ radiated before me: Christ in the mystery of the Cross” (*The Life of a Philosopher and Carmelite*, Teresia Renata Posselt, O.C.D., chapter 5, pgs. 59-60).
- In her letter to her sister Erna, written in late 1918, Edith reinforces her experience of the fleeting nature of life that she encountered at the widow’s house and accepting the Cross without despair: “... One should accept with gratitude all the beautiful things which exist. However, one should not despair if things go other than one had expected. When that happens, one ought to think of what one still has, and also, that one is only here on a visit as it were, that everything which depresses one so terribly now will not be all that important at the end; or it will have a totally different meaning than we now recognize” (*Edith Stein, Philosopher and Mystic*, Josephine Koepfel, O.C.D., chapter 9, pg. 63).
- Over the next few years, Edith was seriously thinking about joining a church. She reached an apex of her search for truth when reading our Holy Mother St. Teresa’s *Life*. Her mistress of novices and prioress of the Cologne Carmel, Teresia Renata Posselt, published Edith Stein’s report on her conversion: “In the summer of 1921, Edith Stein

had been a guest in the home of her friend Hedwig Conrad-Martius on an orchard in Bergzabern. One evening, while Edith was alone in the house, she happened upon the autobiographical *Life* of St. Teresa of Avila on the bookshelf. ‘I began to read,’ she states, ‘was immediately caught up and did not stop until the end. When I closed the book, I said to myself: *This is the truth...*’ Teresa’s autobiographical confessions turned out to be decisive for Edith Stein’s faith. Her conversion was the fruit of her reading” (*Never Forget*, edited by Waltraud Herbstrith, O.C.D., pg. 64).

- Edith’s conversion story never fails to amaze readers. Contrary to popular opinion, Edith was not an atheist. Rather, she lived a productive life on her own terms, always manifesting in her an insatiable desire for truth. Later, looking back on her life, she wrote: “My longing for truth was a single prayer.” “God is truth. All who seek truth seek God, whether this is clear to them or not” (Letter to a Benedictine nun, letter #259, *Self-Portrait in Letters, 1916-1942*).
- Later, when living in the Carmelite monastery, she writes: “There is indeed only *one* Truth, but it unfolds itself to our human perspective in a manifold of individual truths which must be conquered step by step. If we succeed in penetrating to a certain depth in one particular direction, a larger horizon will be opened up, and with this enlarged vista a new depth will reveal itself at the point of departure” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, Introduction, pg. 1).

Side note: Edith’s understanding of “individual truth that reveals itself at the point of departure” parallels John’s step by step description of a soul’s journey to union. John uses the term “**the point of departure**” for purification of sense faculties of all that is not God. He further explains that the soul might leave the “point of departure” for the **means**, which is “faith” “hope” and “love” – a way to emptying and purifying the spiritual faculties (intellect, memory and will) of all that is not God (see A.1.2:1). The final phase of this journey pertains to **the point of arrival**, namely God (see A.1.2:1). As Edith notes, “a larger horizon will be opened up” and “a new depth will be revealed” to the soul at each purifying moment of its journey.

- His holiness Pope John Paul II observed in his homily that the importance of seeking the truth is so characteristic of Edith Stein: “Dear brothers and sisters! The love of Christ was the fire that inflamed the life of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Long before she realized it, she was caught by this fire. At the beginning she devoted herself to freedom. For a long time, Edith Stein was a seeker. Her mind never tired of searching and her heart always yearned for hope. She traveled the arduous path of philosophy with passionate enthusiasm. Eventually she was rewarded: she seized the truth. Or better: she was seized by it. Then she discovered that truth had a name: Jesus Christ. From that moment on, the incarnate Word was her One and All. Looking back as a Carmelite on this period of her life, she wrote to a Benedictine nun: ‘Whoever seeks the truth is seeking God, whether consciously or unconsciously’” (Homily of John Paul for the canonization of Edith Stein. Sunday, 11 October 1998, Art. 5. Included in read-along materials below).

Session Three: Secure in the Hands of God – The Way of Faith

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Points for reflection/discussion

- An attitude of trust in God's providence and resting securely in the hands of God is one of the recurring themes in Edith's writings. She observes that there is a feeling of security in our fleeting being. When speaking about security, Edith is not referring to a false sense of security that comes from an inordinate desire for the accumulation of wealth and fame. Rather, she speaks about the feeling of security "that is lifted up and carried by a strong arm." "The undeniable fact that my being is limited in its transience from moment to moment and thus exposed to the possibility of nothingness is counter balanced by the equally undeniable fact that despite this transience, I *am*, that from moment to moment I am *sustained in my being*, and that in my fleeting being I share in enduring being. In the knowledge that being holds me, I rest securely. This security, however, is not the self-assurance of one who under her own power stands on firm ground, but rather the sweet and blissful security of a child that is lifted up and carried by a strong arm. And, objectively speaking, this kind of security is not less rational. For if a child were living in the constant fear that its mother might let it fall, we should hardly call this a 'rational' attitude" (*Finite and Eternal Being*, chapter II, pg. 58).

Note: According to Edith, the "rational attitude" is the quality of being guided by God-given reasons rather than by emotion.

Faith:

- Edith emphasizes that our temporal being reveals the presence of an eternal being within. She explains that one way in which a person may come to recognize *eternal being* is the "*way of faith*" (see *ibid.*, pg. 58). "One is the *way of faith* when God reveals himself as *he who is*, as the *creator* and *sustainer*, and when our redeemer says, 'He who believes in the Son possesses eternal life' (John 3:36). Then I have in these pronouncements clear answers to the riddle of my own being. And when he tells me through the mouth of the prophet that he stands more faithfully at my side than my father and my mother, yea that he is love itself, then I begin to understand how 'rational' is my trust in the arm that carries me and how foolish is all my fear of falling prey to nothingness – unless I tear myself loose from this sheltering hold" (*ibid.*, pgs. 58-59).
- Edith goes on to explain: "The way of faith, however, is not the way of philosophic knowledge. It is rather the answer of another world to a question which philosophy poses" (*ibid.*, pg. 59). She repeats the fact that "the way of faith gives us more than the way of philosophic knowledge. Faith reveals to us the God of personal nearness, the loving and merciful God, and therewith we are given a certitude which no natural knowledge can impart" (*ibid.*, pg. 60).

Side note: "The intellect knows only in the natural way, that is, by means of the senses" (A.2.3:2). "Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of the soul... it brings us to

believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding” (A.2.3:1).

“The knowledge that faith provides is **intuitive**” (*Ascent: Reflections*, pg. 108, emphasis added).

St. Thérèse spoke of being guided by the light of faith as a *felt sense*. “He teaches without noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I feel that He is within me at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what to say and do” (*Story of a Soul*, 2005 Study Edition, pg. 276, chpt. 8).

Resting in God as opposed to Sensate (perceived by the senses) and Mental Lifepower (willpower):

- Edith further explains the theme – “secure in the arms of God” in her essay on *Sensate and Mental Lifepower*. She explains to the reader that handling stress and anxiety goes beyond one’s “mental lifepower” (willpower) or perception by the senses: “There is a state of resting in God, of complete relaxation of mental activity, in which you make no plans at all, reach no decision, much less take action, but rather leave everything that’s future to the divine will... This state might have befallen me after an experience that exceeded my power, and that has completely consumed my mental lifepower and deprived me of all activeness. Compared to the cessation of activeness from the lack of lifepower [total exhaustion], resting in God is something completely **new and unique**. The former was dead silence. Now its place is taken by the feeling of being safe, of being exempted from all anxiety and responsibility and duty to act. And as I surrender myself to this feeling, new life begins to fill me up, little by little, and impel me – without any voluntary exertion toward new activation. This reviving infusion appears as an emanation of a functionality and a power which is not my emanation, and which becomes operative within me without my asking for it. The sole prerequisite for such a mental rebirth seems to be a certain receptivity [surrender], like the receptivity supporting the structure of the person, a structure exempted from the sensate mechanism [the senses]” (*Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, chapter V, pgs. 84-85, emphasis added).
- Edith’s letter to Mother Petra Bruning, OSU, (an Ursuline Sister), April 16, 1939 (Discalced Carmelite Monastery at Echt, Holland), re-affirms her thoughts on trust and confidence in God. “My basic attitude since I’ve been here is one of gratitude – grateful that I may be here and that the house is as it is. At the same time, I always have a lively awareness that we do not have a lasting city here. I have no other desire than that God’s will be done in me and through me. It is up to Him how long He leaves me here and what is to come then. ‘My days are in your hands’ (Ps. 31:15). There everything is well cared for. I need not worry about anything. But much prayer is necessary in order to remain faithful in all situations. Especially [must we pray] for those who have heavier burdens to carry than I have and who are not rooted in the Eternal. Therefore, I am sincerely grateful to all who help” (*Self-Portrait in Letters*, letter #300, pg. 309).

Side note: “How are we to know what God’s will is? ... This union with God’s will does not demand extraordinary exploits but the daily fulfillment of one’s responsibilities” (*The Way of Perfection*, Study Edition, pg. 368).

Session Four: Interiority of the Soul – Discalced Carmelites' Charism of Prayer

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Explanatory Note: Once, St. Teresa Benedicta was asked about her religious name-patron by an Ursuline nun, Mother Petra Burning. She writes: “You asked about my name-patron. Of course it is holy Father [Saint] Benedict. He adopted me and gave me the rights of home in his Order, even though I was not even an Oblate since **I always had the Mount of Carmel before my eyes**” (*Self-portrait in Letters*, letter #178, pg. 182, emphasis added). Despite her close association with the Benedictines, Dominicans, and Ursulines, her meditative heart and soul were always turned toward Mount Carmel. The Carmelite emphasis on a life dedicated to prayer and interior silence drew her to the Discalced Carmelite Order and the greater part of her writings reflect the characteristics of prayer in the Carmelite tradition. The following texts are chosen to read and reflect upon the interiority of the soul and the Carmelite charism of prayer.

- “If we are to gain clear insight into the peculiar nature of the human soul, it is of the greatest importance that we first acquire an adequate understanding of the interiority of the soul... *In its innermost being the essence of the soul is completely overt to itself.* When the ego lives in this interiority, i.e., in the ground of its being where it is truly at home and in its own, it experiences in some measure the meaning of its being and feels the collected power that precedes the division into individual powers or faculties. And when the ego’s life issues from this interiority, it lives a *full* life and attains to the height of its being” (*Finite and Eternal Being*, chapter VII, pgs. 436-438).
- “The inner transformation of that which penetrates into the depth of the soul does not take place instantaneously but requires a shorter or longer period of time... Everything that penetrates into the interiority of the soul is an appeal or a call to the *person*, an appeal to the person’s *intellect*, i.e., to that power which ‘understands’ what is happening; an appeal also to *reflection*, i.e., to that power which searches for the *meaning* of that which approaches the soul; and an appeal to *freedom*, since even the intellectual search for meaning is already free activity” (Ibid., pgs. 438-439).
- “The personal I is most truly at home in the innermost being of the soul. *When* the I lives its life in this interiority, it is then capable of freely disposing of and of freely engaging the soul’s collected power. In this interiority the I is also closest to the meaning of every event, most open to the demands with which it is confronted, and in the best possible position to evaluate the significance and the import of these demands” (Ibid., pg. 439). “Few human beings, however, live such ‘collected’ lives...But it is nevertheless true that only those who live collectedly in the depth of their personalities are able to see even the ‘little things’ in their larger context, and – measured by ultimate criteria – these persons are the only ones capable of evaluating these little things correctly and of ordering and regulating their attitudes and actions correspondingly. Their souls are on the way to ultimate formation and perfection of their being. On the other hand, in those who only occasionally enter into the depth of the soul and who habitually abide on the surface, the depth remains inarticulate and cannot mold the outer layers with its forming power” (Ibid., pgs. 439-440).

- “From the innermost center of the soul there also issues that *radiation* of the personal essence or nature which is an involuntary spiritual emanation of the personal self. This radiation, which issues from the person and captivates others, is the stronger the more collectedly a human being lives in the innermost center of the soul. And the more this is the case, the more strongly marked are all the free spiritual manifestations of a person’s individuality, since this individuality is ultimately domiciled in the soul’s interiority. And, lastly, the more a human being is at home in the interiority of its soul, the stronger is the body impregnated with this inner life and ‘spiritualized’ by it. Here, then, is the true center of the being of body, soul, and spirit” (Ibid., 441).
- “For those who belong to the church, outer membership can also temporally precede interior, in fact can be materially significant for it (as when someone without faith is baptized and then comes to faith through the public life in the church). But it finally comes down to the interior life; **formation moves from the inner to the outer**. The deeper the soul is bound to God, more completely surrendered to grace, the stronger will be its influence on the form of the church...Because hidden souls do not live in isolation, but are a part of the living nexus and have a position in a great divine order, we speak of an invisible church. Their impact and affinity can remain hidden from themselves and others for their entire earthly lives. But it is also possible for some of this to become visible in the external world. This is how it was with people and events intertwined in the mystery of the Incarnation. Mary and Joseph, Zechariah and Elizabeth, the shepherds and the kings, Simeon and Anna – all of these had behind them a solitary life with God and were prepared for their special tasks before they found themselves together in those awesome encounters and events and, in retrospect, could understand how paths left behind led to this climax. Their astounded adoration in the presence of these great deeds of God is expressed in the songs of praise that have come down to us” (*The Hidden Life, Essays, Meditations, Spiritual Texts*. The Hidden Life and Epiphany, pg. 110, emphasis added).
- “Perhaps it is revealed in an epiphany, the work of God becoming visible in our external behavior and activity noticed by those around us. But perhaps it also bears fruit that, though observed, conceals from all eyes the mysterious source from which its vital juices pour” (Ibid., pg. 111).
“No human eye can see what God does in the soul during hours of inner prayer. It is grace upon grace. And all of life’s other hours are our thanks for them” (Ibid., pg. 6).

Summary:

As previously noted in our formation studies, the Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer has an apostolic dimension that overflows with missionary fervor based on a fervent interior life. Carmel has never separated the apostolate from the contemplative life of prayer. Following the traditions and the teachings of the saints and religious of the Discalced Carmelite Order, St. Teresa Benedicta observes in her writings that “hidden souls do not live in isolation” and the “formation [of a Christian] moves from the inner to the outer.” It’s possible for the fruits of prayer to become visible in the external world without one’s knowing.

St. Teresa Benedicta writes: “Immediately before, and for a good while after my conversion, I was of the opinion that to lead a religious life meant one had to give up all that was secular and to live totally immersed in thoughts of the Divine. But gradually I realized that something else is asked of us in this world and that, even in the contemplative life, one may not sever the connection with the world. I even believe that the deeper one is drawn into God, the more one must ‘go out of oneself,’ that is, one must go out to the world in order to carry the divine life into it” (*Self-Portrait in Letters*, letter #45, pg. 54).

Consequently, St. Teresa Benedicta strongly felt that the authentic spiritual life is for *every* Christian. “Of course, religion is not something to be relegated to a quiet corner or for a few festive hours, but rather, as you yourself perceive, it must be the root and basis of all life; and that, not merely for a few chosen ones, but for every true Christian” (*Self-Portrait In Letters*, letter #45, pg. 54).

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross lived her life as a true witness to the Carmelite charism of prayer. Likewise, “the vocation to the Secular Order is truly ecclesial. Prayer and apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable. The observation of St. Teresa that the purpose of prayer is ‘the birth of good works’ reminds the Secular Order that graces received ought to have an effect on those who receive them. Individually or as a community and, above all as members of the Church, apostolic activity is the fruit of prayer” (OCDS Const., Art. 26).

Recommended Books for Study and Reflection

Note: When choosing a book, it is recommended that participants begin with books and articles written by St. Teresa Benedicta herself, rather than books written by others about the saint. In follow up study, however, books authored by scholars of Edith Stein and other writers might further enhance one's understanding of her quest for truth and Carmelite spirituality in greater depth and clarity.

Books authored by Edith Stein

***The Hidden Life – The Collected Works of Edith Stein, Vol. IV.* ICS.**

This is an inspiring collection of essays written by Edith Stein. They were composed during her final years in the Discalced Carmelite community at Echt, often at the request of her superiors. Here she shares her reflections on the history of Carmel, Carmelite charism of prayer, liturgy, the mystery of Christian vocation and the meaning of the Cross in our lives. In addition, the collected works include her poems and her *Three Dialogues*. It's a very readable book for those who like to glimpse into the hidden inner life of this most remarkable Carmelite and a saint.

***Life in a Jewish Family – 1891-1916, An Autobiography.* Edith Stein, Collected Works, Vol. I. ICS.**

This is Edith's autobiographical work depicting herself as a child, young adult and a student studying under the renowned professor and founder of Phenomenology, Edmund Husserl. In her lifelong search for truth, Edith also shares the important events and friends that contributed to her eventual conversion to the Catholic faith. The main body of the manuscript was written in the year 1933. However, her text ends abruptly because the government of Nazi Germany arrested and deported her to Auschwitz in 1942.

***Edith Stein, Essential Writings*, Modern spiritual master series, with an introduction by John Sullivan, O.C.D. Orbis Books.**

This book contains selected passages from the writings of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross along with an excellent introduction. It gives the readers an overall understanding of her life and her search for truth.

***Edith Stein, Selected Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality. Paulist Press.**

This series contains selected texts arranged by different themes from the original writings of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. The book is an excellent introduction to Stein's thoughts and writings.

***Edith Stein, Finite and Eternal Being.* ICS.**

While in the Cologne convent, Edith Stein was given permission to start her academic studies again. Shortly after taking her vows, her superiors asked that she finish the already-begun draft on *Potency and Act*. In 1936, she completed her work titled, *Finite and Eternal Being – Endliches und Ewiges Sein*. This book is considered by many to be Edith Stein's masterwork, "the culmination of her lifelong search for truth in all its philosophical, psychological, and spiritual dimensions."

Stein, Edith, *Finite and Eternal Being*, Translated by Kurt F. Reinhardt, Volume 9. ICS Publications, 2002.

Stein, Edith, *Finite and Eternal Being*, Translated by Walters Redmond, Volume 12. ICS Publications, 2023.

The new translation is available to order from (The Catholic University of America Press). Available at: <https://www.cuapress.org/9781939272911/finite-and-eternal-being/>

Edith Stein, *The Science of the Cross*, Collected Works, Vol. 6. ICS.

To help celebrate the fourth centenary of the birth of St. John of the Cross in 1542, Edith Stein received the task of preparing a study of his writings. She uses her skill as a philosopher to enter into an illuminating reflection on the difference between the two symbols of cross and night.

Edith Stein, *Self-Portrait in Letters – 1916-1942*. ICS.

St. Teresa Benedicta comes alive through these warm and attentive letters. In these letters, she freely shares her innermost feelings and love of Carmel. This edition includes letters that she wrote from Echt, Holland, a Discalced Carmelite monastery where she spent the last days of her earthly life. “At the time you wanted to hear something about balancing, harmoniously, Christian freedom and the fulfilling of monastic prescriptions. I think the balance lies in the ‘Fiat voluntas tua’ (Thy will be done). Our Holy Rule and Constitutions are for us the expression of the Divine will. To sacrifice personal inclinations for their sake is to participate in the sacrifice of Christ... Our roots are in the heart of Jesus. In the eyes of the ordinary human being this is a dark terrain. For the eyes of faith, it is the clear eternal light” (letter #306, to Sister Agnella Stadtmüller, O.P.).

Biographies, books, and articles by others

Holiness Befits Your House. Documentation on the Canonization of Edith Stein. Edited by John Sullivan, O.C.D. ICS.

This book contains major Vatican pronouncements made at the time of Edith Stein’s canonization late in 1998, as well as Pope John Paul II’s homily at the Eucharist of her beatification on May 1, 1987. Additionally, a useful bibliography is added to assist further reading.

***Listening to Edith Stein, Wisdom for a New Century*,** Carmelite Studies, 12. ICS.

“By focusing on various aspects of Stein’s multifaceted work, each author of this volume contributes to the important task of identifying Stein’s distinctive voice in the perennial human quest for truth.”

***The Life of a Philosopher and Carmelite*,** by Teresia Renata Posselt, O.C.D. ICS.

“Teresia Renate Posselt, O.C.D. was the Novice Director, then Mother Prioress of the Cologne Carmel when Edith Stein lived there. This book is Posselt’s tribute to Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, a wreath of recollections, lovingly woven together. It is also the first-ever biography published about the ‘Great Woman of the Twentieth Century.’”

Never Forget: Christian and Jewish Perspectives on Edith Stein, Carmelite Studies 7. ICS.

“A useful companion to Edith Stein’s *Life in a Jewish Family*, this seventh entry in the Carmelite Studies series can help readers better appreciate Edith Stein’s rich and multifaceted personality. The Catholic Church’s decision to beatify and canonize Edith Stein as a martyr has inspired many. Yet it has also raised important concerns, especially within the Jewish community, about the implications of this action, and of Edith Stein’s life and death, for Jewish-Christian relations.”

Prayer

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, your entire life mission was one of persistent pursuit of searching for truth. You found the deepest truths in the life of Saint Teresa of Ávila and unhesitatingly entered the Church and the monastery of Carmel. Toward the end of your life, you saw human suffering firsthand and allowed your reflections on that experience to open your mind and heart to a deeper understanding of the truth. Pray for us that we will always be open to the deepest and most mysterious truths of our faith, especially the mystery of the Cross, so that we will joyfully live, even while carrying Christ’s Cross in our daily encounters. Amen.

Read-Along Materials
Homily of His Holiness, John Paul II,
The Canonization of Edith Stein

Sunday, 11 October 1998

1. “Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14).

St. Paul’s words to the Galatians, which we have just heard, are well suited to the human and spiritual experience of Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, who has been solemnly enrolled among the saints today. She too can repeat with the Apostle: Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Cross of Christ! Ever blossoming, the tree of the Cross continues to bear new fruits of salvation. This is why believers look with confidence to the Cross, drawing from its mystery of love the courage and strength to walk faithfully in the footsteps of the crucified and risen Christ. Thus the message of the Cross has entered the hearts of so many men and women and changed their lives.

The spiritual experience of Edith Stein is an eloquent example of this extraordinary interior renewal. *A young woman in search of the truth* has become a saint and martyr through the silent workings of divine grace: Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, who from heaven repeats to us today all the words that marked her life: “Far be it from me to glory except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

2. On 1 May 1987, during my Pastoral Visit to Germany, I had the joy of beatifying this generous witness to the faith in the city of Cologne. Today, 11 years later, here in Rome, in St. Peter’s Square, I am able solemnly to present this *eminent daughter of Israel and faithful daughter of the Church* as a saint to the whole world.

Today, as then, we bow to the memory of Edith Stein, proclaiming the indomitable witness she bore during her life and especially by her death. Now alongside Teresa of Avila and Thérèse of Lisieux, another Teresa takes her place among the host of saints who do honor to the Carmelite Order.

Dear brothers and sisters who have gathered for this solemn celebration, let us give glory to God for what he has accomplished in Edith Stein.

3. I greet the many pilgrims who have come to Rome, particularly the members of the *Stein family* who have wanted to be with us on this joyful occasion. I also extend a cordial greeting to the *representatives of the Carmelite community*, which became a “second family” for Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

I also welcome *the official delegation from the Federal Republic of Germany*, led by Helmut Kohl, the outgoing Federal Chancellor, whom I greet with heartfelt respect. Moreover, I greet the representatives of the states of North Rhine-Westphalia and Rhineland-Palatinate and the Mayor of Cologne.

An *official delegation* has also come from my country, led by Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek. I extend a cordial greeting to them.

I would particularly like to mention *the pilgrims from the Dioceses of Wrocław (Breslau), Cologne, Münster, Speyer, Kraków and Bielsko-Zywiec* who have come with their Cardinals, Bishops and pastors. They join the numerous groups of the faithful from Germany, the United States of America and my homeland, Poland.

4. Dear brothers and sisters! Because she was Jewish, Edith Stein was taken with her sister Rosa and many other Catholic Jews from the Netherlands to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, where she died with them in the gas chambers. *Today we remember them all with deep respect.* A few days before her deportation, the woman religious had dismissed the question about a possible rescue: “Do not do it! Why should I be spared? Is it not right that I should gain no advantage from my Baptism? If I cannot share the lot of my brothers and sisters, my life, in a certain sense, is destroyed.”

From now on, as we celebrate the memory of this new saint from year to year, we must also remember the Shoah, that cruel plan to exterminate a people — a plan to which millions of our Jewish brothers and sisters fell victim. *May the Lord let his face shine upon them and grant them peace* (cf. Num. 6:25f.).

For the love of God and man, once again I raise an anguished cry: *May such criminal deeds never be repeated* against any ethnic group, against any race, in any corner of this world! It is a cry to everyone: to all people of goodwill; to all who believe in the Just and Eternal God; to all who know they are joined to Christ, the Word of God made man. We must all stand together: *human dignity is at stake.* There is only one human family. The new saint also insisted on this: “Our love of neighbor is the measure of our love of God. For Christians — and not only for them — no one is a ‘stranger.’ The love of Christ knows no borders.”

5. Dear brothers and sisters! *The love of Christ was the fire that inflamed the life of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.* Long before she realized it, she was caught by this fire. At the beginning she devoted herself to *freedom*. For a long time Edith Stein was a seeker. Her mind never tired of searching and her heart always yearned for hope. She traveled the arduous path of philosophy with passionate enthusiasm. Eventually she was rewarded: she seized the truth. Or better: she was seized by it. Then she discovered that truth had a name: Jesus Christ. From that moment on, the incarnate Word was her One and All. Looking back as a Carmelite on this period of her life, she wrote to a Benedictine nun: “Whoever seeks the truth is seeking God, whether consciously or unconsciously.”

Although Edith Stein had been brought up religiously by her Jewish mother, at the age of 14 she “had consciously and deliberately stopped praying.” She wanted to rely exclusively on herself and was concerned to assert her freedom in making decisions about her life. At the end of a long journey, she came to the surprising realization: *only those who commit themselves to the love of Christ become truly free.*

This woman had to face the challenges of such a radically changing century as our own. Her experience is an example to us. The modern world boasts of the enticing door which says: everything is permitted. It ignores the narrow gate of discernment and renunciation. I am speaking especially to you, young Christians, particularly to the many altar servers who have come to Rome these days on pilgrimage: *Pay attention! Your life is not an endless series of open*

doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface, but *go to the heart of things!* And when the time is right, have the courage to decide! The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in his good hands.

6. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross was able to understand that the love of Christ and human freedom are intertwined, because *love and truth have an intrinsic relationship*. The quest for truth and its expression in love did not seem at odds to her; on the contrary she realized that they call for one another.

In our time, truth is often mistaken for the opinion of the majority. In addition, there is a widespread belief that one should use the truth even against love or vice versa. But *truth and love need each other*. St. Teresa Benedicta is a witness to this. The “martyr for love,” who gave her life for her friends, let no one surpass her in love. At the same time, with her whole being she sought the truth, of which she wrote: “No spiritual work comes into the world without great suffering. It always challenges the whole person.”

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross says to us all: Do not accept anything as the truth if it lacks love. And do not accept anything as love which lacks truth! One without the other becomes a destructive lie.

7. Finally, the new saint teaches us that love for Christ *undergoes suffering*. Whoever truly loves does not stop at the prospect of suffering: he accepts communion in suffering with the one he loves.

Aware of what her Jewish origins implied, Edith Stein spoke eloquently about them: “Beneath the Cross I understood the destiny of God’s People.... Indeed, today I know far better what it means to be the Lord’s bride under the sign of the Cross. *But since it is a mystery, it can never be understood by reason alone.*”

The mystery of the Cross gradually enveloped her whole life, spurring her to the point of making the supreme sacrifice. As a *bride on the Cross*, St. Teresa Benedicta did not only write profound pages about the “science of the Cross,” but was thoroughly trained in *the school of the Cross*. Many of our contemporaries would like to silence the Cross. *But nothing is more eloquent than the Cross when silenced! The true message of suffering is a lesson of love. Love makes suffering fruitful, and suffering deepens love.*

Through the experience of the Cross, Edith Stein was able to open the way to *a new encounter with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faith and the Cross proved inseparable to her. Having matured in the school of the Cross, she found the roots to which the tree of her own life was attached. She understood that it was very important for her “to be a daughter of the chosen people and to belong to Christ not only spiritually, but also through blood.”

8. “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24).

Dear brothers and sisters, the divine Teacher spoke these words to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. What he gave his chance but attentive listener we also find in the life of Edith Stein, in her “ascent of Mount Carmel.” The depth of the divine mystery became perceptible to her in the silence of contemplation. Gradually, throughout her life, as she grew in the

knowledge of God, worshiping him in spirit and truth, she experienced ever more clearly her specific vocation to ascend the Cross with Christ, to embrace it with serenity and trust, to love it by following in the footsteps of her beloved Spouse: St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross is offered to us today as a model to inspire us and a protectress to call upon.

We give thanks to God for this gift. May the new saint be an example to us in our *commitment to serve freedom*, in our *search for the truth*. May her witness constantly strengthen the *bridge of mutual understanding between Jews and Christians*.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, pray for us! Amen.

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A Brief Timeline

- Oct. 12, 1891: Edith Stein is born in Breslau, a city in Imperial Germany (now Wroclaw, Poland), on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement.
- 1911: She begins her university studies in Breslau.
- April 1913: Stein studies at the University of Göttingen with Edmund Husserl, principal founder of the philosophical school of phenomenology.
- 1915: She serves as a Red Cross volunteer.
- 1916-18: Stein works as an assistant to Husserl in Freiburg.
- 1919: Although she passes her doctoral examination with distinction, the University of Göttingen rejects her habilitation thesis, "Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities," because she is a woman.
- Jan. 1, 1922: Stein is baptized, at the age of 30, on the Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus.
- 1923: She begins teaching at a Dominican nuns' school in Speyer.
- 1931: Stein completes a second habilitation thesis, "Potency and Act."
- 1932: Stein becomes a lecturer at the Institute for Scientific Pedagogy in Münster but is forced to resign a year later after the Nazis pass antisemitic legislation.
- April 12, 1933: she writes a letter to Pope Pius XI, urging him to issue a forceful public condemnation of Nazi antisemitism. She wrote later: "I know that my letter was delivered to the Holy Father unopened; some time thereafter I received his blessing for myself and for my relatives. Nothing else happened. Later on, I often wondered whether this letter might have come to his mind once in a while. For in the years that followed, that which I had predicted for the future of the Catholics in Germany came true step by step."
- Oct. 14, 1933: Stein enters the Carmelite convent in Cologne, where she writes the influential study "Finite and Eternal Being."
- April 15, 1934: at an investiture ceremony, she is clothed in the Carmelite habit and takes the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. She wrote later: "I understood the cross as the destiny of God's people, which was beginning to be apparent at the time (1933). I felt that those who understood the Cross of Christ should take it upon themselves on everybody's behalf. Of course, I know better now what it means to be wedded to the Lord in the sign of the cross. However, one can never comprehend it, because it is a mystery."
- April 21, 1935: Stein takes her temporary vows.
- Sept. 14, 1936: On the day that she renews her vows, her mother dies in Breslau. "My mother held on to her faith to the last moment," she wrote. "But as her faith and her firm trust in her God ... were the last thing that was still alive in the throes of her death, I am confident that she will have met a very merciful judge and that she is now my most faithful helper, so that I can reach the goal as well."

April 21, 1938: Stein makes her final profession. She chooses the words of St. John of the Cross for her devotional picture: “Henceforth my only vocation is to love.”

Dec. 31, 1938: She is spirited across the German border to a Carmelite convent in the Dutch city of Echt, where she works intensely on a study of St. John of Cross. She is joined later by her sister Rosa.

June 9, 1939: Stein writes in her will: “Even now I accept the death that God has prepared for me in complete submission and with joy as being his most holy will for me. I ask the Lord to accept my life and my death ... so that the Lord will be accepted by His people and that His Kingdom may come in glory, for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world.”

Aug. 2, 1942: Edith and Rosa are arrested by the Gestapo in the monastery chapel in Echt.

Aug. 4, 1942: They arrive at the Westerbork transit camp.

Aug. 7, 1942: Almost 1,000 Jews are deported from the transit center to Auschwitz, including the Stein sisters.

Aug. 9, 1942: Stein is killed with Zyklon B gas, alongside 522 other Jews, and her body is burned.

April 1, 1962: Cardinal Josef Frings of Cologne opens Stein’s beatification cause.

Aug. 9, 1972: The diocesan phase of the beatification process ends, and the documents are sent to Rome.

May 1, 1987: Pope John Paul II beatifies Stein in Cologne.

Oct. 11, 1998: John Paul II canonizes Stein in Rome.

Oct. 1, 1999: The Polish pope declares Stein a co-patroness of Europe, alongside St. Bridget of Sweden and St. Catherine of Siena.

Courtesy: <https://www.pillarcatholic.com/>

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INDWELLING SPIRIT OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Introduction

The Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity — What is the Trinity?

“The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life” (The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 234). “Christians are baptized in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: not in their *names*, for there is only one God, the almighty Father, His only Son and the Holy Spirit: The Most Holy Trinity” (CCC 233).

“The Trinity is One. We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons, the ‘consubstantial Trinity.’ The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire: ‘The Father is that which the Son is, the Son that which the Father is, the Father and the Son that which the Holy Spirit is, i.e., by nature one God.’ In the words of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), ‘Each of the persons is that supreme reality, viz., the divine substance, essence or nature’” (CCC 253).

The most important concept of the Holy Trinity is its mission in the world — God’s revelation and the salvation of all believers. “The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God’s creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity: ‘If a man loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him’ [Jn. 14:23]:

O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me forget myself entirely so to establish myself in you, unmovable and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing be able to trouble my peace or make me leave you, O my unchanging God, but may each minute bring me more deeply into your mystery! Grant my soul peace. Make it your heaven, your beloved dwelling and the place of your rest. May I never abandon you there, but may I be there, whole and entire, completely vigilant in my faith, entirely adoring, and wholly given over to your creative action” [Prayer of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity] (CCC 260).

In his Angelus address in St. Peter’s Square, on the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity (June 12, 2022), Pope Francis recalls that the Trinity is not a “... theological exercise, but a revolution in our way of life.” The Holy Father stressed that our words must translate into action. “Today we can ask ourselves if our life reflects the God we believe in: do I, who profess faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, truly believe that I need others in order to live, that I need to give myself to others, that I need to serve others? Do I affirm this in words or do I affirm it with my life?” He continues, is the “sign of the Cross we make every day a gesture for its own sake, or does it inspire my way of speaking, of encountering, of responding, of judging, of forgiving?” Pope Francis also says further that “God, who is the author of life, is transmitted not so much through books as through witness of life.”

“The Christian begins his day, his prayers, and his activities with the Sign of the Cross: ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.’ The baptized person dedicates the day to the glory of God and calls on the Savior’s grace which lets him act in the Spirit as a

child of the Father. The sign of the cross strengthens us in temptations and difficulties” (CCC 2157).

The concept of transformation and union in the triune God is the primary focus in the writings of Sts. Teresa and John of the Cross. Teresa confirms that the mystery of God in three persons was revealed to her “through a certain representation of the truth.” “When the soul is brought into that (seventh) dwelling place, the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons..., is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth... and through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone” (*Interior Castle*, VII.1:6).

Likewise, St. John of the Cross, in his *Spiritual Canticle* (Stanza 39, “breathing of the air”), explains the soul’s transformation and union of love in three persons. “By his divine breath-like spiration, the Holy Spirit elevates the soul sublimely and informs her and makes her capable of breathing in God the same spiration of love that the Father breathes in the Son and the Son in the Father. This spiration of love is the Holy Spirit himself, who in the Father and the Son breathes out to her in this transformation in order to unite her to himself. There would not be a true and total transformation if the soul were not transformed in the three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity in an open and manifest degree” (*Spiritual Canticle*, 39:3).

Furthermore, the writings of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity highlight the mystery of the Trinity, present by grace in the soul of every baptized person. Her name tells her she is the “house of God” in which live the Three Divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. “She ardently longs to become for Christ ‘another humanity in which He can renew His whole Mystery’ including conformity on the Cross and participation in His saving work in the world” (*Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works, Vol. One*, Foreword, ICS Publications).

For further understanding of one’s participation in the Triune God, the members will read and reflect on the letters and major writings of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity.

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity — a Brief Biography

Elizabeth Catez, known to her family as “Sabeth,” was born July 18, 1880, near Bourges (France), the daughter of a military officer. Her sister Marguerite was born three years after. Early in her life (1887), Elizabeth’s father and maternal grandfather, Raymond Rolland, both died, and the two young children were left in the care of their mother, a very energetic and upright woman.

The young Elizabeth also had a very pronounced character; her childhood tantrums were fearsome. But at the same time, from a very early age, she tried to conquer her temperament. When her father died, the family moved to a house closer to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns in Dijon. The sound of the convent’s bells and the nuns’ garden gave Elizabeth great solace.

The day of her first communion, April 19, 1891, was an all-important one for her: she felt she no longer had hunger as Jesus had fed her. That same afternoon she went to make her first visit to Carmel and the prioress explained to her the significance of her name in Hebrew—Elizabeth means “House of God.” This made a deep impression on the young girl, who understood the

profundity of these words. From then on, she was determined to be God's dwelling place, by controlling her temperament and forgetting about herself.

She was very gifted in music and obtained first prize in piano when she was 13 years old. Her soul was sensitive to music and nature; beautiful things always reminded her of God, in which she saw harmonious reflections of the Creator.

Elizabeth wanted to be a Carmelite, but her mother forbade it until she reached 21. When reading Saint Teresa, she felt a great connection with her. She understood that contemplation meant to let God act, that mortification had to be interior, and that friendship is an attitude of putting other people's interests before one's own. Elizabeth was also greatly helped by reading *Story of a Soul*, by which the young Thérèse of Lisieux, recently deceased, inspired her with her "Little Way" of trust in God.

On August 2, 1901, Elizabeth entered the Dijon Carmel as a postulant and was given the name Elizabeth of the Trinity. Mother Germaine was her prioress, her Mistress of Novices, and finally became her admirer and disciple. Elizabeth lived a life that was completely ordinary, a life of faith, without revelations or ecstasies. However, this young girl immediately attracted the attention of the whole community through her faithfulness and commitment. In her turn, she submerged herself in reading and deepening her understanding of Scripture (mainly Saint Paul) and Saint John of the Cross. Under their guidance she found her own interior way and her faith matured.

Reading Saint Paul, she felt a deep call to be the Praise of the Glory of the Triune God, by living every moment of the day in constant thanksgiving. She came to identify with this ideal, so much so, that at the end of her life she signed some letters with the name: "*Laudem Gloriam*" [the Praise of Glory].

During Lent in 1904, Elizabeth became ill (effects of Addison's disease), and after a painful and long sickness, she died on November 9, 1906. Her last words were, "I am going to Light, to Love, to Life."

Her life and writings became surprisingly widespread. They consist of her Diaries, her Letters, her Poems, and some prayers, among which is her famous "Prayer to the Trinity." Other writings include *Heaven in Faith*, which moved her to live heaven here on earth by adoring God in faith and love, and what she wrote to her sister Marguerite, housewife and mother, *The Greatness of Our Vocation, Last Retreat*, and *Let Yourself Be Loved* (dedicated to her prioress).

Courtesy: <https://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/who-we-are/our-saints/bl-elizabeth-of-the-trinity/>

Required Reading: *Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works*, Vol. One: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings. ICS, 1984, 2014.

Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works, Vol. Two: Letters from Carmel. ICS, 1995.

Read-along discussion materials (included at the end, after the bibliography):

Fr. Saverio Cannistra, The Superior General Letter to the Order, on the occasion of the canonization of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity.

His Holiness Pope Francis, Angelus address in St. Peter's Square, on the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, June 12, 2022.

Sister Margaret Dorgan, D.C.M., "The Message of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity," *Spiritual Life Magazine*, Washington Province of Discalced Carmelite Friars, Inc., Winter, 1984.

Note: Participants may include in their ongoing discussion the essential points of the above referenced articles. These materials and the essential points of this study could be used effectively for community formation/discussion as well.

Additional Reading: *He is My Heaven: The Life of Elizabeth of the Trinity* by Jennifer Moorcroft. ICS Publications, 2001.

Session One: Heaven in Faith (HF), Major Spiritual Writings, I

(Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works*, Vol. One, pages 85-120).

Prayerfully read and reflect on the entire *Ten Days of Prayers*.

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Recommended: “Discerning Hearts” YouTube podcasts: “*Beginning to Pray – Heaven in Faith*” by Dr. Anthony Lilles. In these 18 videos, Dr. Lilles begins the spiritual explorations of prayers of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity. (The podcasts may be found by searching YouTube for “Anthony Lilles.”)

Explanatory Note: Elizabeth of the Trinity still has three months to live when, in the first half of August 1906, she writes the first of her four spiritual treatises — *Heaven in Faith* (HF). These prayers are addressed to her sister, Guite (Marguerite). Elizabeth organized her souvenir for her sister as a retreat of ten days, like the Carmelites make each year. Each day consists of two prayers. “To be able to appreciate the true value of this retreat, we must hear within us the echo that each word, each quotation, touched by faith, awoke in Elizabeth” (Introduction, pg. 86). Each prayer begins with a scriptural quotation followed by her explanation and reflection.

Points for discussion/reflection:

First Day

First Prayer

Elizabeth begins her “First Prayer” with the last wish of Jesus: “Father, I will that where I am they also whom You have given Me may be with Me, in order that they may behold My glory, the glory you have given Me because You have loved Me before the creation of the world” [John 17:24]. “Such is Christ’s last wish, His supreme prayer before returning to His Father” (*Heaven in Faith*, #1).

She then goes on, “He wills that where He is we should be also, not only for eternity, **but already in time**, which is eternity begun and still in progress” (*Heaven in Faith*, #1, emphasis added).

Side note: For some people, the most significant part of Elizabeth’s message is this assurance that heaven can begin on earth. If a foretaste of heaven is available to us in advance, what is the meaning of time? How does time function in this perspective? Elizabeth sees the temporary as flowing into the eternal. The temporal is our means of access to the eternal. It passes on, and yet through it we reach what does not pass on.

“Time then is of supreme value. But how does it take on aspects of the eternal? It does so through the *now* of this moment which holds God for me. She says, ‘He (God) requires of me to live in an eternal present without before or after, to be wholly at one in myself in this eternal now.’ Here we have an asceticism of time that requires full attention to the unfolding moment. I do not indulge myself by wandering in thought or desire to what has been or to what might be. I keep my energy focused on what this moment communicates to me – whether it be the call to serve others, the duty of work, the enjoyment of beauty” (*The Message of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity*, by Sister Margaret Dorgan, D.C.M.).

Second Prayer

“‘Remain in Me.’ It is the Word of God who gives this order, expresses this wish. Remain in Me, not for a few moments, a few hours..., but ‘*remain*’... permanently, habitually. Remain in Me, pray in Me, adore in Me, love in Me, suffer in Me, work and act in Me. Remain in Me so that you may be able to encounter anyone or anything; penetrate further still into these depths. This is truly the ‘solitude into which God wants to allure the soul that He may speak to it,’ ...” (HF #3).

“In order to understand this very mysterious saying, we must not, so to speak, stop at the surface, but enter ever deeper into the divine Being through recollection. ... It is there in the very depths that the divine impact takes place, ... There we will find the strength to die to ourselves and, losing all vestige of self, we will be changed into love...” (HF # 4).

Second Day

First Prayer

“‘The kingdom of God is within you’ [Lk. 17:21]. A while ago God invited us to ‘remain in Him’...; and now He reveals to us that we do not have to go out of ourselves to find Him... St. John of the Cross says that ‘it is in the substance of the soul where neither the devil nor the world can reach’ that God gives Himself to it; then ‘all its movements are divine, and although they are from God they also belong to the soul, because God works them in it and with it’ [*Living Flame of Love*, Stanza 1.9]” (HF #5).

Second prayer

“‘Hurry and come down, for I must stay in your house today...’ [Lk. 19:5] The Master unceasingly repeats this word to our soul which He once addressed to Zacchaeus. ... But what is this descent that He demands of us except entering more deeply into our interior abyss? This act is not an external separation from external things, but a ‘solitude of spirit,’ a detachment from all that is not God” (HF #7).

Third Day

First prayer

In this prayer, Elizabeth explains that love alone brings the soul closer to God. “‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home *in him*’ [Jn. 14:23] ... It is love that attracts, that draws God to His creatures: not a sensible love but that love ‘strong as death that deep waters cannot quench’ [Eph. 3:9]” (HF #9).

“‘Because I love My Father, I do always the things that are pleasing to Him’ [Eph. 1:4]. Thus spoke our holy Master, and every soul who wants to live close to Him must also live this maxim.... Each incident, each event, each suffering, as well as each joy, is a sacrament which gives God to it; so it no longer makes a distinction between these things; it surmounts them, goes beyond them to rest in its Master, above all things. ... ‘The property of love is never to seek self, to keep back nothing, but to give everything to the one it loves’ [Heb. 4:9]” (HF #10).

Second prayer

“‘You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God’ [Col. 3:3].” Elizabeth here explains the meaning of the phrase, “you have died.” She says the soul must withdraw from all that is not God and remain in holy recollection. “‘I die daily’ [1 Cor. 15:31]. I decrease, I renounce self more each day so that Christ may increase in me and be exalted ... I no longer want ‘to live my own life, but to be transformed in Jesus Christ so that my life may be more divine than human,’ so that the Father, in bending attentively over me can recognize the image of His beloved Son in whom He has placed all His delight” (HF #11-12).

Fourth Day

First prayer

“Our God, wrote St. Paul, is a consuming Fire, that is ‘a fire of love’ which destroys, which ‘transforms into itself everything that it touches’ [*Living Flame*, Stanza 2:2]” (HF #13).

Second prayer

“But to attain to this love the soul must first be ‘entirely surrendered,’ its ‘will must be calmly lost in God’s will’ so that its ‘inclinations,’ ‘its faculties’ ‘move only in this love and for the sake of this love. I do everything with love, I suffer everything with love...’ Then ‘love fills it so completely ... that everywhere it finds the secret of growing in love,’ ‘even in its relations with the world’; ‘in the midst of life’s cares it can rightly say: “My only occupation is loving”!’” (HF #16). As St. John of the Cross stated: “Now that my every act is love” (*Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 28).

Fifth Day

First prayer

“‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone listens to My voice and opens the door to Me, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with Me.’ Blessed the ears of the soul alert enough, recollected enough to hear this voice of the Word of God; blessed also the eyes of this soul which in the light of a deep and living faith can witness the ‘coming’ of the Master... But what then is this coming? It is an unceasing generation, an enduring hymn of praise. Christ ‘comes with His treasures, but such is the mystery of the divine swiftness that He is continually coming, always for the first time as if He had never come; for His coming, independent of time, consists in an eternal “now,” and an eternal desire eternally renews the joys of the coming’” (HF #17).

Second prayer

“‘He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, remains in Me and I in him’ [Jn. 6:56]. The first sign of love is this: that Jesus has given us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink. ‘The property of love is to be always giving and always receiving ... and this love burns us, consumes us, and draws us into unity where beatitude awaits us’” (HF #18).

Sixth Day

First prayer

Faith: “‘To approach God, we must believe.’ Thus speaks St. Paul. He also says, ‘Faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ ... St. John of the Cross says that it serves as ‘feet’ to go ‘to God,’ and that it is ‘possession in an obscure manner.’ ‘It alone can give us true light’ concerning Him whom we love, and our soul must ‘choose it as the means to reach blessed union’” (HF #19).

Second prayer

Simplicity: “‘If your eye is single, your whole body will be full of light’ [Mt. 6:12]. What is this single eye of which the Master speaks but this ‘simplicity of intention’ which ‘gathers into unity all the scattered forces of the soul and unites the spirit itself to God. It is simplicity which gives God honor and praise; it is simplicity which presents and offers the virtues to Him... I call simplicity of intention that which seeks only God and refers all things to Him...’ ‘It is the interior slope’ and ‘the fountain of the whole spiritual life’” (HF #21).

Seventh Day

First prayer

Predestination: “‘God chose us in Him before creation, that we should be holy and immaculate in His presence, in love’ [Eph. 1:4]. ‘The Holy Trinity created us in its image, according to the eternal design that it possessed in its bosom before the world was created,’ ... In the beginning was the Word; and we could add: in the beginning was nothing, for God in His eternal solitude already carried us in His thought” (HF #22).

“‘Our created essence asks to be rejoined with its principle.’ The Word, ‘the Splendor of the Father, is the eternal archetype after which creatures are designed on the day of their creation.’ This is ‘why God wills that, freed from ourselves, we should stretch out our arms towards our exemplar and possess it,’ ‘rising’ above all things ‘towards our model.’ ‘The immense riches that God possesses by nature, we may possess by virtue of love, by His dwelling in us and by our dwelling in Him’” (HF #23).

Second prayer

“‘Be holy for I am holy’ [1 Pet. 1:16]. It is the Lord who speaks. ‘Whatever may be our way of life or the clothing we wear, each of us must be the holy one of God.’ Who then is ‘the most holy’? ‘The one who is most loving, who gazes longest on God and who most fully satisfies the desires of His gaze.’ How do we satisfy the desires of God’s gaze but by remaining ‘simply and lovingly’ turned towards Him so that He may reflect His own image as the sun is reflected through a pure crystal” (HF #24).

“‘The highest perfection in this life ... consists in remaining so closely united to God that the soul with all its faculties and its powers is recollected in God.’ ... ‘The image of God imprinted in the soul is formed by reason [intellect], memory, and will... The form of the soul is God who must imprint Himself there like the seal on wax, like the stamp on its object. Now this is not fully realized unless the intellect is completely enlightened by

knowledge of God, the will captivated by love of the supreme good, and the memory fully absorbed in contemplation and enjoyment of eternal happiness.’ ... To ‘realize this ideal’ we must ‘keep recollected within ourselves,’ ‘remain silently in God’s presence,’ ‘while the soul immerses itself, expands, becomes enkindled and melts in Him, with an unlimited fullness’” (HF #25).

Note: The entire teaching of St. John of the Cross (*The Ascent*, Books 1, 2, and 3) focuses on purification of the intellect (by faith), the memory (by hope), and the will (by love).

Eighth Day

First prayer

“...we have become His through baptism, that is what Paul means by these words: ‘He called them’; yes, called to receive the seal of the Holy Trinity... So let us contemplate this adored Image, let us remain unceasingly under its radiance so that it may imprint itself on us; let us go to everything with the same attitude of soul that our holy Master would have. Then we will realize the great plan by which God has ‘resolved in Himself to restore all things in Christ’ [Eph. 1:9-10]” (HF #27).

Second prayer

Elizabeth quotes Paul, “‘It seems to me that all is loss since I have known the excelling knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. For love of Him I have forfeited everything. I have accounted all else rubbish that I may gain Christ. What I want is to know Him, to share in His sufferings, to become like Him in His death. I pursue my course striving to attain what He has destined me for by taking hold of me. My whole concern is to forget what is behind and to strain forward constantly to what is ahead. I run straight to the goal, to the vocation to which God has called me in Christ Jesus’” [Phil. 3:8, 10-14]. “That is: I want only to be identified with Him: ‘*Mihi vivere Christus est.*’ ‘Christ is my life’! [Phil. 1:21]” (HF #28).

“The object of this retreat is to make us more like our adored Master, and even more, to become so one with Him that we may say ‘I live no longer I, but He lives in me’ [Gal. 2:20]. Oh! Let us study this divine Model: His knowledge, the Apostle tells us, is so ‘excelling’ [Phil. 3:8]” (HF #28).

Ninth Day

First prayer

Spirit and Truth: “Christ said one day to the Samaritan woman that ‘the Father seeks true adorers in spirit and truth’ [Jn. 4:23]. To give joy to His Heart, let us be these true adorers. Let us adore Him in ‘spirit,’ that is, with our hearts and our thoughts fixed on Him, and our mind filled with His knowledge imparted by the light of faith. Let us adore Him in ‘truth,’ that is, by our works, for it is above all by our actions that we show we are true: this is to do always what is pleasing to the Father whose children we are. And finally, let us ‘adore in spirit and in truth,’ that is, *through* Jesus Christ and with Jesus Christ, for He alone is the true Adorer in spirit and truth” (HF #33).

Second prayer

Humility: “‘If anyone should affirm to me that to find the bottom of the abyss is to be immersed in humility, I would not contradict him. However, it seems to me that to be plunged into humility is to be plunged into God, for God is the bottom of the abyss. That is why humility, like charity, is always capable of increasing.’ ‘Since a humble heart is the vessel needed, the vessel capable of containing the grace God wants to pour into it,’ let us be ‘humble.’ ‘The humble can never rank God high enough nor themselves low enough. ... Whoever possesses humility has no need of many words to be instructed; God tells him more things than he can learn; such was the case with the Lord’s disciples’” (HF #37).

Tenth Day

First prayer

Faithful Virgin: “‘If you knew the gift of God,’ Christ said one evening to the Samaritan woman [Lk. 4:10] ... There is one who knew the gift of God, one who did not lose one particle of it, one who was so pure, so luminous that she seemed to be the Light itself...One whose life was so simple, so lost in God that there is hardly anything we can say about it. ‘*Virgo fidelis*’: that is, Faithful Virgin, ‘who kept all these things [and pondered them] in her heart’ [Lk. 2:19]. She remained so little, so recollected in God’s presence, in the seclusion of the temple, that she drew down upon herself the delight of the Holy Trinity...The Father bending down to this beautiful creature, who was so unaware of her own beauty, willed that she be the Mother in time of Him whose Father He is in eternity. Then the Spirit of love who presides over all of God’s works came upon her; the Virgin said her *fiat*: ‘Behold the servant of the Lord, be it done to me according to Your Word,’ and the greatest of mysteries was accomplished. By the descent of the Word in her, Mary became forever God’s prey” (HF #38-39).

Note: In this retreat prayer, Elizabeth meditatively reflects upon the Gospel story to unveil the workings of the Holy Trinity in the ordinariness of one’s life.

Elizabeth goes on to reflect that the habitual recollection of the Virgin Mary in God did not prevent her from spending time with her family and those in need. “It seems to me that the attitude of the Virgin during the months that elapsed between the Annunciation and the Nativity is the model for interior souls... In what peace, in what recollection Mary lent herself to everything she did! How even the most trivial things were divinized by her!... The Gospel tells us that Mary went in haste to the mountains of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth [Lk. 1:39-42]. Never did the ineffable vision that she contemplated within herself in any way diminish her outward charity... If an order from Heaven arrives, contemplation turns towards men, sympathizes with their needs, is inclined towards all their miseries; it must cry and be fruitful” (HF #40).

Second Prayer

Elizabeth dedicates her entire “Tenth Day” of second prayer to “*the praise of His glory*.” Inspired by the words of St. Paul, she confirms that “We have been predestined by the decree of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, so that we may be ‘*the praise of His glory*’ [Eph. 1:11-12]” (HF # 41).

Side note: One of the things this prayer addresses is us! We are to be the praise of God's glory, "even here below!" — not just to praise God with our lips, but to make our choices, our behavior, and our everyday life a source of praise of God. Elizabeth calls us to offer praise to God with our conduct, not just our words.

Praise of Glory

"A praise of glory is a soul that lives in God, that loves Him with a pure and disinterested love, without seeking itself in the sweetness of this love; that loves Him beyond all His gifts and even though it would not have received anything from Him ..." (HF #43).

"A praise of glory is a soul of silence that remains like a lyre under the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit so that He may draw from it divine harmonies; it knows that suffering is a string that produces still more beautiful sounds; so it loves to see this string on its instrument that it may more delightfully move the Heart of its God" (HF #43).

"A praise of glory is a soul that gazes on God in faith and simplicity; it is a reflector of all that He is; it is like a bottomless abyss into which He can flow and expand; it is also like a crystal through which He can radiate and contemplate all His perfections and His own splendor. A soul which thus permits the divine Being to satisfy in itself His need to communicate 'all that He is and all that He has,' is in reality the praise of glory of all His gifts" (HF #43).

"Finally, a praise of glory is one who is always giving thanks. Each of her acts, her movements, her thoughts, her aspirations, at the same time that they are rooting her more deeply in love, are like an echo of the eternal *Sanctus*" (HF #43).

"In the Heaven of glory, the blessed have no rest 'day or night, saying: Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty ... They fall down and worship Him who lives forever and ever..." (HF #44).

"In the heaven of her soul, the praise of glory has already begun her work of eternity. Her song is uninterrupted, for she is under the action of the Holy Spirit who effects everything in her; and although she is not always aware of it, for the weakness of nature does not allow her to be established in God without distractions, she always sings, she always adores, for she has, so to speak, wholly passed into praise and love in her passion for the glory of her God. In the heaven of our soul let us be praises of glory of the Holy Trinity, praises of love of our Immaculate Mother. One day the veil will fall, we will be introduced into the eternal courts, and there we will sing in the bosom of infinite Love.

And God will give us 'the new name promised to the victor.'
What will it be?"

"LAUDEM GLORIAE" (HF #44)

Session Two: The Greatness of Our Vocation (GV), Major Spiritual Writings, II

Pages 121-130. Prayerfully read and reflect on the entire letter.

(May take multiple sessions as needed.)

Explanatory note from the Introduction, pg. 121: This “spiritual treatise” of September 1906 is written to a young lady of Dijon, Françoise de Sourdon (Framboise), age nineteen. The letter to Françoise becomes a long meditation, a little treatise: “Let’s treat humility first ...,” begins Elizabeth on a serious note. This letter is filled with helpful insights. Read the entire letter slowly and meditatively.

Points for discussion/reflection:

On Humility:

- “...nothing can ‘disturb’ the humble. He possesses ‘invincible peace for he has plunged into such an abyss that no one would go that far to look for him’” (GV #2).
- Humility leads to self-knowledge. “...the humble person finds his greatest pleasure in life in feeling his own ‘weakness’ ‘before God’” (GV #2).
- Humility leads to forgetfulness of ourselves. “‘Quotidie morior’ exclaimed St. Paul, ‘I die daily’ (GV #2). This doctrine of dying to self is the law for every Christian” (GV #3).
- Our self-forgetfulness leads to transformation. “That is what St. Paul meant when he wrote: ‘Strip off the old man and clothe yourselves anew in the image of Him who created you’ (Col. 3:9-10). This image is God Himself” (GV #3).
- Our transformation and union with Christ make us aware that we are the sharers of His divine nature. “St. Peter writes in one of his epistles that ‘we have been made sharers in His divine nature’ (2 Pet. 1:4)” (GV #3).
- This awareness and participation in His divine nature make us free and peaceful. “It seems to me the soul that is aware of its greatness (self-knowledge) enters into that ‘holy freedom of the children of God,’ of which the Apostle speaks, that is, it transcends all things, including self (Rom. 8:21). The freest soul, I think, is the one most forgetful of self. If anyone were to ask me the secret of happiness, I would say it is to no longer think of self, to deny oneself always. That is a good way to kill pride” (GV #4).
- “You see, pride is love of ourselves; well, love of God must be so strong that it extinguishes all our self-love. St. Augustine says we have two cities within us, the city of God, and the city of SELF [for clarification, see endnote, no. 13]. To the extent that the first increases, the second will be destroyed” (GV #4).
- “A soul that lives by faith in God’s presence, that has this ‘single eye’ that Christ speaks of in the Gospel (Mt. 6:22), that is, a purity of ‘intention’ that seeks only God; this soul, it seems to me, would also live in humility: it would recognize His gifts to it – for ‘humility is truth’ — but it would attribute nothing to itself, referring all to God as the Blessed Virgin did” (GV #4).
- Again, Elizabeth goes on to explain the “movements of pride” in the soul. “Framboise, all the movements of pride that you feel within yourself, only become faults when the will takes part in them! Without that, although you may suffer much, you are not offending God... What God asks of you is never to entertain deliberately any thought of

pride, and never to act on the inspiration of pride, for this is wrong” (GV #5).

Note: Here, Elizabeth echoes the teaching of St. John of the Cross: “I am speaking of the voluntary appetites because the natural ones are little or no hindrance at all to the attainment of union, provided they do not receive one’s consent or pass beyond the first movements, those stirrings in which the rational will does not take part either before or after” (*Ascent*, 1.11:2).

- “...to attain the ideal life of the soul, I believe we must live on the supernatural level, that is, we must never act ‘naturally.’ We must become aware that God dwells within us and do everything with Him, then we are never commonplace, even when performing the most ordinary tasks, for we do not live in these things, we go beyond them! A supernatural soul never deals with secondary causes but with God alone... Everything for it is reduced to unity, to that ‘one thing necessary’... (Lk. 10:42). Then the soul is truly great, truly free, for it has ‘*enclosed its will in God’s*’” (GV #8).
- Elizabeth goes on to proclaim: “Walk in Jesus Christ, rooted in Him, built up on Him, strengthened in faith and growing in Him in thanksgiving.” (GV #10)
- “Be *rooted* in Him. This implies being uprooted from self...” (GV #10)
- “Be *built* upon Him, high above everything that is passing, there where everything is pure, everything is luminous” (GV #10).
- “Be *strengthened in faith*, that is, never act except in the great light of God, never according to impressions or your imagination” (GV #11).
- “And, finally, *grow in thanksgiving*... If you walk rooted in Christ, strengthened in your faith, you will live in thanksgiving: the love of the sons of God!” (GV #12).

Elizabeth concludes the letter with a final parting word to Framboise: “As for me, I feel already as if I were almost in heaven here in my little cell; alone with Him alone, bearing my cross with my Master. Framboise, my happiness increases along with my suffering! If you only knew how delicious the dregs are at the bottom of the chalice prepared by my Heavenly Father!” (GV #13). “A Dieu, beloved Framboise; I cannot go on. And in the silence of our rendez-vous you will guess, you will understand, what I do not tell you” (GV #13).

Elizabeth signs the letter adding, *Laudem Glorae* (Praise of Glory) stating, “This will be my new name in Heaven.”

Note: For Sessions Three, Four, and Five, use the same pattern as the above sessions, focusing on major points and concepts.

Participants are asked to make notes of points they would like to discuss with the group. Alternatively, the local Council may choose to appoint an individual or a team to create discussion points.

Session Three: *Last Retreat*, Major Spiritual Writings, III

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Read, reflect, and meditate on the pages of the *Last Retreat* in its entirety (pages 141-173).

Explanatory Note: *Last Retreat* is one of the major writings of Elizabeth of the Trinity and it's divided into fifteen days of spiritual treatise. "It is a cry of love before the 'exceeding love' of God, a cry issuing from the 'depths of the bottomless abyss.' The Breath of God passes from the heart to the pen" (Introduction, pg. 138).

Session Four: *Let Yourself be Loved*, Major Spiritual Writings, IV

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Read, reflect, and meditate on the pages of *Let Yourself Be Loved* in its entirety (pages 175-182).

Explanatory Note: *Let Yourself Be Loved* is a very rich text. It's written during the last days of October 1906 and was found in 1934 on the deceased Prioress' table (Mother Germaine). Elizabeth's posthumous mission to help others to live 'in communion with love' was more clearly formulated than ever in this text. We must place these pages in the context of an *almost sacramental spirituality* which developed greatly during her last illness (see Introduction, pgs. 175-177).

Session Five: *Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works, Vol. Two, Letters from Carmel*

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Explanatory Note: "Though never intended for publication, her letters and writings for friends and family, in which she shares the secrets of her soul, have come to inspire countless Christians searching for a deeper relationship with the 'divine Three,' the indwelling Trinity" (Translator's Preface, vii).

Recommended "Discerning Hearts" YouTube podcasts: "*The Letters of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity – Beginning to Pray*" by Dr. Anthony Lilles. In these episodes, Dr. Lilles begins the spiritual explorations of selected letters of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity published by ICS. The selected letters for the podcast: #111, 157, 158, 162, 165, 169, 184, 185, 214, 224, 269, and 335 (episodes Parts I and II).

Dr. Anthony Lilles currently serves as the Academic Dean of St. Patrick's Seminary and University in Menlo Park, CA. Having taught graduate level theology for over 20 years, Dr. Lilles specializes in Spiritual Theology and various classics of Catholic Spirituality. His expertise is in the spiritual doctrine of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity and the Carmelite Doctors of the Church: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Concluding Session: *The Message of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity*

By Sister Margaret Dorgan, D.C.M. Courtesy, Spiritual Life Magazine, ICS Publications, Winter, 1984.

Note: the entire article is included below in the read-along materials. Excerpts are given here to serve as discussion points.

- Elizabeth of the Trinity is already for many people the patron saint of their inner life with God.
- Her message, like Thérèse's, is directed at anyone who longs to take hold of their personal existence and find deeper meaning in the ongoing flow of ordinary time.
- Elizabeth was aware that what she comprehended of the mystery of an indwelling God was not for herself alone. Eleven days before her death on November 9, 1906, she wrote about her mission in heaven: "I have found heaven on earth, because heaven is God and God is within me. The day I understood that everything became clear to me." Nothing complex, nothing extraordinary, nothing that requires a long, arduous application of the mind to comprehend.
- She did not dilute her message when she wrote to relatives and friends beyond her monastery walls. What she experienced in such fullness was equally available to them. A letter to her mother says, "think of the fact that your soul is the temple of God. At every moment of the day and night, the three divine Persons are dwelling within you. When one knows that, one is no longer ever alone. It is so simple. There is no need of beautiful thoughts, only an outpouring of the heart."
- Elizabeth's pondering of Scripture, especially the New Testament passages of Saints Paul and John, deepened her realization that to live in the divine presence is to anticipate heaven.
- For some people, the most significant part of Elizabeth's message is this assurance that heaven can begin on earth. "Heaven is within us, because He who is the joy of the blessed in the beatific vision gives Himself to us in faith and mystery. It is the same thing."
- If the foretaste of heaven is available to us in advance, what is the meaning of time? How does time function in this perspective? Elizabeth sees the temporary as flowing into the eternal. The temporal is our means of access to the eternal. It passes on, and yet through it we reach what does not pass on.
- Elizabeth wants us to focus our attention on each moment, each event and what's happening now. "Each incident, each event, each suffering, as well as each joy, is a sacrament which gives God to us. We no longer make a distinction between these things."
- Elizabeth is not urging us to get away from everyday existence but to dig down to the deepest dimensions of life. She opens our eyes to what is hidden in the too familiar places. She shows the mark of God on it; that all earthly things radiate an inner peace, the way time points inwardly to the everlasting.
- Of all schools of spirituality none is more firmly set on the ground than Carmel's, with its insistence on taking life exactly as it is without asking for the creation of special

circumstances. At the same time, it offers the invitation to taste divine realities, not merely to know them from afar. Elizabeth resonated with this tradition long before she sensed her own mission to add to it.

- In the final mystic vision, which celebrates the Christ-life in us leading to the depths of the triune God, Elizabeth still speaks of the ordinary as the vehicle of our communing with the divine.

*O God of bountiful mercy, You revealed to St. Elizabeth of the Trinity the mystery of Your secret presence in the hearts of those who love You and You chose her to adore You in spirit and in truth. Through her intercession may we also abide in the love of Christ, that we may merit to be transformed into temples of Your life-giving Spirit to the praise of Your glory.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

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Read-Along Materials

Father Saverio Cannistrà, Superior General, Letter to the Order

On the occasion of the canonization of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity

Dear brothers and sisters in Carmel,

At a distance of one year from the canonization of the Martin husband and wife, we are getting ready to celebrate another grace-filled happening filling us with joy. On the 16th of October, one hundred and ten years after her death, our sister Elizabeth Catez was written into the canon of saints of the Church, entering this way, with full rights, to form part of the great and glorious family of the saints of Carmel.

Many are the motives for thanking the Lord and reflecting upon the significance that this event can have in the journey our Order has embarked upon. The rich and stimulating teaching that Pope Francis proposes with his words and initiatives — I am thinking of the encyclical *Laudato si'* and the jubilee year of Mercy — can help us to gather various aspects of the relevance of the witness and spiritual teaching of this our famous sister, so loved and appreciated in spiritual circles, but still little known to the greater part of the faithful. And yet, what ought to render her interesting is her life as a vivacious young girl, sensitive, attractive, talented, generously committed to the life of the Church, tied to her family, exuberant in affection and capable of friendship, a lover of beauty and in all this conquered and focused upon the mystery of the Trinity which Jesus Christ revealed to us!

Elizabeth can help us to reach the abundant and ever fresh source of the Trinity, which gives vitality, significance, joyful perseverance in our consecration and mission. She offers to everyone a stimulating example of how immersion in the mystery of divine life allows us to find total fulfillment.

In this letter I wish to propose to you keys for rereading the writings of Elizabeth for the purpose of gathering from them their relevance, keeping in mind contradictory phenomena of the present age, always less capable of being characterized by good relationships because it is confused and discouraged; the anxiety of making oneself present to feel alive, by means of media visibility, that however does not manage to make us present to ourselves; the frenetic and noisy filling of time with activities that preoccupy and disturb us, which take away from us the time to listen, to talk and reflect in depth; the use of beauty and the selective astaticism of reality for the purpose of consumption, which rejects gratuitousness by impeding the reception of the beauty inherent in things, as well as disfiguring nature; the widespread feeling of being on the edge of a precipice, in the power of unknown and uncontrollable forces, which renders vain every effort for good, in a world always marked more and more by violence, misery and uncertainty, without the possibility of getting near peace; suffering and death seen as a disgrace, emphasized or vainly fled from in our culture, which does not manage to realize the value of them.

How to consolidate our life?

A main line of thought unites the experience of Elizabeth from when she was a small child until, still young but more mature, she was to die: the intuition that the one important thing is “to live for love. The God who is capable of overcoming her fiery and choleric temperament and to captivate her sensitive heart thirsting for beauty, she found in Jesus crucified for love (cfr. letter #133). In Him she saw and touched a love that was passionate and thrilling, which overcame her and, at a tender age, made her decide to be totally His. It is the contact that would happen on the most beautiful day of her life, the day of her first communion.

“in which Jesus placed his dwelling place in me/ in which God took possession of my heart/ so much and so well that from that hour/ from that mysterious conversation/ from that delightful, divine encounter/ my only desire was to give my life/ to give back a little of his great love/ to the Beloved in the Eucharist/ who reposes in my weak heart/ inundating it with all his Favours” (Poetry, 47).

The difficulties she had to face in the process of becoming mature — such as the contrast between the desire to enter Carmel and the opposition of her most loved mother; the desire to remain recollected in intimacy with Jesus and to take part in the feasts by dancing, where young men fascinated by her beauty paid attention to her; the feeling of being called to solitude, which required detachment and separation, and being involved in so many artistic and social activities; giving her whole heart to God and at the same time being ready to help and be affectionate with her friends — they found their solution in the attraction exerted on her by “the too great love” of Christ, which shines forth from the cross, the wood that is capable “of lighting the flame of love” (letter #138).

Among the passages most loved by Elizabeth is the beginning of the hymn in *the letter to the Ephesians*, where Saint Paul announces the glorious destiny of man by saying that we have been thought of, blessed, and predestined from eternity “to be holy and faultless before him in love” (Eph. 1:4). Because of this “souls who chat about their own self, who are preoccupied about their sensitivity, dally with a useless thought or whatever desire, scatter their strength, “as it is not ordered towards God” (*Last Retreat*, 3). All that is not done for God is worthless (cfr. letter #340). It empties instead of filling; it scatters instead of gathering. It is not activity that disperses, but not believing “that a Being called Love dwells in us” (letter #330), not being united to the Being who loves us, to the Father who in Christ who awaits us in his house and with his Spirit who sustains us on our journey.

The great act of faith — Elizabeth reminds us, echoing the evangelist John — is to believe in this immense love God has for us (cfr. *Heaven in Faith*, 20). The unification of the person comes about then through the potency of the act of faith and reverberates in the feelings. Therefore, to grow harmoniously, to be healed from the wounds of life and mature as a person, our objective ought not to be the cure of one’s own self or the overcoming of our own weakness but, rather, to come out of ourselves, to leave aside our own self (cfr. *Last Retreat*, 26) in an advantageous exchange with the self of Christ who “wants to consume our life to change it into his own: our own full of vice and his full of grace and glory, prepared exactly for us, if only we renounce ourselves” (*Heaven in Faith*, 18).

The secret then is to recognize how much we are loved, fixing our eyes on the Master who came to light the fire of love and wants to see it burn in his disciples, so that it might spread visibly throughout the whole world. Divine love is so excessive and without measure, that it carries away the soul that permits him to do so, making it constant, no longer subject to the unforeseeable and inevitable disturbances of life, “because it sees the Invisible” and so then “it is no longer stopped by tastes or feelings”; it actually happens “that the more it is tried the more its faith grows, because it knows, so to say, how to overcome all obstacles so as to go to rest itself on the breast of infinite love, who does only works of love” (*Heaven in Faith*, 20). On the other hand, this is the human experience of the Son sent by the Father upon the earth and accepted by the humble Mother, this is the longing written into the being of every person, this is the grace of baptism which therefore constitutes a new birth, a permanent enlightenment for those who keep it in mind, the beginning of life eternal (cfr. *Heaven in Faith*, 2).

At the base of her immaturity lay indecision with respect to union with God, remaining centered upon herself and not choosing love. The action with which God transforms and unites us is a quasi-physical phenomenon, a consummation of self-love, of the fear of suffering, of vices, of aversion towards God, all of this requires us to let go our will in order to be grafted into love, the “double current between the One who is and the one who is not” (letter #131).

Wretchedness, a place blessed by mercy

If we want to become — with our consecration and our work — an efficient sign of the Father’s action, “we are called to keep our gaze fixed on mercy” (*Misericordiae vultus*, 3). Often, in fact, whether we formulate it, or it remains implicit, a question hovers in our mind which renders us sterile, weakening our thrust and taking enthusiasm from us: what do I get out of my weakness? How much better it would be if it were not there, if only I were much stronger; if I were unassailable, how many problems less....and the ideal becomes unreachable! Thus, the life of discomfort and frustration is set up before us.

Elizabeth reasons in a completely different manner, as also Pope Francis does, when contemplating the mystery of Jesus’ passion. She says that the strength of tenderness is known only by accepting to enter into contact with the real life of others, without standing back at a distance from the human drama, by touching the suffering flesh of ourselves and others (cfr. *Evangelii gaudium*, 269-270). Speaking to her sister Guite, our saint suggests to her to cancel the word discouragement from her vocabulary: the more weakness is felt, and the Lord seems hidden, the more it is necessary to rejoice, reminding yourself that “the abyss of your misery attracts the abyss of his mercy” (letter #298). The interior life is fathomless because in it is the God who loves us without any shadow of change, an abyss of love that we possess within us (cfr. letter #292).

If we use the light of faith, we find trust and love, which permit us to descend into our depths, instead of remaining rigid on the rippling surface of the sea of life. In this way we experience the abyss that is God, inseparably tied to our being and, reaching the bottom, “the divine impact will take place; it is down there that the abyss of our nothingness, of our destitution will encounter the abyss of mercy, the immensity of all of God” (*Heaven in Faith*, 4).

Only by recognizing this truth, which is the heart of the Gospel message, is it possible to recognize “God under the veil of humanity” (*Last Retreat*, 4) and to hear from him the word in the present. If we want to find peace, we have to prostrate ourselves and throw ourselves “into the abyss of our nothingness”: from this will be born adoration, “from the ecstasy of love” (*Last Retreat*, 21). From this derives trust: fear of our own weakness disappears, because “the Strong One is in me and his virtue is all-powerful; it operates, says the Apostle, far beyond what we could hope for” (letter #333).

Therefore, how much hope is it possible to have if it is true that “the weakest soul, even the most guilty is the one that has more reasons to hope”, given that “it possesses in itself a Saviour who wants to purify her in every moment” (letter #249), since “his mission is that of pardoning” (letter #145). We must see our nothingness, our poverty and powerlessness, recognizing calmly that we are not capable of progress and perseverance and place them before the mercy of the Master (cfr. *Heaven in Faith*, 12). In this way we can find freedom and peace which are the expression of reconciliation with ourselves in Christ — “He is in me, I am his sanctuary/ Oh, is it not the “vision of peace?” (*Poetry*, 88) — desiring [that] He grows in us and, through this growth, becomes known to mankind. Therefore, sanctity is truly within reach because it is found in a movement of descent, not of elevation:

“The All-powerful needs to descend/ to pour out the torrents of his love. / He is searching for a heart that wants to understand him/ and in this one he makes his abode. / [.....] “Look at me, you can better understand/ the gift of yourself, the annihilation/ To exalt myself I must always descend, / that your repose might be in a basement! / It is always here that meeting happens” (Poetry, 91).

The Eucharist is the All of the Trinity who invades us

The mystery of the Holy Trinity is the abyss into which Elizabeth, losing herself, finds herself (cfr. letter #62). He is “an Immensity of love overflowing” (letter #199), which soaks into and gives life to every fiber of being; that is poured into the soul in the measure that the person draws with faith on baptismal grace and is progressively conformed to Christ. The horizon of reality continues always to expand (cfr. letter #89) and light is shed on everything, because Christ enters into the depths of the soul, “into those abysses in which only He lives” (letter #125), making us participate in his way of looking at things, in his feelings, in his heart: He *fascinates*, carries us away; under his gaze the horizon becomes so beautiful, so vast, so luminous....” (letter #128). “The Trinity is not an abstract and complicated truth, but it is the life of the Three — as they are called — who in their happy communion create the world and humanity involving them in the splendor of Love, Light and Life. God is the Father, his Son and their Spirit: our home, our intimacy, the paternal home from which we ought never leave” (*Heaven in Faith*, 2).

In the logic of faith, the existential roots and consequences of being Christian are strictly connected: to live in faith, to know the love of Christ crucified for us, to live in a light which renders beautiful even the most painful moments of life, to be transformed by the Spirit as

happened in Mary, to live inhabited by the Trinity, to find the peace of heaven upon earth, for Elizabeth were synonymous.

The Eucharist is the key to this luminous and prophetic vision of life. In the experience of Elizabeth, from the day of her first Communion, sacramental Communion with Jesus and prolonged adoration of his constant giving of self to us were the experimental source, the door of communication, the place where flowed together all the illuminations and graces she received in her brief and most intense life. Entering the chapel while the Blessed Sacrament was exposed seemed to her “like glimpsing heaven, as it truly was, since the One whom I adore in faith is the same that those in glory contemplate face to face” (letter #137). “Nothing tells us more about the love that is in God’s heart than the Eucharist: it is union, consummation, it is he in us and us in him, is this not heaven upon earth? Heaven in Faith, in expectation of the vision face to face so desired”. The wait for this encounter really makes “everything disappear, and it seems you are already penetrating into the Mystery of God” (letter #165). In the Eucharist the reality of heaven is made present, communicated and made personal for every soul by the Spirit, because heaven is “that which the Spirit creates in you” (letter #239). The Eucharist is a reality so essential that Elizabeth committed herself to reach the goal of being worthy to receive the Eucharist daily (in a time when it was not the habitual practice): “Well then, my God, I have realized all my desires: to receive You every day and, between one Communion and the next, to live in union with You, in intimacy with You. Oh! This is Paradise on earth!” (*Diary*, 150). Like St. Francis, Elizabeth considered the Eucharist strictly connected to Christmas, from which emanates the splendid light which makes visible to our eyes the disturbing Mystery of the Incarnation, the beginning of the fulfillment of salvation and the glorification of humanity through the outpouring of charity and intimate union with God, which by means of faith is accomplished in the human heart (cfr. *Poetry*, 75, 86, 88, 91).

In this intimate transfusion of love, human experience changes radically. What can we discover and “touch with the hand” — of ourselves, of God, of others, of reality — by communicating with full confidence in the mystery of faith?

1) *We are another humanity*. If we think for a moment of the increasing burden there is — in our relationships, in complying with public opinion, in the growing up of young people — the visibility of our own image and making oneself “available” through snapshots of our own daily life showing our wish to be “for others”, all this makes us aware of how different is what Elizabeth has to tell us and her own personal experience. For her it was not possible to be truly oneself and make oneself present to the other in a real and not transient manner, except by placing oneself in the depths in which we find our human image in the divine person of Christ — the visible image of the Father.

When a person does not know herself or does not become known as a space of personal communication, she does not represent and is not worth anything. Instead, by opening herself to the splendors of faith, the person “discovers her God present, living in her; she in turn remains present in him, in holy simplicity, and He guards her with jealous care” (*Last Retreat*, 5). Everything becomes precious if we discover this invisible intimacy and seek to join our human experience with his, fixing our gaze on the mysteries of his life, seeking to intuit his

feelings, which stand out in the Gospels, in order to make them our own: “it seems to me that it is necessary to come so close to the Master, to communicate with your soul, to make yourself aware of all of his movements and then depart like him into the Father’s will” (letter #158). The worth of our quotations would shoot up to the stars becoming through interior identification “the sacrament of Christ”; in every expression of our existence — joyful or sad, strength or weakness — we can “give to our all-holy God, all loving God crucified”. This entails “allowing oneself to transform into the one same image with him” by means of “faith, which gazes and prays without ceasing; the will, imprisoned and which no longer turns back; a true heart, pure, which beats under the blessing of the Master” (*Intimate notes*, 14). This Pauline-Carmelite mystic overcomes the vain attempt to find oneself in the recognition of others, by which we expose our superficiality and our inability; we find ourselves and the other by searching for the Other, keeping ourselves aware that we are — all of us — made in the image of Christ:

“That I may be for him another humanity in which he renews all his Mystery. And you, O Father bend down upon your poor little creature, ‘cover her with your shadow’ (cfr. Mt. 17:5) and see in her nothing but the ‘Beloved in whom you have placed all your delight’ (cfr. ivi)” (Intimate notes, 15).

2) *To become persons of communication, who radiate him.* Every person carries within himself those who have played an important part in his life: the persons who generate him, those who have contributed to his formation, those who have been at his side in the crucial moments of life. On meeting together, we encounter and communicate also something of the persons we carry in our being.

The sublime mystery of the “new incarnation”, that is accomplished in the soul, allowing oneself to love from the Crucified one, right down to one’s own wretchedness, loving him in our turn out of gratitude “until we are drained”, is the “no longer I, it is He who lives in me” (*Poetry*, 75), which allows Love incarnate in Christ to radiate out (cfr. *Intimate notes*, 15). The communion, which people of good will are searching to build and which in our epoch continues to be wounded and offended, can be realized only in the measure the divine will of “restoring all things in Christ” is realized. The road is marked out and Elizabeth describes it in this manner: “Let us contemplate this adored image, holding ourselves without ceasing under the light which emanate from it so that it becomes imprinted in us; then we will face up to everything with the same attitude our holy Master would use” (*Heaven in Faith*, 27).

Love of Christ, the Church and people go hand in hand and support each other in turn. Unifying ourselves with Christ in order to have “the soul full of his soul, full of his prayer, all the being captured and given” and “enter into all his joys, share all his sadness”, makes us “to be fruitful, co-redeemers, generating souls to grace, multiplying the adopted children of the Father, Christ’s redeemed, coheirs to his glory” (*Intimate notes*, 13). To render glory to God is to render Christ visible — his life — in our existence. Here is revealed that inconstancy and listlessness in prayer are proportional to how much we are not aware of this vocation which is our identity: “I will be in communion by it with the One who is a consuming fire, so that by this he transforms me continually into himself, so that she may render him glory” (letter #328). But the soul, touched by the Holy Spirit, “will become like a flame of love that spreads out into all the

members of the Body of Christ which is the Church” (letter #250). Only thus “by our generosity/ will we help holy Church/ and love will be seen to reign/ a prelude of divine dwelling” (*Poetry*, 94); “to live by love, to live by his life/ is what makes us his apostles./ So great is the power of a captive soul/ I believe that she obtains everything” (*Poetry*, 77).

3) *Living suffering as a blessing*. It is true that we are not created to suffer but to be joyful, not to die but to live, and we should add: not to possess ourselves egoistically but to give ourselves generously. At the basis of fear and refusal of suffering can be found a closing off, a deep solitude, the idol of physical beauty and efficiency, arrogance, in the last analysis the lack of an unfathomable experience — to put it as Elizabeth would — of divine-human love. Elizabeth had lived this, she was immersed in it, and it was let overwhelm her so much as to request it insistently for herself and persons dear to her, in her intimate conversations with the Three.

Terms which — just to hear them said — evoke sentiments of sadness, make us suspicious and do not please us, such as victim, sacrifice, immolation, renunciation, forgetfulness of self are the only ones which set out, in Scripture and spiritual experience, that necessity of Easter and the truth of love for someone. Elizabeth understood this well and so she said: “Let us ask him to make us true in our love, that is to transform us into victims of sacrifice, since it seems to me that sacrifice is no other than to translate love into action” (letter #250). For this, it is a source of happiness to think “that the Father has predestined me to be conformed to his crucified Son” (letter #324).

The Eucharist is a sacrament of communion, a banquet of heaven, a joyful feast because someone has been immolated, sacrificed, annihilated for us. We can then perceive the theological spiritual centering of expressions such as the following and the beauty of the Eucharistic perspective that opens: “Adored Master, you search for a host/ and in your charity want/ because you dream that there rise up to the Father/ sacrifice and adoration” (*Poetry*, 91).

Peace and repose are not born from the absence of problems and sufferings, but when you “know how to appreciate the happiness of suffering and see in it the revelation of “immense love” (Eph. 2:4) of which St. Paul speaks (letter #323 bis); if “pain is the revelation of love” it becomes precious and blessed and can become “my favorite dwelling place, it is there that I find peace and repose, there where I am sure to meet my Master and to live with him” (letter #323). Because of this, a Christian should not have any other ideal than that of “being transformed into Jesus crucified” (letter #324): by discovering that Christ dwells in pain, she will receive strength in the painful and frustrating happenings in life. So in the light of eternity, sacrifices, struggles, troubles are reasons for joy, not for sadness (cfr. *Heaven in Faith*, 30); the secret is to learn to take refuge always “in the prayer of the Master; on the cross he saw you, prayed for you and that prayer and this prayer is eternally alive and present before the Father, and this will save you from your suffering” (letter #324).

Suffering, from being a “proof” of the lack of love, becomes an “echo” of divine life which knocks to enter into the heart and shed light on humanity. In the most painful sickness, he becomes signs of hope for those who stand beside us and the one who suffers without hoping,

if we live the sickness as the mystery of Christ dead and risen from the dead, who celebrates his Mass with his disciple (cfr. letter #309).

4) *Time is redeemed*. The light of eternity gives the correct perspective on reality because, giving to life the sense of a good origin and end, it places them within a process in which the single happenings are made relative and redeemed by a process of receiving absolution that would make them break open, overloading them with expectations. At the same time, the fulness of personal being is being prepared by all the choices we make, the actions we commit, the words we utter: “life is such a serious thing: every minute is given to us to ‘take root’ even more in God” (letter #333) and to arrive at resembling in life the divine model, in a union always more intimate with Him.

The Trinity “desires to have us with itself, not only in eternity, but now in time, which is eternity commenced and yet always in becoming” (*Heaven in Faith*, 1). What should we do so that this process happens in us? The secret is “to forget about yourself, to abandon yourself, not to rely on yourself, to look only at the Master, look only to him, to receive in the same way that joy or pain come directly from his love” (letter #333).

In this contemplative dimension it becomes possible to read happenings, from the smallest to the greatest, as an expression of the Father’s will — as Christ did — so that for those who believe “every circumstance, every happening, every suffering as every joy is a sacrament” (*Heaven in Faith*, 10). In everything it is possible to communicate with him, reality becomes meaningful, events become connected, points come together allowing us to see into a beautiful texture, wise, suitable for our own human growth. If the eternal Word has entered into reality and is united in some manner to every person, then “through everything I can, right from this earth, / contemplate him in the light of faith/ [. . .] unite myself to him, touch him with faith” (*Poetry*, 91).

Elizabeth had learnt this in the long wait to enter the monastery, which favored an interiorization of the place of contemplation and of union with God, so as to live it in mundane circumstances, being concentrated on what was essential in the vocation and Christian witness: the realities of faith, the realism of the divine will, the presence of God in the midst of daily events.

It is no longer possible to experience that “there is not enough time” or have experience that what we are doing is draining our life away, because we do not find any meaning or because it represents an escape from ourselves. Faith, if we have not tamed it, keeps us awake, attentive to gather God’s graces which cross our path every day, gathered “in the light of his creative word, in that faith ‘in the excess of his love’ (Eph. 2:4) which enables God to fill the soul ‘according to its capacity’ (Eph. 3:19)” (*Heaven in Faith*, 34).

5) *To live “from within”, grateful and connected to true life*. Sanctity is to live “in contact with him in the depths of an unfathomable abyss, *from within*” (*Heaven in Faith*, 32). “From within” is the expression which sums up the charism and eternal mission of Elizabeth of the Trinity: to live in relationship with God, the mystery of the Church, friendships, activities, the worries of existence, the events of one’s own era, deliberately and tenaciously within the most strict

union with the Word incarnate, crucified and risen, who is being given constantly to every creature. Dwelling within the Mystery of faith corresponds to passing from one's own ego to the shore of the divine ego and the consequent opening out of life's horizon and view; to be consolidated in faith is the only thing necessary for our life, since it allows us to "not act except under the great light of God, never according to impressions and imagination" (*The Greatness of Our Vocation*, 11). It is the experience of heaven upon earth, of the realism of divine life in the communion of saints, of perceptible realization — already present, even if not yet in fulness — of the words of truth and life that revelation hands over to us as our luminous inheritance as children of God.

Praying to be entirely present in the adored Trinity, awake in faith and abandoned to its creative action, Elizabeth desired that "every instant carry me deeper into the depth of your Mystery" (*Intimate notes*, 15); to live "from within" means to rest your being totally in the Trinity, "God wholly love": this intimacy "has been the beautiful sun shining on my life, making it an anticipated heaven; it is what sustains me today in suffering" (letter #333). If we permit infinite beauty to imprint itself on us it is possible, even in a world where "everything is contaminated", to be persons "beautiful with his beauty, luminous with his light" (letter #331), who grow in gratitude and always share in the joy of God's children (cfr. *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, 12), capable of catching a reflection of his beauty and love in nature and persons.

A healthy relationship with creation entails "the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change" (*Laudato si'*, 218), by recognizing gratefully that the world is a gift received from the Father's hands. This recognition propels us to act with spontaneity and respect, without surprise towards whatever actuality, aware that all beings form together a wonderful universal communion. The world "is not contemplated from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has united us to all beings" (*ivi*, 220), secure that "Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light" (*ivi*, 221). Thanks to the sacraments — particularly in the Eucharist — in which nature is assumed into God and transformed into mediation, "we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane" (*ivi*, 235) than that of profit and exploitation. It is extraordinary the agreement between Elizabeth and Pope Francis, who aims at laying the foundation of an integral ecology:

"The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist fulness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. [...] The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration" (ivi, 236).

Mary, a model of listening which makes fruitful

“Recollect yourself, within your soul/ the mystery is fulfilled. / Jesus, Splendor of the Father, / has taken flesh in you. / With the Virgin Mother/ clasp your Beloved/ he is in you” (*Poetry*, 86). Mary is the creature who cannot be related but only contemplated, because she has penetrated in a unique way the mystery of Christ; her help can be invoked, we can learn from her how to guard the gift by placing oneself in her maternal hands: “This Mother of grace will form my soul so that her tiny daughter may be a ‘radiant’, living image of her first born, the Son of the Eternal one, he who was the perfect praise of glory of his Father” (*Last Retreat*, 2).

“In her everything happens within and for this reason she is the model of the disciple who allows himself to be reached and transformed by the living Word of the Father, remaining docile to the creative action of the Spirit; Mary, that disciple of her Son, teaches us to adore in silence, to suffer and stand beneath the cross, to contribute to the work of redemption; humble, free from oneself, forgetful of self, full of charity and ready to hasten to help, always recollected “within herself with the Word of God” (*Last Retreat*, 40). Elizabeth had a deep admiration for the Virgin Mother, displayed wonderment at her humble greatness, which had made heaven open, the one in whose womb the Three were able to find in their creature a dwelling place (cfr. *Poetry*, 79):

“Think what ought to be in the soul of the Virgin when, after the Incarnation, she possessed in herself the Word incarnate, the Gift of God. . . In what silence, in what recollection, in what adoration she must have buried herself in the depth of her soul to clasp that God whose Mother she was” (letter #183).

Mary is the intrepid witness to an enormous event; which took place in the strength of silence which made her capable of listening deeply, who consented to the Spirit imprinting in her the eternal Son: she teaches us how to prepare “a very calm dwelling place in our soul, in which always resounds the canticle of love, of thanksgiving” (letter #165); she tells us how to listen: “Make it so that I listen to you always,/ unchangeable in my faith,/ that in everything I adore you/ and live only for you” (*Poetry*, 88). The passion to listen to him is a taste for harmony, a capacity to be in tune with the soul of Christ, aware that He “has so many things to tell us” (letter #164). In fact, like Mary, we too are “at One” with the Lord, who gives himself to us and dwells in our soul. From this arises the need for silence, which is so difficult to reach, “in order to listen to him always and to penetrate deeper and deeper into his infinite being; identified with Him who loves, she found him everywhere, she saw him shining in everything” (letter #133). In the person is born a praise without end, an adoration of the gift of God that increases charity and the passion to make Christ known, to the point that “praise of glory” becomes the new identity:

“A praise of glory is a soul who dwells in God, who loves him with a pure and disinterested love, without looking for herself in the sweetness of this love; who loves him beyond all his gifts and also when none have been received; [. . .] she is a soul of silence which is held like a lyre under the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit, so that he makes divine harmonies come out of it; she is a soul who gazes at God in faith and simplicity, she is a mirror that reflects in everything that which he is; she is like a fathomless abyss in which he can run, expand himself; [. . .] in the end a praise of glory

is always occupied in thanksgiving. All her actions, her movements, her thoughts, her aspirations, while they make her take root more deeply in love, are like an echo of the eternal Sanctus” (Heaven in Faith, 43).

Conclusion

Elisabeth of the Trinity is a precious gift for us and for the Church in this age marked by crises of identity, depression, indifference, unrestrained yearnings, defacement of nature, and manipulation of what is human. She gives in a strong, beautiful and convincing manner witness to the realism of the truths in which we believe, and she helps us to grasp that, if we do not recover the eschatological dimension of our faith, this loses effectiveness and becomes useless, without biting and transforming strength.

We know what her mission is, what she is doing, in what she requests us to collaborate, with ardent and thankful love to the Trinity:

“In heaven my mission will be to attract souls, helping them to come out of themselves to cling to God in a wholly simple and loving manner and to keep them in this great interior silence, which allows God to imprint himself in them, to transform them into himself” (letter #335).

Let us thank her for the words written in her last letter that, knowing her heart, we know are also directed to us:

“Dear little brother, before going to heaven, your Elizabeth wants to tell you yet another time of all her affection and her desire to assist you, day by day, until you reach heaven [. . .] You will have to put up with struggles, you will meet obstacles along the road of life, but do not become discouraged, call me! Yes call your little sister, in this way you will increase the happiness of her heaven: she will be so happy to help you to win, to remain worthy of God..... When I will be close to God, recollect yourself in prayer, we will find one another even better” (letter #342).

**Pope Francis' Angelus
(on the Trinity)**

Saint Peter's Square

Sunday, 12 June 2022

Dear brothers and sisters, buongiorno and blessed Sunday!

Today is the Solemnity of the Holy Trinity, and in the Gospel of the celebration Jesus presents to us the other two divine Persons, the Father and the Holy Spirit. He says of the Spirit: "He will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come". And then, regarding the Father, he says: "All that the Father has is mine" (Jn. 16:14-15). We notice that the Holy Spirit speaks, but not of himself: he announces Jesus and reveals the Father. And we also notice that the Father, who possesses everything because he is the origin of all things, gives to the Son everything he possesses: he keeps nothing for himself and he gives himself fully to the Son. That is, the Holy Spirit speaks not of himself; he speaks about Jesus, he speaks about others. And the Father does not give himself, he gives the Son. It is open generosity, one open to the other.

And now let us look at ourselves, at what we talk about and what we possess. When we speak, we always want others to say something good about us, and often, we only speak about ourselves and what we do. How often! "I have done this and that...", "I had this problem...". We always speak like this. How different this is from the Holy Spirit, who speaks by announcing others, and the Father the Son! And how jealous we are of what we possess. How hard it is for us to share what we possess with others, even with those who lack the basic necessities! It is easy to talk about it, but difficult to practice.

This is why celebrating the Most Holy Trinity is not so much a theological exercise, but a revolution in our way of life. God, in whom each Person lives for the other in a continual relationship, in continual rapport, not for himself, provokes us to live with others and for others. Open. Today we can ask ourselves if our life reflects the God we believe in: do I, who profess faith in God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, truly believe that I need others in order to live, that I need to give myself to others, that I need to serve others? Do I affirm this in words or do I affirm it with my life?

The Triune God, dear brothers and sisters, must be manifested in this way — with deeds rather than words. God, who is the author of life, is transmitted not so much through books as through witness of life. He who, as the evangelist John writes, "is love" (1 Jn. 4:16), reveals himself through love. Let us think about the good, generous, gentle people we have met; recalling their way of thinking and acting, we can have a small reflection of God-Love. And what does it mean to love? Not only to wish them well and to be good to them, but first and foremost, at the root, to welcome, to be open to others, to make room for others, to give space to others. This is what it means to love, at the root.

To understand this better, let us think of the names of the divine Persons, which we pronounce every time we make the sign of the cross: each name contains the presence of the other. The Father, for example, would not be such without the Son; likewise, the Son cannot be considered

alone, but always as the Son of the Father. And the Holy Spirit, in turn, is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. In short, the Trinity teaches us that one can never be without the other. We are not islands; we are in the world to live in God's image: open, in need of others and in need of helping others. And so, let us ask ourselves this last question: in everyday life, am I too a reflection of the Trinity? The sign of the cross I make every day — the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit — is that sign of the cross we make every day a gesture for its own sake, or does it inspire my way of speaking, of encountering, of responding, of judging, of forgiving?

May Our Lady, daughter of the Father, mother of the Son and spouse of the Spirit, help us to welcome and bear witness in life to the mystery of God-Love.

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The Message of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity (by Margaret Dorgan)

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Elizabeth of the Trinity is already for many people the patron saint of their inner life with God. Her beatification on November 25, 1984 highlighted the importance of this French nun who is Carmel's most significant gift to the roster of sanctity since St. Thérèse of Lisieux.

Her message, like Thérèse's, is directed to anyone who longs to take hold of personal existence and find deeper meaning in the ongoing flow of ordinary time. She teaches the eager seeker how to grasp the passing moments, dramatic or drab, and plunge down below their surface to the underlying depths where God is waiting to be found.

Elizabeth was aware that what she comprehended of the mystery of an indwelling God was not for herself alone. Eleven days before her death at the age of 26 on November 9, 1906, she wrote about her "mission in Heaven." Her secret was so simple that it could be conveyed to anybody. "I have found heaven on earth, because heaven is God and God is within me. The day I understood that everything became clear to me." Nothing complex, nothing extraordinary, nothing that requires a long arduous application of the mind to comprehend. "God in me. I in Him. That is my life," she said. Plain words. One-syllable words. They expressed for Elizabeth the key to living fully — how to experience heaven already, how to taste in advance what eternity will give in completion.

As a child of ten, Elizabeth Catez was delighted to learn that her first name meant "dwelling place of God." She grew up with her widowed mother and only sister in a middle-class family that moved in military circles. The divine presence within her was even then the focus of her awareness. When she entered the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of Dijon at the age of twenty-one, she found there an affirmation of the way she already lived as a layperson.

In Elizabeth, there is no sense of a break in her life, a clearly defined before and after once she had entered the cloister. She obviously felt the opportunities for intimacy with God that her married sister's life offered were not radically different from what was possible for herself as a nun. She did not dilute her message when she wrote to relatives and friends beyond her monastery walls. What she experienced in such fullness was equally available to them. A letter to her mother says, "Think of the fact that your soul is the temple of God. At every moment of the day and night, the three divine persons are dwelling within you. When one knows that, one is no longer ever alone. It is so simple. There is no need of beautiful thoughts, only an outpouring of the heart."

In the same letter, she recognizes that awareness of God can take other forms. "If you prefer to think of the good God as close to you rather than within you, follow your attraction, provided you live with him." So it can be God-within-us or equally God-with-us. In either case, it is a matter of turning our attention Godward.

Elizabeth's pondering of Scripture, especially the New Testament passages of Paul and John, deepened her realization that to live in the divine presence is to anticipate heaven. She quotes Ephesians 2:19, "You are no longer guests or strangers but you belong to the city of saints and the house of God."

For some people, the most significant part of Elizabeth's message is this assurance that heaven can begin on earth. We don't have to wait for eternity to draw on our divine inheritance as sons and daughters of God. Elizabeth writes, "Heaven is within us, because He who is the joy of the blessed in the beatific vision gives Himself to us in faith and mystery. It is the same thing."

If a foretaste of heaven is available to us in advance, what is the meaning of time? How does time function in this perspective? Elizabeth sees the temporary as flowing into the eternal. The temporal is our means of access to the eternal. It passes on, and yet through it we reach to what does not pass on.

Reflecting on time, the French Carmelite begins with a quotation from John 17:24, "Father, I will that where I am they also whom you have given me may be with me." She then goes on, "Such is Christ's wish. . . . He wills that where He is we should be also, not only for eternity but already in time which is eternity begun and ever in progress."

Time then is of supreme value. But how does it take on aspects of the eternal? It does so through the now of this moment which holds God for me. She says, "He (God) requires of me to live in an eternal present without before or after, to be wholly at one in myself in this eternal Now."

Here we have an asceticism of time that requires full attention to the unfolding moment. I do not indulge myself by wandering in thought or desire to what has been or to what might be. I keep my energy focused on what this moment communicates to me — whether it be the call to serve others, the duty of work, the enjoyment of beauty.

Elizabeth's words "to be wholly at one in myself" express the unity of attention. A dissipated imagination, the rise and fall of fantasies — all of this scatters my inner strength. It breaks up my attentiveness, pulling me this way and that. A focused attention, on the contrary, brings me back to myself and then leads me to my rootedness in God. Elizabeth tells us, "Each incident, each event, each suffering, as well as each joy, is a sacrament which gives God to us. We no longer make a distinction between these things."

In offering us the possibility of living in the now of the present moment in an anticipation of heaven, has this young nun simply worked out a romantic spiritual artifice? Is she urging us to become so spiritual that we function in a separate sphere, removed from commonplace human contact and turned in on a personal universe? All of that could happen to an imprudent enthusiast embracing Elizabeth's message with unbalanced abandon.

But every principle of sanctity can be pushed to an extreme where it no longer functions effectively for human beings. The Little Way of St. Thérèse, which takes the ordinary and makes it totally for God, can be twisted out of shape and turned into trivialization. Littleness then becomes obsessive. Someone could spend the day picking up pins for Jesus and never do anything significant with the stuff of living.

Elizabeth's doctrine would take a different kind of twisting. The risk would be to make it into a form of angelism in which heaven so dominates the mind that an abnormal absorption results. I

would then build myself a psychic penthouse in order to retreat from the hurly-burly of daily interaction. Though bodily present to events and situations, I would make a mental jump to remove myself from them. This dangerous spacing-out has nothing to do with living in the divine presence. Elizabeth is not urging us to get away from everyday existence but to dig down to the deepest dimension which undergirds its being. She opens our eyes to what is hidden in the too familiar. She shows us the mark of God on it, the quality of heavenwardness that all earthly things radiate, the way time points inwardly to the everlasting.

A balanced understanding of Elizabeth perceives her doctrine as simply taking the gift of grace with utmost seriousness. If grace is a participation in the divine nature and if with the created gift comes the uncreated giver, what are the implications for a human life? Limited as she was by a very inadequate secular education, Elizabeth brings out these implications by drawing on the basic theology of the Trinity, on her own experience of the indwelling, and also on her long pondering of scripture. Add to this the guidance of John of the Cross and the Flemish mystic Blessed Jan van Ruysbroeck. These are the primary building stones that support her spiritual edifice. She constructs on carefully surveyed territory, as any Carmelite would.

Of all schools of spirituality none is more firmly set on the ground than Carmel's with its insistence on taking life exactly as it is without asking for the creation of special circumstances. At the same time, it offers the invitation to *taste* divine realities, not merely to know them from afar. Elizabeth resonated with this tradition long before she sensed her own mission to add to it.

Her spiritual vision makes her particularly valuable today for Catholics who have turned to Buddhist and Hindu teachers. For Elizabeth, all enlightenment is found in Christ Jesus. With her, every psychological process that helps us to advance in meditative practice rises out of a Christian matrix. The mystic way she points to, more and more illuminates the contents of Christian faith with each significant step forward.

This advance in faith makes Elizabeth a much-needed mentor to contemporary Christian prayer movements that have been able to lead their members through the first stages of praying but haven't always known how to deal with the passage into a more contemplative mode of prayer.

In the last year of her life, a passage in Ephesians 1:6 acted like a spark to set her on fire with a new sense of vocation. The phrase "praise of glory" gave her a new name which she saw as fulfilling the promise of Revelation 2:17, "I will give a stone with a new name written on it." As with all her enrichments by God, she shares this call to praise with others, explaining how they, too, can fulfill the same role. Her final retreat, mostly written during the sleepless nights before she died of Addison's disease, leaves these words like a legacy for distribution. "One who does everything in Him, with Him, by Him and for Him with that limpid gaze which gives a resemblance to His simple being — this person by every movement, longing, and action, however ordinary it may be, is rooted more deeply in Him who is loved. Everything within pays homage to the thrice-holy God. This is to be, as it were, a perpetual Sanctus, an unceasing praise of glory."

In the final mystic vision which celebrates the Christ-life in us leading to the depths of the triune God, Elizabeth still speaks of the ordinary as the vehicle of our communing with the divine.

THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Introduction

What is meant by the presence of God?

St. John of the Cross uses the phrase “the nature of union of the soul with God” to explain the presence of God in one’s life. First, His presence is in essence, not in holy souls only, but in sinful souls and all creation; for it is by this presence that God gives life to all beings, and once it’s withdrawn all things would return to nothing. John employs the term “substantial union” by which God sustains every soul and dwells in it, substantially, even those in mortal sin (see *The Ascent*, 2.5:3). This union between God and creatures always exists. John primarily talks about another union which he explains as “the union of likeness” with God. This union does not always exist, except when there is a likeness of love by active participation in it (see A.2.5:3).

However, it is important to note that the presence of God – who is naturally communicating Himself to souls through nature and through grace – **is not different in kind, but in intensity**. The soul is now more aware of the presence of God. This increase of consciousness happens because in the process of purification, the soul’s capacity and receptivity for God has increased; it has made more “room for God” – A.2.5:7 (see *Ascent to Joy*, *The Goal: Union with God*, pg. 49, emphasis added).

“Finally, God’s presence by spiritual affection, which the Bride in *The Spiritual Canticle* asks for, is a clear vision of the divine being and beauty but ‘since the conditions of this life will not allow such a manifestation... God communicates to her some semi-clear glimpses of his divine beauty’ (SC.11:3-4). Such glimpses are foretastes of eternal glory. Thus, there are not three *kinds* of presence that are disclosed to the soul, but three degrees: **nature** (preconscious awareness – Substantial Union), **grace** (faith – The Union of Likeness by active participation), and **glory** (beatific vision)” (*Ascent to Joy*, pg. 51).

Under this study, we will read, discuss, and reflect on the practical wisdom of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. In his writings, he shows how to participate in and experience the presence of God throughout his daily life. “For three centuries his simple wisdom has crossed denominational boundaries and theological differences to inspire spiritual seekers throughout the world. The universality of his appeal is extraordinary, but it is due in large part to the very ordinariness he taught [and exemplified]. God is available in ordinary life, in the commonest places and most mundane activities. The practice of God’s presence can be as simple as a little interior glance, as plain as a bare desire.” (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, Foreword to the American Edition, pg. ix, ICS Publications).

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

Brother Lawrence was born Nicolas Herman in eastern France in 1614 to a peasant family and, although poorly educated, was taught the Christian faith. “At the age of eighteen, a sudden, cosmic intuition of the grandeur and presence of God grasped him profoundly.” It was a silent call of the divine mystery and a first conversion. Nonetheless, Nicolas did not turn toward

religious life but chose military service instead. He became a soldier, fighting in the brutal chaos of the 30-year war where he was captured and suffered wounds that made him permanently lame. Nicolas then returned to his parents' home.

At the age of twenty-six he made a serious decision. In mid-June of 1640 he entered the Order of Discalced Carmelites on the Rue de Vaugirard in Paris as a lay brother. In mid-August Nicolas Herman received the brown Carmelite habit and took the religious name of Lawrence with the devotional title "of the Resurrection," a mystery he admirably lived in the sight of the living God, Jesus.

The two years of his novitiate completed, this young brother made his solemn profession of vows on August 14, 1642, at the age of twenty-eight. Louis de Sainte-Thérèse, his prior, summed up the lay brother's vocation as one of prayer and manual work. Following his profession, Lawrence served as cook for the Parisian community for fifteen years. Some years, this community numbered up to one hundred friars plus many young men in formation.

More and more, however, Lawrence suffered from a kind of sciatic gout that made him limp. The kitchen became too difficult a task for someone physically handicapped, so Brother Lawrence was given the responsibility of repairing sandals for the monks. There he kept in repair more than two hundred sandals of his fellow Discalced Carmelites!

His physical suffering increased, however. Lucid up to his last moments, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection died on February 12, 1691, at the age of seventy-seven.

Spiritual Maxims, Letters, and Conversations:

In the normal way of things, all memory of such an obscure monk would have soon faded. Yet within a few years, some of his sayings, letters, and conversations, were compiled into a book which came to be called *The Practice of the Presence of God*. The writings we have by and about Lawrence we owe to his biographer Joseph de Beaufort, priest, and later vicar general of Paris. In it we find the principles by which Brother Lawrence lived. The ideal of a life in which every thought and action remain focused on God, not simply during formal prayer or worship but throughout every daily task, however humble. As Brother Lawrence wrote, "It is enough for me to pick up a straw from the ground for the love of God."

The Practice of the Presence of God has a surprising history. It became popular amongst many Protestants across Europe. "The prestige of the Protestant minister Pierre Poiret (1646-1719), very open to Catholicism and publisher of many authors including Brother Lawrence, had a great deal to do with the international influence exerted through the German and English translations. However, it took more than two centuries before a new French edition was published in 1924, once again due to our Protestant brethren... After the second world war, Father Francois de Sainte-Marie, who had already expressed his regret that his Parisian confrere was 'so little known,' included him in his 'La Vigne du Carmel' [Vine of Carmel] series" (General Introduction, pgs. xxvii-xxviii, ICS).

The third centenary of the death of Brother Lawrence provided the occasion for a new edition published by ICS in 1994. It's certainly most appropriate given the impact this humble Brother has had for centuries (see General Introduction, pg. xxix, ICS).

“Brother Lawrence belongs neither to Catholicism nor to Protestantism, but to all those who regardless of their religious affiliation, try to make Jesus King in their daily life” (General Introduction, pg. xxviii).

Courtesy: ICS Publications. General Introduction, pg. xvii and following.

Required Reading: Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, O.C.D. *The Practice of the Presence of God*, Critical Edition, Translated by Fr. Salvatore Sciurba, O.C.D. ICS, 1994. (All quotes in the main texts are taken from this edition).

Recommended Reading: *Practicing the Presence of the Living God*; A Retreat with Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, by Jean Maalouf. ICS, 2011.

Read-along materials: “The Prayer of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection” by Sister Christina Nunn, O.C.D. *Spiritual Life*, A Quarterly Journal of Contemporary Spirituality, Spring, 2013. Published by Washington Province of Discalced Carmelite Friars, Inc.

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614-1691) Fourth Centenary of His Birth, by Fr. Saverio Cannistra, O.C.D., Superior General. (This is a letter addressed to the members of the Discalced Carmelite Order).

Note: In the following sessions participants may include the essential points of the above two articles in their ongoing discussion. The essential points could be used effectively for community formation as well.

Session One: Spiritual Maxims

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Pages 31-43. After reading the introductory note, prayerfully read and reflect on the entire Maxims.

Explanatory Note: At the age of eighteen, Lawrence had a life-changing experience of God: “I saw Brother Lawrence for the first time, and he told me that God had granted him a special grace of conversion at the age of eighteen when he was still in the world. One day in winter while he was looking at a tree stripped of its leaves, and he realized that in a little while its leaves would reappear, followed by its flowers and fruit, he received a profound insight into God’s providence that has never been erased from his soul” (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, First Conversation, pg. 89).

“In order to know Brother Lawrence, nothing is better than to read his ‘Spiritual Maxims’ and ‘Letters’... We find in Brother Lawrence an intelligent and utterly honest man. He was a clear thinker and went to the essential. His doctrine is founded on faith, and at the same time, comes from a profound experience of God. His words are simple but convincing. What he says is always sensible and meaningful... He had an open and upright nature. He was humorous and didn’t beat around the bush” (Fr. Saverio Cannistra, O.C.D., Superior General).

Br. Lawrence begins his Spiritual Maxims with the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love. He quickly moves on to one “practice,” the “holiest, the most necessary” — that of the presence of God who penetrates our entire life to the point of making it a prolonged adoration (chapter 3) and an actual union (chapters 5-7). At the end he returns to the theological virtues, coming full circle (see Introduction Notes to *Spiritual Maxims*).

Points for discussion/reflection:

- “Everything is possible for one who believes [faith], still more for one who hopes, even more for one who loves, and most of all for one who practices and perseveres in these three virtues” (spiritual maxim 1, pg. 35).
- “We must keep our eyes fixed on God in everything we say, do, or undertake” (SM.2).
- “When we undertake the spiritual life, we must seriously consider who we are, recognizing that we are worthy of all scorn ... and subject to all kinds of miseries and a multitude of setbacks. ... In all, we are persons God wants to humble by means of a multitude of internal and external troubles and trials” (SM.3).
- “We must believe that it is advantageous for us and pleasing to God to sacrifice ourselves to him... Without this submission of heart and mind to the will of God, devotion and perfection cannot endure” (SM.4).
- “The holiest, most ordinary, and most necessary practice of the spiritual life is that of the presence of God. It is to take delight in and become accustomed to his divine company, speaking humbly and conversing lovingly with him all the time, at every moment, **without rule or measure**, especially in times of temptation, suffering, aridity, weariness, even infidelity and sin” (SM.6, pg. 36, emphasis added).

Note: Here, Br. Lawrence speaks about one of the key elements of the Carmelite charism of prayer: “Carmelite prayer is to be understood as being present to God, as

relationship with God, rather than as an exercise to be performed. Interior prayer involves no rigorously prescribed method and has little to do with techniques. The primary focus is on the search for God in silence and solitude, our longing for union with Him. 'For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; It means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us' — St. Teresa, Life, 8:5" (*Formation Handbook for the OCDS*, pg. 11).

- "We must continually apply ourselves [to the presence of God] so that all our actions, without exception, become a kind of brief conversation with God" (SM.7).
- "We must perform all our actions carefully and deliberately, **not impulsively or hurriedly**, for such would characterize a distracted mind" (SM.8, emphasis added).
- "During our work and other activities, even during our reading and writing... and I emphasize, even during our religious exercises and vocal prayers – we must stop for a moment, as often as possible, to adore God in the depths of our hearts... It is a typical error among the spiritually minded not to withdraw from what is external from time to time to adore God within themselves and enjoy his divine presence in peace for a few moments" (SM.9).
- "The [practice of the] presence of God is an application of our mind to God, or remembrance of God present, that can be brought about either by the imagination or the understanding" (SM.20, pg. 39).
- "It is important, however, to realize that this conversation with God takes place in the depth and center of the soul... always in a deep and profound peace... Everything that takes place outside the soul means no more to it than a lit straw that goes out as soon as it is ignited, and almost never, or very rarely, disturbs its inner peace." (SM.23, pg. 40).
- How does one acquire the Presence of God?
- "The first means is great purity of life" (SM.27, pg. 41).
- "The second is great fidelity to the practice of this presence and to the fostering of this awareness of God within, which must always be performed gently, humbly, and lovingly, without giving in to disturbance or anxiety" (SM.28).
- "We must take special care that this inner awareness, no matter how brief it may be, precedes our activities ... Since much time and effort are required to acquire this practice, we must not get discouraged when we fail, for the habit is only formed with effort, yet once it is formed, we will find **contentment in everything**" (SM.29, emphasis added).

Note: "The etymology of the word 'contentment' comes from the fact that everything "tends together" towards its goal, that there is no internal division. Lawrence was a man of one purpose, straightforward, a rock, a stable, free being who found his simplicity, his harmony, and his dynamism in the presence of God" (De Meester – This quote is taken from the article, *The Prayers of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection* by Christina Nunn, included in the read-along materials below).

- "It would be appropriate for beginners to formulate a few words interiorly, such as: 'My God, I am completely yours, or 'God of love, I love you with all my heart....' But they

must take care that their minds do not wander or return to creatures [inordinate attachments]” (SM.30).

- “This [practice of the] presence of God, somewhat difficult in the beginning... [however] when practiced faithfully, imperceptibly leads it to this simple awareness, to this loving view of God present everywhere, which is the holiest, the surest, the easiest, and the most efficacious form of prayer” (SM.31).
- What are the benefits of the Presence of God?
- “The first benefit ... is that its faith becomes more intense and efficacious in all life’s situations... For the soul, accustomed to the practice of faith by this exercise, sees and senses God present by a simple remembrance... It can be said that it possesses here something resembling the state of the blessed...” (SM.33, pg. 42).
- “The practice of the presence of God strengthens us in hope. Our hope increases in proportion to our knowledge [of God]. It grows and is strengthened to the extent that our faith penetrates the secrets of divinity by this holy exercise... It discovers in God a beauty infinitely surpassing not only that of the bodies we see on earth but even that of the most perfect souls and of the angels” (SM.34).
- “This practice inspires the will with a scorn for creatures [inordinate affection and attachment] and inflames it with a sacred fire of love... The soul thus inflamed can live only in the presence of its God, a presence that produces in its heart a holy ardor, a sacred zeal and a strong desire to see this God loved, known, served, and adored by all creatures” (SM.35).
- “By turning inward and practicing the presence of God, the soul becomes so intimate with God that it spends practically all its life in continual acts of love, adoration... and thanksgiving” (SM.36, pg. 43).

Br. Lawrence, ending as he began, wraps up his Spiritual Maxims with the three theological virtues of faith, hope and love.

“What more do you want, O soul! And what else do you search for outside, when within yourself you possess your riches, delights, satisfaction, fullness, and kingdom – your beloved whom you desire and seek? Be joyful and gladdened in your interior recollection with him, for you have him so close to you. Desire him there, adore him there. Do not go in pursuit of him outside yourself. You will only become distracted and wearied thereby, and you shall not find him, or enjoy him more securely, or sooner, or more intimately than by seeking him within you.”

St. John of the Cross, “The Spiritual Canticle” Stanza 1:8.

Session Two: Letters of Brother Lawrence

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Pages 47-81. Read the letters in their entirety for discussion and reflection.

Explanatory Note: The letters were written to specific individuals to answer questions on prayer or to deal with a particular situation. Not surprisingly, the general content of these letters is the continuous search for and experience of the presence of God. On several occasions Br. Lawrence also addressed those who were suffering from personal problems. These letters reflect the Carmelite charism of prayer in greater depth and beauty.

Points for discussion/reflection:

Letter 1, pages 49-51

- Br. Lawrence writes to a nun, explaining that at times he is forgetful of this divine presence. “[however,] God makes himself known immediately in his soul to call him back to himself; this often happens when he is most engaged in his activities. He responds with complete fidelity to this inner call: either by lifting up his heart toward God, by gently and lovingly turning inward, or by a few words that love formulates during these encounters, for example: ‘My God, I am all yours; Lord, fashion me according to your heart...’ Once again, we must turn inward; time is flying, and there is no escape” (pg. 49).

Letter 2, pages 52-55

- “Several days ago, during a discussion with a pious person, I was told the spiritual life was a life of grace that begins with servile fear, that intensifies with the hope of eternal life, and that finds its consummation in pure love; and that there are various ways of ultimately arriving at this blessed consummation. I haven’t followed these methods at all; on the contrary, I don’t know why they provoked such fear in me in the beginning. But for this reason, on my entrance into religious life I made the resolution to give myself entirely to God in atonement for my sins, and to renounce everything else for the sake of his love ... carefully applying myself the rest of the day — even during my work — to the presence of God who was always near me, often in the very depths of my heart. This gave me great reverence for God, and in this manner, faith alone was my reassurance” (pg. 52)
- “I gave up all devotions and prayers that **were not required** and I devote myself exclusively to remaining always in his holy presence. I keep myself in his presence by **simple** attentiveness and a general loving awareness of God that I call ‘actual presence of God’ or better, a quiet and secret conversation of the soul with God that is lasting” (pg. 53, emphasis added).

Side note: Footnote 6 refers to the writings of St. John of the Cross. John speaks of “loving attention to God,” involving a “*simple* loving awareness,” in contrast to the discursive work of the intellect. Lawrence also uses the word “simple” (see pg. 56).

Members of the Secular Order strive to:

- practice mental prayer for at least half an hour each day in an atmosphere of interior silence and solitude
- pray Morning and Evening Prayer daily from the Liturgy of the Hours, and Night Prayer if possible
- attend daily Mass, as able
- practice devotion to Mary
- participate in the apostolate
- attend the community (group) meetings

Mercies of the Lord: At one point in his life, Br. Lawrence considered himself “as the most miserable of all human beings, covered with sores, foul, and guilty of all sorts of crimes committed against my King...” But much to his surprise, he was not condemned: “Far from chastising me, this King, full of goodness and mercy, lovingly embraces me, seats me at his table, waits on me himself, gives me the keys to his treasures, and treats me in all things as his favorite; he converses with me and takes delight in me in countless ways, without ever speaking of forgiveness or taking away my previous faults” (pg. 54).

Transformation and union: “Regarding the prescribed hours of prayer, they are nothing more than a continuation of this same exercise. Sometimes I think of myself as a piece of stone before a sculptor who desires to carve a statue; presenting myself in this way before God I ask him to fashion his perfect image in my soul, making me entirely like himself” (pg. 54).

“I know that some would call this state idleness, self-deception, and self-love. I maintain that it is a holy idleness and a blessed self-love, should the soul in this state be capable of it” (pg. 54).

Letter 3, pages 57-58

- “There is no way of life in the world more agreeable or delightful than continual conversation with God... [However,] we must not seek consolations from this exercise, but must do it from a motive of love, and because God wants it” (pg. 57).
- “If I were a preacher, I would preach nothing but the practice of the presence of God; and if I were a spiritual director, I would recommend it to everyone, for I believe there is nothing so necessary or so easy” (pg. 57).

Letter 4, pages 59-60

- “I do not say we must put ourselves to a great deal of trouble to do this; no, we must serve God in holy freedom. We must work faithfully, without turmoil or anxiety, gently and peacefully bringing our minds back to God as often as we find ourselves distracted” (pg. 59).
- “We must, however, place all our trust in God and let go of all our cares, including a **multitude of private devotions**, very good in themselves but often carried out for the wrong reason, for these devotions are nothing more than the means to arrive at the end. If, then, we are with the one who is our end by this practice of the presence of God, it is certainly useless to return to the means” (pg. 59, emphasis added).

Letter 6, pages 63-64

- “A brief lifting up of the heart is enough. A brief remembrance of God, an act of inner adoration — even though on the run with sword in hand — these prayers, short as they may be, are pleasing to God, and, far from causing those engaged in battle to lose courage in the most dangerous circumstances, fortify them... No one sees it, and there is nothing easier than to repeat these little inner adorations frequently throughout the day” (pg. 63).

Letter 7, pages 65-66

- “If your mind wanders or withdraws occasionally, don’t get upset. Since these disturbances tend to distract the mind rather than focus it, we must use the will to gently collect our thoughts. If you persevere in this manner God will have mercy on you” (pg. 65).

Letter 8, pages 67-68

- “Here is my reply to Sister N.’s letter... It seems like her heart is in the right place, but she wants to advance faster than grace would allow. You don’t become a saint in a day!” (pg. 67).
- “Since in his mercy he still gives us a little time, let’s take advantage of it! We can make up for lost time and return to this Father of goodness with complete trust. He is always ready to receive us lovingly” (pg. 67).
- “We cannot think of him often unless we habitually practice this holy exercise. You will tell me that I always say the same thing. It is true. I know no other means more appropriate or easier than that! And since I practice no other, I recommend it to everyone” (pg. 68).
- “We must know before we can love. To know God, we must think of him often. And when our love is strong, we will think of him often for our heart will be where our treasure is [Mt. 6:21]. Think about this often and think about this carefully” (pg. 68).

Letter 9, pages 69-70

- “We do not always have to be in church to be with God. We can make of our hearts an oratory where we can withdraw from time to time to converse with him there, gently, humbly, and lovingly. Everyone is capable of these familiar conversations with God, some more, some less” (pg. 69).

Note: Letters 10, 11, 13, 14, and 15 are important letters on suffering. Read in their entirety.

Letter 10, page 71

- This letter was addressed to a woman (Mrs. N.) whose husband was suffering from grief over the loss of his best friend. “If only Mr. N. knew how to profit from the loss he has suffered and would place all his trust in God, he would soon give him another more powerful and better-intentioned friend, for God disposes hearts as he pleases. Perhaps his affection for and attachment to the friend he lost were too great; we must love our friends but without prejudice to the love of God, which must come first” (pg. 71).

Letter 11, pages 73-74

- **Suffering:** “I will not ask God to deliver you from your trials, but I will ask him earnestly to give you the patience and strength needed to suffer as long as he desires. Find consolation in him who keeps you fixed to the cross; he will release you when he judges it appropriate. Happy are they who suffer with him” (pg. 73).
- “The worldly do not understand these truths, and I am not surprised; the reason is that they suffer as citizens of this world and not as Christians... I wish you were convinced that God is often closer to us in times of sickness and suffering than when we enjoy perfect health. Seek no other doctor but him. I think he wants to cure you by himself” (pg. 73).

Letter 12, pages 75-76

- “I was as faithful to this practice [of the presence of God] during my activities as I was during my periods of mental prayer, for at every moment, all the time, in the most intense periods of my work I banished and rid from my mind everything that was capable of taking the thought of God away from me” (pg. 75).

Letter 13, pages 77-78

- “If we were truly accustomed to the practice of the presence of God, all physical illnesses would be easy to bear. God often permits us to suffer a little in order to purify our souls, and to make us remain with him. I cannot understand how a soul who is with God, and wants him alone, is capable of suffering; I have enough experience of this not to doubt it” (pg. 77).
- “I do not know what God wants to do with me. I am always more content. Everyone is suffering, and I, who should do rigorous penances, experience such continual, profound joys that I have trouble keeping them under control” (pg. 77).

Letter 14, pages 79-80

- “These prayers ... please God greatly and comfort those who love him. Love lightens suffering, and when we love God we suffer for him joyfully and courageously; accept it, I beg you” (pg. 79).

Letter 15, page 81

- “We must restrain our minds from wandering away for any reason whatsoever. We must make our hearts a spiritual temple where we continually adore him. We must keep constant guard over ourselves, not to do, say, or think anything that might displease him. When we are attentive to God in this way, suffering will no longer be anything but sweetness, balm, and consolation” (pg. 81).
- “Suffering is the means of her [the soul] penetrating further, deep into the thicket of the delectable wisdom of God. The purest suffering brings with it the purest and most intimate knowing, and consequently the purest and highest joy, because it is knowing from further within” (St. John of the Cross – *The Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza 36:12).

Letter 16, pages 83-84

- “Let us devote ourselves entirely to knowing God. The more we know him, the more we want to know him. Since love is generally measured by knowledge, the deeper and more extensive the knowledge, the greater will be the love. And if our love is great, we will love him equally in pain and consolation” (pg. 83).
- “Let us not settle for seeking or loving God only for the graces he has given or can give us, no matter how great they may be. These favors, impressive as they are, never bring us as close to him as does a simple act of faith; let us seek him often through this virtue” (pg. 83).
- “He is in our midst; let us not look for him elsewhere. Aren’t we rude, and even guilty of leaving him alone, when we are occupied with so many trifles that displease and perhaps offend him?” (pg. 83).
- “Let us commit ourselves entirely to him, and banish everything else from our hearts and minds... Let us pray for each other” (pg. 84).

Session Three: Conversations

(May take multiple sessions, as needed.)

Pages 87-100. Read the Conversations in their entirety for discussion and reflection.

Explanatory Note: Beginning August 3, 1666, Joseph de Beaufort, his biographer, visited Br. Lawrence frequently. He took notes of his conversations and preserved them for later publications. He explained to the readers at the time of publication: “Brother Lawrence will speak for himself; I will give you his own words taken from the conversations I had with him, which I wrote down as soon as I had left him” (Introductory Note to the Conversations, pg. 87).

First Conversation:

- “He had asked to be admitted to religious life, thinking he would be skinned alive for his awkwardness and imperfections, and thereby would offer God his life and all its pleasures. But God had fooled him, for he experienced only satisfaction. This led him to tell God frequently: ‘You have tricked me’” (#3, pg. 89).
- “We must give ourselves to God entirely and in complete abandonment in the temporal and spiritual realms, finding joy in carrying out his will whether he leads us by the way of suffering or consolation, for it is all the same to one who is completely abandoned” (#5, pg. 90).
- In every circumstance and in all things, Br. Lawrence maintained the same posture and attitude as St. Paul:
“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:11-13).
- “[He recounted] how he was not astonished on hearing every day about miseries and sins; on the contrary, he was surprised there were not more, considering the evil of which the sinner is capable. He did pray for sinners, but knowing that God could set them straight when he wanted, he worried no more about it” (#6, pg. 90).
- “[He said] that in order to arrive at self-abandonment to God to the extent that he willed, we must watch over **all the movements** of the soul, since it can become entangled in spiritual things as well as in the most base. God gives the necessary light to those who have the true desire to be with him...” (#7, pg. 90, emphasis added).

Second conversation

- “[He said] that he had always been governed by love with no other interest, never worrying whether he would be damned or saved, and having once decided to perform all his actions for the love of God, he was at peace. He was content even when picking up a straw from the ground for the love of God, seeking him alone and nothing else, not even his gifts” (#8, pg. 91).
- “[He said] that only the soul that trifles with the gift, instead of rejecting it and going beyond it to God, experiences ecstasy and rapture. Except for wonder, we should not allow ourselves to be carried away! God must always remain the master...” (#10, pg. 91).

Side note: Concerning ecstatic experiences of the soul – locutions, visions, and raptures – St. Teresa says that locutions “can be from God, or from the devil, or from one’s own imagination... One thing I advise you: do not think, even if the locutions are from God, that you are better because of them, for he spoke frequently with the Pharisees. All the good comes from how one benefits by these words, and pay no more attention to those that are not in close conformity with the Scripture... It’s necessary to treat them as if they were temptations in matters of faith, and thus resist them always” (*Interior Castle*, VI.3:4).

St. John of the Cross is of the same view concerning apprehensions (intellectual, corporal, natural, and supernatural) and favors. “It must be known that even though those apprehensions can come to the bodily senses from God, one must never rely on them or accept them” (*Ascent*, Book 2, 11:2). “If individuals remain both faithful and retiring in the midst of these favors, the Lord will not cease raising them degree by degree until they reach divine union and transformation. Our Lord proves and elevates the soul by first bestowing graces that are exterior, lowly, and proportioned to the small capacity of sense. If the person reacts well by taking these first morsels with moderation for strength and nourishment, God will bestow a more abundant and higher quality of food. If individuals are victorious over the devil in the first degree, they will pass on to the second; and if so in the second, they will go to the third ... until the bridegroom puts them in the wine cellar of perfect charity [Sg. 2:4]” (*Ascent*, 2.11:9).

Notice that both Teresa and John relate extraordinary experiences to the progression of prayer. From ecstasies and raptures to contemplative communion, they point to the natural progression of our relationship with God. John’s understanding is that “we have to lead the soul to this dark and general knowledge of contemplation (which is imparted in faith) by guiding it through all these other apprehensions and divesting it of them, beginning with the first” (*Ascent*, 2.10:4).

- “[He said] that in the beginning we must work at forming the habit of continually conversing with God, attributing to him everything we do; but after a little effort we will feel ourselves awakened by love with no more difficulty” (#13, pg. 92).

Side note: “Br. Lawrence describes this way of prayer as a habit. This idea has been expanded by Fr. Salvatore Sciorba, O.C.D., in his tape on Lawrence: The more that we work at it, the more we turn to God, the more that we recognize that God is present within us. The more that this becomes a part of our life, it becomes a habit in a good sense, not in the sense of something artificial, forced, mechanical; but rather this is the way we are, this is what we become. We become more and more aware of God’s presence within us; it’s natural and a habit in a good sense” (*The Prayer of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection*, Sr. Christina Nunn, O.C.D., included in the read-along materials below).

- “When he failed, he did nothing other than acknowledge his failure, telling God, ‘I will never do anything right if you leave me alone; it’s up to you to stop me from falling and correct what is wrong.’ After that he no longer worried about his failure” (#16, pg. 92).
- “[He said] that the periods of mental prayer were not at all different for him than other times. He made his retreats when Father Prior told him to do so, but he neither desired them nor asked for them, since his most demanding work in no way turned him away from God” (#20, pg. 93).

Side note: Br. Lawrence displayed the same attitude in all circumstances and found contentment in all things. “The times of activity are not at all different from the hours of prayer,” he said, “for I possess God as peacefully in the commotion of my kitchen, where often enough several people are asking me for different things at the same time, as I do when kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament” (*The Ways of Brother Lawrence*, #9, pg. 115).

Side note: St. Teresa speaks of this kind of prayer in her writings. This prayer (the prayer of quiet) continues amid daily occupations. While one attends to the external service of God in discharging customary business, one’s will remains united to Him. “This is a great favor for those to whom the Lord grants it; the active and the contemplative lives are joined. The faculties all serve the Lord together: the will is occupied in its work and contemplation without knowing how; the other two faculties serve in the work of Martha. Thus, Martha and Mary walk together” (*The Way of Perfection*, 31:5). “This should serve as a great encouragement to Carmelite Seculars” (OCDS Formation 1, Year A, pg. 20).

- “[He said] that he consulted no one in his trouble. With the light of faith and knowledge that God was present, he was satisfied to act for him come what may, and he was willing to lose himself for the love of God, and he was indeed content” (#22, pg. 93).
- “[He said] that thoughts [that are contrary to God’s word] spoil everything; that’s how trouble starts! We must be careful to reject them as soon as we notice that they have nothing to do with our present occupation or our salvation, and begin again our conversation with God, which is where our good is found” (#23, pg. 93).
- “[He said] that... all penances and other exercises serve only as a means to reach union with God by love. Once he had considered this carefully, he realized it was shorter to go straight there by an exercise of continual love, by doing everything for the love of God!” (#26, pg. 94).
- “Even if we did all the penances possible, they would not so much as take away one single sin if they were separated from love! Without worrying, we must look to the blood of Christ for the remission of sin, working only at loving God with our whole heart. God seems to choose the worst sinners to give the greatest graces...” (#28, pg. 94).
- [He said] that he thought neither of death, nor of his sins, nor of paradise, nor of hell, but only of doing little things for the love of God, since he was not capable of doing great things. Other than that, whatever happened to him was God’s will, and he was at peace with it” (#29, pg. 94).
- “He told me that he was rarely scrupulous. ‘When I realize I have failed, I acknowledge it and say: this is typical; it’s all I can do! If I have succeeded, I thank God and acknowledge that this grace comes from him’” (#31, pg. 94).

Third Conversation

- “... In his struggle against temptation, he could sense the temptation from the **first moment**... but at just the right moment he called upon God, and they vanished completely...” (#34, pg. 95).

Side note: “Resisting first movements (the first stirrings of temptation) ‘wins strength, purity, comfort, and many blessings’” (*Ascent*, 1.12:6). Virtue is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). St. John of the Cross’ solution lies in looking away from self to Jesus who is the fullness of life, for as John says, souls become like the things they love.

- “He was more closely united with God during his ordinary activities than when he put them aside to do his retreat exercises, which generally left him in great aridity” (#37, pg. 96).
- “We settle for penances and private devotions, leaving aside love, our end. Our works prove this, and that is why we see so little solid virtue [or progress]” (#40, pg. 96).

Side note: St. John of the Cross makes important observations about those who practice extraordinary penances and other religious practices (outward observances) without striving to deny their appetites (inner purification). “The ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain union with Divine Wisdom. **But such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites.** If they would attempt to devote only half of that energy to the renunciation of their (inordinate) desires, they would profit more in a month than in years with all these other exercises” (A.1.8:4, emphasis added).

John is not against penitential practices. The focus is on inner purification that leads to union of love rather than outward observances.

John’s observation is reflected in the teachings of St. Thérèse of Lisieux regarding penance and growth in virtue. “I made a resolution to give myself up more than ever to a *serious* and *mortified* life. When I say mortified, this is not to give the impression that I performed acts of penance. Alas, *I never made any*. Far from resembling beautiful souls who practiced every kind of mortification from their childhood, I had no attraction for this. ... My mortification consisted in breaking my will, always so ready to impose itself on others, in holding back a reply, in rendering little services without any recognition, etc., etc. It was through the practice of these *nothings* that I prepared myself to become the fiancée of Jesus...” (*Story of a Soul*, Manuscript A: ch. VI, at the end of the chapter).

Fourth Conversation

- “He told me that what matters is renouncing once and for all everything that we recognize does not lead to God, in order to become accustomed to a continual conversation with him, without mystery or finesse” (#42, pg. 97).
- “[He said] that our sanctification depends not on changing our works, but on doing for God what we would normally do for ourselves. It is a pity to see how many people are attached to certain works that they perform rather imperfectly and for human respect, always mistaking the means for the end” (#44, pg. 97).
- “[He said] that it is a big mistake to think that the period of mental prayer should be different from any other. We must be just as closely united with God during our activities as we are during our times of prayer” (#46, pg. 98).
- “We must never tire of doing little things for the love of God who considers not the magnitude of the work, but the love” (#49, pg. 98).

- “We must cultivate faith, hope, and love, for these alone can conform us completely to the will of God. All other things are insignificant, and we must not settle for them, but rather regard them as a bridge to be crossed quickly so we can lose ourselves in our sole end by confidence and love” (#50, pg. 98).
- “Everything is possible for one who believes, still more for one who hopes, [even more for one who loves,] and most of all for one who practices and perseveres in these three virtues” (#51, pg. 98).

THE WAYS OF BROTHER LAWRENCE, pgs. 111-124

- “‘We look for methods,’ he continued, ‘to learn how to love God. We want to get there by I don’t know how many practices. A multitude of methods makes it more difficult for us to remain in God’s presence. Isn’t it much shorter and more direct to do everything for the love of God, to use all the works of our state in life to **manifest our love to him**, and to foster the awareness of his presence in us by this exchange of our heart with him?’” (#10, pg. 116, emphasis added).
- “His sole approach to God was to do everything for his love, and so it made no difference to him what he did, provided that he did it for God. It was God, not the thing itself, that concerned him” (#19, pg. 118).
- “I asked him one day who his spiritual director was. He told me he had none and did not think he needed one since the *Rule* and his religious obligations made clear what his duties were, and the Gospel obliged him to love God with his whole heart. Once he realized this, a director seemed unnecessary to him, but he greatly needed a confessor to absolve his sins” (#21, pg. 119).
- “After he received the last sacraments, a friar asked him what he was doing and what was occupying his mind. ‘I am doing what I will be doing throughout eternity’ he replied. ‘I am blessing God, I am praising God, I am adoring God, and I am loving him with my whole heart. This is what our vocation is all about, brothers, to adore God, and to love him without worrying about anything else’” (#28, pg. 121).
- “These were Brother Lawrence’s last sentiments. He died shortly thereafter in the same peace and tranquility that had characterized his life. He died on February 12, 1691, at about eighty years of age” (#29, pg. 121).

CONCLUSION:

Joseph de Beaufort (his biographer), commented on Br. Lawrence’s approach to God for all people: “Although Brother Lawrence lived a hidden life, all people, no matter what their personal circumstances may be, can benefit from his example as given here... He teaches them to turn to God in their conversations, even during their leisure time... This is not a theoretical devotion that can only be practiced in the cloister. Everyone must adore and love God” (*The Practice of the Presence of God*, Ways of Br. Lawrence, pg. 123, #32).

“Lawrence presents us with a way of prayer that transcends time and denominational boundaries. It is as alive and present to us today as when he was writing and speaking in the

seventeenth century. Lawrence managed to combine the active life with an intense life of prayer that all Christians can follow. He shows us how, in the midst of a busy life, we can pray continuously, giving praise to God at all times, in all places, in all circumstances...

“Lawrence – with his emphasis on nothing but love of God and the joy found in doing this – is indeed a beacon for the rest of us as we seek God in prayer” (*The Prayer of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection*, Sr. Christina Nunn, O.C.D.).

The Mission of Brother Lawrence Continues...

“Brother Lawrence occupies a privileged place in the heart of a number of seekers of God throughout the world, including our Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox brothers and sisters. Many Christians love him, listen to him, and revere him as a luminous guide and an authentic saint. By his life in the Son of God and his radiant witness, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, true son of Carmel, continues today his beneficial action. By his simplicity and love, he leads us to God, present in our entire life. Let’s not hesitate to get to know him”

– Fr. Saverio Cannistra, O.C.D., Superior General

*We thank you, Lord, for giving us Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection
as an example of holiness.
Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, pray for us.*

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Read-Along Materials

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1614-1691) Fourth Centenary of his Birth

From Father Saverio Cannistrà, O.C.D. Superior General

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

During the General Chapter held in Avila in 2009, the friars asked that in the year 2014 and in the shadow of the approaching fifth centenary of the birth of our mother Teresa of Jesus, we commemorate the fourth centenary of the birth of one of her spiritual sons, born in 1614, a humble lay brother, humble, but very much loved by many Christians in the entire world, and even non-Christians: Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. His simple writings, timely and luminous, have been translated into many languages and edited many times up to now.

In 1991, on the occasion of the third centenary of his death, our brother Camilo Maccise, superior general at the time, wrote a remarkable letter on the spirituality and mission of Brother Lawrence (cf. *Acta OCD*, 1991-1992, pgs. 451-458). I would also like to speak briefly about this son of Carmel beginning with the two major periods of his life, both of which are significant: First of all, “the young layman,” Nicolas Herman (his civil name), and then the Lay Brother OCD, Lawrence of the Resurrection.

I. Nicolas Herman, Young Layman

Already from a simple human and Christian perspective, this first period of his life is meaningful for us who walk in the light of Christ and of Carmel, whether we are seculars or religious.

In 1614, on an uncertain date, Nicolas was baptized in the humble Church of the little village of Herménil in Lorraine, at that time an independent Grand Duchy, now part of France. We know hardly anything about his family background and of his education in this rural environment. However, an event there marked his entire life. One winter day, at the age of eighteen, while contemplating a tree stripped of its leaves, and reflecting on the cosmic reawakening that takes place in nature every spring, Nicolas was seized by a profound sense of the Divine Presence and of Divine Providence, the source of life that never ceases to reveal itself. His intellect was filled with an entirely new light, an awakened faith. God became close, present in all things. This experience of the living God would engrave itself in the depths of his soul.

Life was difficult in the Lorraine of his time, involved in the terrible Thirty Years’ War which was so destructive, murderous, and immoral. Nicolas enlisted in the army of the Grand Duchy. In this gravely troubled period, his soul lost the beautiful vision he had discovered at eighteen. Later on, he would grieve over the sins he had committed, without revealing exactly what they were. Several times he peered into the eyes of death. In 1635, he was seriously wounded during the siege of the town of Rambervilliers that the Duke of Lorraine tried to reconquer. Nicolas was brought back to his native village. While his body was restored, his soul also slowly recovered.

Some time later, he met a hermit and decided to share his solitary life. But this was not his path. Yes, he intuited the value of a life wholly given to God, but the spring of prayer didn't flow as he had dreamed. He moved to Paris where we find him at the service of a prominent man. But that was not what God was asking of him either.

Let us remain a few moments with Nicolas our young layman. Through difficult circumstances he had come "to know life and the world." In the struggle for life, he had survived through the upheaval of a long and terrible war, the irritation and helplessness of many anguishing situations, and the experience of poverty and famine. He had also discovered the weakness of his human nature, of his "sins" of which he was humbly conscious for the rest of his life, as had been his spiritual mother St. Teresa of Jesus before him.

But love would triumph. Nicolas would not merit the reproach of the Angel of the Apocalypse. "I hold this against you; you have lost the love you had at first." (Rev. 2:4) A soldier, wounded, an immigrant and a laborer, the young layman would rediscover the luminous flame of the divine Presence he had experienced at eighteen years of age. There in the midst his struggles, a Christian and Carmelite soul slowly developed in him. He opened unconditionally to God, to his grace, and to his concrete desires.

Nicolas remains an example of a spiritual awakening and a slow resurrection: for each of us a silent reminder and a gentle invitation.

II. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

In Paris Nicolas Herman met the large and fervent community of Discalced Carmelite Friars of St. Joseph's convent located on Rue de Vaugirard. In June of 1640, at 26 years of age, he entered as a "lay brother" ("*frater donates*" according to the Constitutions) and received the habit two months later. At that time the habit of the lay brothers differed from that of the cleric brothers. The lay brother's habit lacked the capuche and the white mantle. The lay brothers also sat in the last places in the refectory and the choir. Nonetheless, they received a Carmelite name and title: henceforth Nicolas was called Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.

After two months of postulancy and two years of novitiate, on the 14th of August 1642, the eve of the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Lawrence, now 28 years old, pronounced his perpetual vows as a "lay brother." The Constitutions of the Order (Const. edition 1631, section II, ch. 4) stipulated that the "non-cleric" brothers should be "devout, simple, faithful, and devoted to work since they are called to work." They had no vote in the conventual chapter nor did they participate in the recitation of the Divine Office. When they could not be present at the hours of mental prayer because of their domestic duties, they prayed at other times indicated by the superior, often in the evening or during the night. (cf. Const., section 1, ch. 4)

They assumed, therefore, a lot of manual work and we find our brother Lawrence as cook of the large community, then as cobbler, and often as helper in the Church (For example, he served the numerous Masses of the priest friars because Eucharistic Concelebration did not

exist at that time.). He was also seen on the street doing errands and sometimes begging for alms. He was even sent to the Burgundy and Auvergne regions to shop for provisions.

A Difficult Beginning, then Great Joy

Here, therefore, was Nicolas Herman catapulted into a new environment; a major change as we can all recall in our lives whether secular or religious: a move, a new employment, a new work situation and change in living conditions, insertion into a new community, family, or social life. Brother Lawrence did not rush blindly into this new life with new challenges, people and duties. He knew that God's grace was waiting for him and he wanted to give himself unconditionally to God. To a religious he knew well, he wrote, (speaking in the third person):

"His principal concern throughout the more than forty years he has been in religious life has been always to be with God, and to do, say, or think nothing that could displease him. He has no other interest than the pure love of God."

However, to a religious priest, apparently his confessor and spiritual advisor who is "fully aware" of his "great miseries," as well as the "great graces with which God has favored" his soul, he recalls:

On my entrance into religious life, I made the resolution to give myself entirely to God in atonement for my sins, and to renounce everything else for the sake of his love. During the first years I ordinarily thought about death, judgment, hell, paradise, and my sins when I prayed. I continued in this fashion for a few years, carefully applying myself the rest of the day – even during my work – to the practice of the presence of God who was always near me, often in the very depths of my heart. This gave me a great reverence for God, and in this matter faith alone was my reassurance. I gradually did the same thing during mental prayer, and this gave me great joy and consolation. This is how I began.

However, there was a painful side to his spiritual experience:

I will admit that during the first ten years I suffered a great deal. The apprehension that I did not belong to God as I wished, my past sins always before my eyes, and the lavish graces God was giving me, were the sum and substance of all my woes. During this period I fell often, but I got back up just as quickly. It seemed to me that all creatures, reason, and God himself were against me, and that faith alone was on my side. I was sometimes troubled by thoughts that this was the result of my presumption, in that I pretended to be all at once where others were able to arrive only with difficulty. Other times I thought I was willingly damning myself, that there was no salvation for me. When I accepted the fact that I might spend my life suffering from these troubles and anxieties – which in no way diminished the trust I had in God and served only to increase my faith – I suddenly found myself changed all at once. And my soul, until that time always in turmoil, experienced a deep inner peace as if it had found its center and place of rest.

From this letter we can clearly deduce that Brother Lawrence, who had been in “religious life for more than forty years,” went through an intense night of the soul for the “first ten years” of his religious life, and then “for thirty years,” he experienced deep spiritual joys he wrote in a letter to the religious sister previously mentioned. This letter informs us of his constant “practice” of God’s Presence and its happy effects:

He is now so accustomed to this divine presence that he receives constant help in every situation. For about thirty years his soul has been enjoying such great and continual inner consolations that he can hardly contain them. If occasionally he becomes too forgetful of this divine presence, God makes himself known immediately in his soul to call him back to himself; this often happens when he is most engaged in his activities. He responds with complete fidelity to this inner call: either by lifting up his heart toward God, by gently and lovingly turning inward, or by a few words that love formulates during these encounters... These experiences make him so certain that God is always in the depths of his soul, that he has no doubts about it, no matter what he may do or what may happen.

The Spirit of Carmel

Let us note that in entering Carmel Brother Lawrence found a fervent community where the spirit of the Teresian Reform was alive. In Paris the confreres of Brother Lawrence had translated the works of holy mother Teresa and of John of the Cross. Through sermons and conferences, or in counsels from his superiors and confessors, our cook would have often heard the words of our mother St. Teresa reminding us that we must not become discouraged “when obedience calls us to attend to exterior things: if it is in the kitchen, know that the Lord walks among the pots and pans. He will help you interiorly and exteriorly...Moreover, the true lover loves everywhere and is always thinking of the Beloved! ... When we are involved in activity, even though these works are done with obedience and charity, do not neglect to turn interiorly towards God” (*Foundations*, ch. 5).

In the search for the harmonious and fruitful union of contemplation and action, our brother Lawrence, very active and deeply contemplative, has a message for everyone: Carmelite friars, students, our contemplative sisters, indeed for all Christians, lay or religious, whenever we are called to daily work and to apostolic service, be it humble and hidden, or outstanding and appreciated.

The Man and the Guide

In order to know Brother Lawrence, nothing is better than to read his “Spiritual Maxims” and “Letters.” Recently the authentic texts of his writings have providentially been discovered. We find in Brother Lawrence an intelligent and utterly honest man. He was a clear thinker and went to the essential. His doctrine is founded on faith, and at the same time, comes from a profound experience of God. His word is simple but convincing. What he says is always sensible and meaningful. As he said, sometimes he consulted “books” because he never neglected to nourish

himself on spiritual reading. He had an open heart and an upright nature. He was humorous and didn't beat around the bush.

He had renowned friends who highly esteemed him. The future biographer of Brother Lawrence, Joseph of Beaufort, vicar general of Bishop Antoine de Noailles (Bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne and later Cardinal of Paris, with Beaufort again as vicar general) often consulted Brother and recalled what our mystic cook told him during his first visit:

"God gives light to those who have an authentic desire to be with him, and that if I had this intention, I could ask to see him whenever I wanted without fear of bothering him, and if not, I ought not to come to see him at all."

According to some witnesses, Lawrence had a rough exterior, but not in an impolite manner, but direct, like someone from the country or a simple worker. He was not fond of compliments and beautiful formulas. Beaufort sketched a portrait of his good "starets."

"Brother Lawrence's virtue never made him unsociable. His heart was open, eliciting confidence, letting you feel you could tell him anything, and you had found a friend. For his part, once he knew who he was dealing with, he spoke freely and showed great kindness. What he said was simple, yet always on target, and full of common sense. Once you got past his rough exterior you discovered an unusual wisdom, a freedom beyond the reach of a poor lay brother, an insight that extended far beyond what you would expect."

And again:

"He had the best heart in the world. His good appearance, his human and affable air, his simple and modest manner readily won the esteem and high regard of all those who saw him. The more you spoke to him, the more you discovered in him a depth of uprightness and piety that you hardly encountered elsewhere ... He was not one of those people who never bend and who regard holiness as incompatible with an honest way of looking at life. He never put on airs, got along with everyone and acted kindly with his brothers and friends, always identifying with them."

The great Fenelon, another admirer of our mystic cook, personally knew him and witnessed:

"The words of the saints themselves are quite different from the lectures of those who try to depict them. Saint Catherine of Genoa was prodigious in love. Brother Lawrence was rough by nature yet sensitive by grace. I saw him and I had an excellent conversation with him about death, while he was very ill and yet quite cheerful."

In addressing Bossuet during the subtle disputes about true mysticism, he wrote:

"We can learn every day by studying God's ways in the lives of unlearned people who have experience. For example, could we not have learned about the practice by conversing with the good Brother Lawrence?"

Some Principal Ideas of His Teaching

Without stopping to consider his theological life of awakened faith, unshakable confidence and unconditional charity, let us listen to Brother Lawrence communicate his strong and mature convictions, such as we find in his “Letters” and “Spiritual Maxims.”

A long and personal experience persuaded our brother that the practice of the Presence of God is an excellent way to intensify our union with God. To his spiritual guide, he explained, as we read, how after ten years his prayer evolved from a more meditative prayer to an affectionate contact with the Lord, present “in the depths of my heart.” This affectionate contact was then continued during “the rest of the day and even during my work.” He continued:

I felt neither sadness nor doubt about my state since I have no will other than the will of God, which I try to carry out in all things and to which I am so surrendered that I would not so much as pick up a straw from the ground against his order, nor for any other reason than pure love. I gave up all devotions and prayers that were not required and I devote myself exclusively to remaining always in his holy presence. I keep myself in his presence by simple attentiveness and a general loving awareness of God that I call “actual presence of God” or better, a quiet and secret exchange of the soul with God that is hardly every interrupted. This sometimes results in interior, and often exterior, contentment and joys that are so great that I have a hard time keeping them under control and from showing them outwardly.

From this time Lawrence became a true prophet and apostle of the way of the Presence of God. He wrote to a nun:

If I were a preacher, I would preach nothing but the practice of the presence of God; and if I were a spiritual director, I would recommend it to everyone, for I believe there is nothing as necessary or as easy. I feel that the entire spiritual life consists in this, and it seems to me that in practicing it as we should, we will become spiritual in a short time.

However, without effort we do not obtain very much. Already upon entering Carmel, Lawrence considered that we must “**give all to obtain All.**” In order to learn to live “die ac nocte,” day and night in the Will and the Presence of God, as the Rule of Carmel invites us to, we must have this “*determinada determinación*” of which St. Teresa of Jesus spoke. Brother Lawrence, spiritual son of Teresa of Jesus and of John of the Cross, doesn’t think otherwise. In the letter cited above, he said:

I know that to do this your heart must be empty of all other things because God desires to possess it exclusively, and since he cannot possess it exclusively without first emptying it of everything other than himself; neither can he act within it nor do there what he pleases, if we do not abandon it entirely to him for his good pleasure.

But, he continues, union with God sought out of pure love will become a source of great happiness.

There is no way of life in the world more agreeable or delightful than continual conversation with God; only those who practice and experience it can understand this.

This practice of the Presence of God **must therefore be learned, and perhaps be relearned throughout life**. Lawrence confessed that he also had difficulties in the beginning.

I had much trouble doing this exercise, but continued in spite of all the difficulties I encountered, without getting disturbed or anxious when I was involuntarily distracted. I was as faithful to this practice during my activities as I was during my periods of mental prayer. (...) even in the most intense periods of my work. (...) This is what I have practiced since I entered religious life. Although I have practiced it feebly and imperfectly, I have nonetheless received many advantages from it. (...) So, by repeating these acts they become familiar, and the practice of the presence of God becomes more natural.

Therefore, learning to practice the Presence is progressive but faithful [gradual but persistent]. As a good teacher, here is Lawrence's tactful and perspective counsel to a lady:

This good God does not ask a great deal of us: a brief remembrance from time to time, a brief act of adoration, at times requesting his grace, at other times offering him your sufferings, finding comfort in him. During your meals and conversations, occasionally lift up your heart to him; the least little remembrance of him will always be most pleasing to him. You need not shout out: he is closer to us than we may think. We do not always have to be in church to be with God. We can make of our hearts an oratory where we can withdraw from time to time to converse with him there, gently, humbly, and lovingly. Everyone is capable of these familiar conversations with God, some more, some less. God knows of what we are capable.

Little by little **the will and the habit** of turning frequently to God's presence will be formed in us. He recommends to us:

A great fidelity to the practice of this presence and to the fostering of this awareness of God within, which must always be carried out gently, humbly, and lovingly...We must take special care that this inner awareness, however brief, precedes our activities somewhat, that it accompanies them from time to time, and that we complete all of them with it. Since much time and effort are required to acquire this practice, we must not become discouraged when we fail. For the habit is only formed with effort, yet once it is formed we will find contentment in everything.

To what a profound union with God does Brother Lawrence want to lead us! For the faithful soul, he opens beautiful and happy perspectives:

This (practice of the presence) of God, somewhat difficult in the beginning, secretly accomplishes marvelous effects in the soul, draws abundant graces from the Lord, and when practiced faithfully, imperceptibly leads it to this simple attentiveness, to this loving awareness of God present everywhere, which is the holiest, the surest,

the easiest, and the most efficacious form of prayer. By turning inward and practicing the presence of God, the soul becomes so intimate with God that it spends practically all its life in continual acts of love, adoration, contrition, trust, thanksgiving, oblation, petition, and all the most excellent virtues. Sometimes it even becomes one continuous act, because the soul is in constant communion with this divine presence.

Three months before his death, our brother wrote:

What consoles me in this life is that I see God by faith. And I see him in such a way that it could make me say sometimes: "I don't believe anymore, I see. I experience what faith teaches us." On this assurance and this practice of faith, I will live and I will die with him. (And again, in speaking of "confidence") We could never have too much in such a good and faithful friend who will never let us down, either in this world or in the next.

Having evoked such a luminous horizon, Lawrence addresses to us this **last encouragement**, on which we will finish our little anthology.

I know that few persons reach this advanced state. It is a grace God bestows only on a few chosen souls, since this simple awareness remains ultimately a gift from his kind hand. But let me say, for the consolation of those who want to embrace this holy practice, that he ordinarily gives it to souls who are disposed to receive it. If he does not give it, we can at least acquire, with the help of ordinary grace, a manner and state of prayer that greatly resembles this simple awareness, by means of this practice of the presence of God.

A Providential Discovery of the Writings of Brother Lawrence

Regarding the writings of Lawrence, until now we have only had at our disposal the printed text edited in 1691 by the Abbé of Beaufort. This is the text that readers and authors have depended on until the present. However, quite providentially, a manuscript of 1745 was discovered containing the transcription of the writings of some religious authors of the seventeenth century, ending with the Letters and Spiritual Maxims of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection.

This will be the subject of a new critical edition of the texts of Brother Lawrence. Our brother will come forward looking more true, free, and "Teresian." This will reveal the hagiographical style of Abbé Joseph de Beaufort typical of his time. This doesn't lessen the great gratitude we owe to Abbé de Beaufort. Without him we would not have known this simple lay brother. He quickly understood the spiritual riches of the mystical cook he had known for a quarter of a century. He also understood the importance of his doctrine and the apostolic influence that his writings and the example he could give. Lawrence is a prophet of the Sun of God who enlightens our life, provided that we prefer not to remain in the shadow.

The Mission of Brother Lawrence Continues

Brother Lawrence occupies a privileged place in the heart of a number of seekers of God throughout the world, including our Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox brothers and sisters. Many Christians love him, listen to him, and revere him as a luminous guide and an authentic saint. By his life in the Sun of God and his radiant witness, Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, true son of Carmel, continues today his beneficial action. By his simplicity and love, he leads us to God, present in our entire life. Let's not hesitate to get to know him.

On the Feast of the Glorious Cross, Rome, September 14, 2014

Father Saverio Cannistrà, O.C.D., Superior General

The Prayer of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

Spiritual Life, Spring 2013

Christina Nunn, O.C.D.

AFTER RECEIVING THE LAST SACRAMENTS as he lay dying, Brother Lawrence was asked what he was doing, what he was thinking about. “I am doing what I will be doing throughout eternity,” he replied,

I am blessing God, I am praising God, I am adoring God, and I am loving him with my whole heart. This is what our vocation is all about, brothers, to adore God, and to love him without worrying about anything else.

This encapsulates Lawrence’s attitude to his prayer and indeed to his: life. Camilo Maccise, former Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, describes Lawrence as understanding in a remarkable way the charism of Carmel: “To so dwell under the gaze of the living God as to experience, in a mysterious way, the ineffable Presence who lives within us.”

Brother Lawrence was born Nicholas Herman in 1614 at Hérimenil, a small village near Lunéville in Lorraine. We know practically nothing about his family and early life, apart from a short note in the Eulogy written by Joseph de Beaufort and published a year after Lawrence’s death in 1692:

His mother and father were fine people who led an exemplary life. They inspired the fear of God in him from his childhood and took particular care for his education, presenting him only with holy maxims in keeping with the Gospel.

At the age of eighteen Lawrence had a profound experience of God that was to affect him for the rest of his life. One winter’s day he was looking at a tree stripped of its leaves, when he realized that in a little while its leaves would reappear followed by its flowers and fruit. This simple experience of seeing this tree that appeared to be dead and realizing that it would come to life again changed his whole life. It was at this moment that Lawrence began to realize in a very special way the presence of God in his life, and the providence of God, and the power of God [Sciurba (tape)]. Lawrence then became a soldier, fighting in the Thirty-Years War, before returning wounded to his parents’ home in 1635.

After an attempt to lead the eremitical life as a hermit and some time as a valet in Paris, Lawrence made the decision in 1640 at the age of twenty-six to enter the Discalced Carmelites on the Rue de Vaugirard in Paris. He entered as a lay brother, taking the name Lawrence of the Resurrection. He was to remain here until his death in 1691, at the age of seventy-seven. The writings we have by and about Lawrence we owe to his biographer Joseph de Beaufort, priest and later vicar general of Paris.

These consist of a series of thirty-seven maxims and sixteen letters that were written by Lawrence and four conversations recorded by de Beaufort shortly after each meeting. A resume of Lawrence’s teaching was put together by de Beaufort and called, “The Practice of the Presence of God,” as well as two biographical sketches, the “Eulogy” and “The Ways of Brother Lawrence.” Together these give us a good insight in Lawrence’s way of praying, this “simple

attentiveness and general loving awareness of God.” In this article I shall look at Lawrence’s teaching on prayer and the simplicity of his way, a way that is open and available to us today if only we have the courage to persevere.

The Ways of Brother Lawrence

The Ways of Brother Lawrence was published in 1694 by de Beaufort, who states at the beginning, “I will write what I myself heard and saw concerning the ways of Brother Lawrence.” This small book gives us a sense of who Brother Lawrence was and what undergirded his life of prayer. Lawrence spent the first fifteen years in the monastery as cook to about one hundred friars, a job to which he had “the strongest natural aversion.” Yet he was able to state that he possessed God as peacefully in the commotion of his kitchen as he did when kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament. De Beaufort describes him as never harsh:

His heart was open, eliciting confidence, letting you feel you could tell him anything, and that you had found a friend.... He spoke freely and showed great goodness.... Once you got past his rough exterior you discovered an unusual wisdom.

Lawrence lived the virtue of humility to the depths of his being. He was content with any place, any task:

Instead of paying attention to his dispositions and examining the road he was walking, he looked only to God, the end of the journey. Therefore he made great strides toward him by practicing justice, charity and humility, more intent on doing than on thinking about what he was doing.

When he learned of evil, he was not shocked, rather, he was surprised that things were not worse, given the “malice of which a sinner is capable.”

“The Practice of the Presence of God”

Lawrence’s description of his way of prayer is the “practice of the presence of God,” that is, to take delight in and become accustomed to God’s divine company. Lawrence also described it as “attention to God; silent conversation with God; trust in God; the life and soul’s peace.” It is a habit formed by repetition of acts and by frequently bringing the mind back into God’s presence. In order to acquire this way of prayer, Lawrence stresses the need for purity of life and then fidelity to this practice and to the fostering of the awareness of God within. Lawrence understands the needs of those beginning this way of prayer. He gives examples of the words beginners could use interiorly, such as, “My God, I am completely yours” or “God of love, I love you with all my heart.” It doesn’t actually matter what words are used, but rather it is the fact that one can fix one’s mind on God alone. Lawrence is not concerned that, when describing this prayer, he is repeating himself:

You will tell me that I always say the same thing. It is true. I know of no other means more appropriate or easier than that! And since I practice no other, I recommend it to everyone.

A necessary prerequisite is the “desire to learn the trade” (De Meester, pg. xxxv). Lawrence accepts that at the beginning it is very difficult and advises us not to be discouraged when we fail: “When I realize I have failed, I acknowledge it and say: this is typical; it’s all I can do!” As he wrote to one of his correspondents about a nun who wanted to advance faster, “You don’t become a saint in a day!” Our only concern in this life should be to please God, or, as he expanded this thought in another letter, “to be with God, and to do, say or think nothing that could displease him.” Whatever we are doing, whether it is manual work, or reading and writing,

even during our religious exercises and vocal prayers, we must stop for a moment, as often as possible, to adore God in the depths of our hearts, to savor him.

For Lawrence, this simple awareness of God “is the holiest, the surest, the easiest, and the most efficacious form of prayer.” Lawrence described how he would carry out this practice in his periods of activity as well as during prayer, so that “repeating these acts, they become more familiar, and the practice of the presence of God becomes more natural.” This conversation with God takes place “in the depths and center of the soul.” He describes how we should “make an oratory of our hearts, where we can withdraw to converse with him.” When we are aware of the fact that God dwells within us and know this as a reality in our lives then, as Lawrence tells the same correspondent, we do not have to be in Church to be with God. I do not think that Lawrence is saying there is no need for church, as some might interpret this; rather that God can be with us at all times and in all places. This is because prayer had become such an integral part of his life that it didn’t matter where Lawrence was or what he was doing; he was always in the presence of God.

This practice of prayer was not an end in itself. As Lawrence would have learned from the writings of St. John of the Cross, we need to go beyond the consolations of God to seek God himself. Lawrence tells one of his correspondents that this exercise—the practice of the presence of God—does not hurt the body, but that it is appropriate “to deprive it occasionally, and even with some frequency, of some innocent, permissible, little consolations” that we might find consolation only in God. But consolations are not the reason for seeking God: “We must not seek consolations from this exercise, but must do it from a motive of love, and because God wants it.” In order to do this, we must empty our heart of all that is not God and renounce all that is not God.

Lawrence held to this teaching all his life. In a letter written six days before he died, he wrote: “Let us devote ourselves entirely to knowing God.... Let us not settle for seeking or loving God only for the graces he has given us or can give us.” The last section of his *Spiritual Maxims* is concerned with the benefits the soul receives from this practice. These are centred on the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. For Lawrence, these alone can conform us completely to the will of God, and, for the one who practices these three virtues, everything is possible.

Benefits of this Practice

According to Lawrence, the first benefit is that faith increases and “becomes more intense and efficacious in all life’s situations, and especially in times of need.” The person praying in this way “sees and senses God present by a simple remembrance.” It also strengthens us in hope: “[Our hope] grows and is strengthened to the extent that our faith penetrates the secrets of the divinity by this holy exercise.” Finally, this practice inspires the will and “inflames it with a sacred fire of love”: “God who is a consuming fire reduces to ashes all that is opposed to him.” This produces “a holy ardor, a sacred zeal and a strong desire to see this God loved, known, and adored by all creatures.”

Lawrence never lost the recognition of his total dependency on God. In conversation with Joseph de Beaufort, he impressed on him the need to ask God for help in events as they happen. He related how when on a trip to buy wine in Burgundy, for which he had no experience and had to cope with a crippled leg and the problems travelling; he did not worry: “He told God it was his problem, after which he discovered that all was accomplished, and all was done well!”

Echoing the teaching of St. Teresa of Jesus, he found joy everywhere doing little things for the love of God (cf. *Interior Castle*, VII.4.15): “The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done.” Lawrence said “that our sanctification depends not on changing our works, but on doing for God what we would normally do for ourselves.”

There is a real feeling of joy and peace that comes across from Lawrence’s writings. This was not some hard penitential grind done out of fear of a stern God. He had such an intimate relationship with God that he could act in no other way. To a correspondent he wrote, “My tranquility is so great that I fear nothing. What could I fear when I am with him? I cling to him with all my strength.” Lawrence stresses that all too often it is we who ignore God rather than his being unreachable:

*God paints himself in the depths of our souls, yet we do not want to see him there.
We leave him for foolish things and fail to converse with our King, who is always
present within us.*

“Methodless Method”

The “Practice of the Presence of God” has been described as a way of orientating ourselves toward God (Moran, pg. 2) and as the “methodless method” (De Meester, pg. xxxv). In fact, Lawrence spurned the methods of his day:

*We look for methods to learn how to love God. We want to get there by I don’t
know how many practices. A multitude of methods makes it more difficult for us to
remain in God’s presence. Isn’t it much shorter and more direct to do everything for
the love of God?*

It was love of God alone that led him on. He stripped prayer to its essentials, until what he said was simplicity itself. He described himself as having “no other interest than the pure love of

God.” Lawrence describes this way of prayer as a habit. This idea has been expanded by Fr. Salvatore Scieurba in his tape on Lawrence:

The more that we work at it, the more we turn to God, the more that we recognize that God is present within us. The more that this becomes a part of our life, it becomes a habit in a good sense, not in the sense of something artificial, forced, mechanical: but rather this is the way we are, this is what we become. We become more and more aware of God’s presence within us; it’s natural and a habit in a good sense.

Lawrence describes private devotions as a means to arrive at the end, but they can be superfluous when our prayer has reached the depths he describes:

If, then, we are with the one who is our end by this practice of the presence of God, it is certainly useless to return to the means. We can continue our loving exchange with him, remaining in his holy presence sometimes by an act of adoration, praise, or desire, other times by acts of oblation, thanksgiving, or anything else that our minds can devise.

Relevant for All People

Lawrence presents us with a way of prayer that transcends time and denominational boundaries. It is as a live aid present to us today as when he was writing and speaking in the seventeenth century. Lawrence managed to combine the active life with an intense life of prayer that all Christians can follow (Moran, pg. 1). He shows us how in the midst of a busy life, we can pray continuously, giving praise to God at all times, in all places, in all circumstances. Just two months before his death, Lawrence wrote in a letter “I am still very content.”

De Meester in his general introduction comments:

The etymology of the word “contentment” comes from the fact that everything “tends together” towards its goal, that there is no internal division. Lawrence was a man of one purpose, straightforward, a rock, a stable, free being who found his simplicity his harmony, and his dynamism in the presence of God” (pg. xxxviii).

Joseph de Beaufort, toward the end of his second book, entitled *The Ways of Brother Lawrence*, commented on Lawrence’s relevance for all people:

Although Brother Lawrence lived a hidden life, all people, no matter what their personal circumstances may be, can benefit from his example as given here. He teaches those involved in the world to turn to God to ask for the grace to fulfill their responsibilities, to deal with their concerns. He teaches them to turn to God in their conversations, even during their leisure time.... This is not a theoretical devotion that can only be practiced in the cloister. Everyone must adore and love God.

De Beaufort goes on to say that the constant prayer St. Paul urges for all Christians (1 Thess. 5:17) consists in just this type of prayer.

Lawrence—with his emphasis on nothing but love of God and the joy found in doing this—is indeed a beacon for the rest of us as we seek God in prayer. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection died on February 12, 1691, “in the same peace and tranquility that had characterized his life.”

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COMMUNITY FORMATION

“Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others... Each community is called to create a God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord”

(Gaudete et exsultate, ch. 4 — In Community)

Introduction

Definition and purpose

“Community formation” is time set aside for the entire community, including visitors, to engage in discussions centered on Carmelite spirituality. It is distinct from “Candidate Formation” (Formation I and II) in that it is less formal and does not follow a strict structure. It is also distinct from “Ongoing Formation.” While Ongoing Formation often covers topics that may be more advanced or suited to definitely professed members with greater experience, community formation focuses on subjects that are accessible and beneficial to all levels within the community. The atmosphere encourages open dialogue and allows for a more spontaneous exchange of ideas among participants.

The purpose is to grow in community life, offer mutual support in living our Carmelite vocation, and nurture spiritual friendship. The materials used, or the conferences given, are to provide a starting point for conversation. The end goal is *not* to “study a book” or master a subject, but to accompany one another on “the way of perfection.” Examples and suggested topics are given below.

Community formation benefits everyone. Those in aspirancy and Formation I and II gain insight into practical aspects of being a Carmelite, while inspiring the definitively professed to reflect on their Carmelite journey. Community formation/discussion involves everyone—visitors, aspirants, candidates, and professed.

Characteristics of the OCDS communities

“The local community of the Secular Order of the Teresian Carmel, a visible sign of the Church and of the Order, is a place to live and promote personal and communal fellowship with God in Christ and in the Spirit and with other brothers and sisters in accordance with the Teresian charism. The person of Christ is at the center of the community” (OCDS Const., Art. 24.a).

“St. Teresa of Jesus initiated a new model of community life. Her ideal of community life is based on the certainty of faith that the Risen Jesus is in the midst of the community and that it lives under the protection of the Virgin Mary... 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 the spiritual life and they bring peace both internally and externally” (Const., Art. 24.b).

Community Formation (discussion/conference)

Accordingly, those who come to Carmel are “called to profound dialogue with God in prayer. But this would be meaningless in the absence of a trusting relationship with the members of the community...” (Ratio Institutionis 23). The need for divine and human assistance is a vital

part of any formation in our communities. The community meeting gives an opportunity for all candidates in formation to learn from the example of those experienced seculars who are living the charism of Carmelite spirituality with unwavering loyalty and dedication (see Ratio 22).

Coming together as a community fosters the fraternal life of its members.

“Faithful to the teaching of our Holy Mother Teresa, the members are conscious that their commitment cannot be carried out by one alone; their fraternal life is a privileged place where they are deepened, formed and matured” (Ratio 26).

It is important to note here that “fraternal life does not mean to live a common life, nor does it mean to live a life in community; rather it means a life lived in the spirit of oneness, rooted in baptism and bound together even more closely in Christ through a common vocation of charism, life and mission” (Can. 602. Code of Canon Law; Book II, People of God).

“It is Christ in his Pascal mystery who is the model and sustainer of fraternal life. This fraternal life constitutes an evangelical way of conversion which requires the courage of self-renunciation to accept and accommodate the other within the community. This renunciation becomes a way of life, to live as Jesus did” (Ratio 27).

“Teresa is aware of the importance of mutual support on the road of prayer and the importance of friendship with others in the common search for God. She also considers as fundamental to such friendship, culture, the human virtues, gentleness, empathy, prudence, discretion, simplicity, kindness, joy and availability, as we seek to ‘walk in truth before God and people’” (Const., 24.b).

Community is a privileged place where spiritual formation is deepened and accompanied by a corresponding need for communication. For this reason, “the community should give a good example of how to live Secular Carmelite life, even if it does not reach the ideal... The secular order community as a whole, and each of its members, have a formative responsibility, to be fulfilled in the manner determined in cooperation with the Director of formation and the Council” (Ratio 28).

Specific Guidelines

In order to foster the noble ideals of the Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer, community formation/discussion/sharing, much like candidate formation, requires appropriate formation guidelines. It should meet the needs of the candidates who are at all different levels of formation. As a point of clarification, it’s not necessary to look for new materials or themes for community formation. The materials and essential points from any of the levels of formation in our National Formation Program can be used effectively for community formation.

Selected themes/topics should be chosen for the benefit of the whole community. Our message should be clear, and the main ideas should be easily identified and understood. We should get to the point without using unneeded words or images. Putting it simply, discussion points should help the members of the community grow in their vocation. Overall, community formation should help the members develop a stronger sense of personal and collective identity as Discalced Carmelites.

Once again, we need to keep in mind the practicality of community formation. As noted previously, it shouldn't be academic in nature. It's about responding to the life of Jesus, lived and experienced by our Carmelite saints. This is largely a practical pursuit that purifies and transforms the members in Christ.

Topics and Themes

The following themes and topics are offered by way of suggestions to make community discussion more fruitful. Communities should feel free to take what is useful for their needs. Discussion time depends on the community's schedule.

OCDS Legislative Documents

Instead of reading an entire document from start to finish, our focus should be on specific themes for discussion as shown below:

“Witness to the Experience of God” – Constitutions, Art. 17-24 could be used as a central theme for a community session.

The role of St. Albert's Rule in the Carmelite reform of St. Teresa. We could use Session Three of ongoing formation: *The Word of God and Rule of Carmel*.

Note: All the sessions of ongoing formation on the Rule of St. Albert could be effectively used for community formation as well.

Reading and discussing certain sections of the Provincial Statutes and other legislative documents of the OCDS. For example, during election years, communities could discuss and familiarize themselves with the election procedures that are laid out in their respective Provincial statutes.

The local Council: understanding the function of the Council within the context of the community.

Note: Session Eleven of Formation II, Year C could be effectively used for community formation.

The Ritual for the OCDS members, officially approved by the Holy See, could be another topic for discussion prior to profession/reception day of the communities.

Letters, notices, and messages addressed by the Provincial Delegate, the Superior General of the Order and the Provincial Council.

Reading and discussing the letters and messages sent out by the OCDS main office should be part of the community formation to foster the sense of belonging to the whole body of the Discalced Carmelite Order and its structure. We are not just one isolated community. We are part of the harmonious whole.

Related to this topic, we might discuss the “essential points” of Session Four of the Aspirancy Handbook along with its Appendix D which refers to the Organizational Chart. The point to understanding the structure is not so much who is “in charge” but how the parts of the Order relate to one another.

Writings of Carmelite saints that focus on specific themes

Themes based on the writings of Carmelite saints could be part of the discussion point. For example:

“Explanation of the nature of union with God” (OCDS Formation II, Year A, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Session Nine).

Progression in prayer: prayer of recollection, prayer of quiet, and contemplation, using the Our Father as a guide (OCDS Formation I, Year A, *The Way of Perfection*, Sessions 7-9).

“Spiritual Maxims of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection” (Session One of our study of Brother Lawrence).

Glossaries are a great resource for clarification or understanding some of the terms used in the works of our saints. For example, the word “detachment” within the context of Teresa’s *The Way of Perfection* could be a point of discussion for clarification and understanding the virtue of detachment.

Detachment (*The Way of Perfection*, Study Edition, pgs. 503-504):

- Relinquishing what stands in the way of giving oneself to the All without reserve (8.1; 32.9).
- In it one embraces the Creator rather than the creature, cares not for what comes to an end but for eternal things (8.1; 32.9; 3.4)
- Outward detachment is necessary until one gains from the Lord a freedom in regard to the attachment (8.4; 10.1).
- The freedom from attachment gives one dominion over all creation (10.3).
- An aid to detachment is the thought of how quickly everything comes to an end (10.2).
- Along with humility, it is a virtue loved by Christ, who was never seen without it (10.3).
- Through the two virtues [detachment and humility], one escapes from Egypt [slavery] and finds the true manna (10.4).
- These two virtues cannot be present without love for others (16.2).
- The objects of detachment include ourselves, our bodies, and our honor (10.5; 12:5).

History and Charism of the Discalced Carmelite Order

We could choose a theme or topic based on the history of the Order or charism for discussion. It should be brief and focused on the spirituality of Discalced Carmelites in history. For example, when studying the foundation of the first monastery of the Discalced Carmelites, St. Joseph in Avila, the discussion points could include selected paragraphs from St. Teresa’s *Life* (chapters 32-39) and the letters written by Teresa (*Letters*, Vol. 1, letter 2) relating to the first foundation. The session should be a learning experience of our charism and the reform movement of the sixteenth century. (Also refer to Teresa’s *Foundations*.)

Another topic relating to history of the Order could be the chain of important events that led to the establishment of the Discalced Carmelites as a separate order and the election of the first Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites. (The history and charism are discussed in Sessions Three and Four of Formation I, Year B.)

OCDS Members’ responsibilities to the Community and the Order

It could be useful to refer to the OCDS Formation I, Year B, Session Ten as a basic guideline to share a brief and effective message on community responsibilities. Related topics could be OCDS community elections and member responsibilities that should empower members to take on roles of service.

Conclusion

The deepening of one's relationship with God is the primary purpose of community formation. Community discussions on Carmelite spirituality help members develop a stronger sense of personal and collective identity as Discalced Carmelites. In addition, coming together monthly provides stability that contributes to individual growth and transformation. This not only helps the participants' personal life, but impacts those around them as well. Community formation fulfills an important role in our spiritual development and service to the Order and the Church.

Prayer

God grant us the patience to work together as members of our community. Teach us the true meaning of compassion, in order that we may reach out generously to all within our community. Help us to recognize our shared responsibilities and the gift of unity and love. Guide our actions toward peaceful resolutions, and grant us the wisdom to listen, respect, and learn from one another. We ask this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

PART II

A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF RESOURCE MATERIALS FOR ONGOING AND/OR COMMUNITY FORMATION

Introduction

Applying oneself to a regular habit of reading and reflection is essential to a vocation in Carmel. Frequent return to foundational materials such as the major writings of the Carmelite Doctors of the Church and Church documents is necessary for ongoing formation of the definitively professed. Equally important is reading and reflecting on the writings of other Carmelite saints and exploring recent articles on Carmelite topics. Additionally, reading books authored by Carmelite scholars and other writers can further enhance one's understanding of Carmelite spirituality.

"There is an academic aspect to the formation of a Teresian Carmelite. There is an intellectual basis to the spirituality and identity of one who is called to the Order. ... A Carmelite who does not have the interest in studying or deepening the roots of his/her identity through prayer and study loses their identity and can no longer represent the Order. Nor does that person speak for the Order" (*Welcome to the Secular Order*, pg. 14, Aloysius Deeney, O.C.D.).

We must remember that ongoing formation is not just about reading many books or attending various retreats and conferences. The goal of the Carmelite is to be a loyal witness for Christ, remaining subject to ongoing purification, transformation, and ultimate union with God. Carmelite spirituality is meant to be lived in the hustle and bustle of our daily lives.

Our Carmelite saints often describe the abundant blessings experienced through spiritual readings. In *The Book of Her Life*, Teresa describes how she felt the "call" by reading St. Augustine's *Confessions* and how she appropriates to herself Augustine's conversion story: "As I began to read the *Confessions*, it seemed to me I saw myself in them. I began to commend myself very much to this glorious saint. When I came to the passage where he speaks about his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden, it only seemed to me, according to what I felt in my heart, that it was I the Lord called. I remained for a long time totally dissolved in tears and feeling within myself utter distress and weariness... **It seemed to me my soul gained great strength** from the Divine Majesty and that He must have heard my cries and taken pity on so many tears. **The inclination to spend more time with Him began to grow**" (*Life*, 9:8-9, emphasis added).

Likewise, St. Thérèse wrote in her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*, that she was nourished for a long time on the "pure flour" contained in the *Imitation of Christ*. "All the great truth of religion, the mysteries of eternity, plunged my soul into a state of joy not of this earth" (Study Edition, pg. 158). Her spiritual readings, meditation and reflection raised her consciousness to the higher realms of heaven. It is easy to see where her readings influenced her daily life in Carmel. Thérèse describes an incident concerning a Sister in her community who had a habit of displeasing her in everything. Thérèse quickly realized, "...when I was tempted to answer her back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her my most friendly smile ... for the

Imitation [*Imitation of Christ*, 44:1] says: ‘*It is better to leave each one in his own opinion than to enter into arguments*’” (Study Edition, pg. 346).

As can be seen here, by incorporating in their daily lives what they read and reflected, the Carmelite saints are the shining stars for countless souls and guide the way to the Promised Land.

As you begin to read and reflect on the suggested resource materials, sincerely ask yourself the following questions:

- What can I take from these readings to incorporate into my daily life as a Christian and a Secular Carmelite?
- What did I read that has personal meaning for me?
- What, if anything, does the Holy Spirit want me to share with others?

“Occupying a privileged place in nourishing the prayer life of Secular Carmelites will be the study and spiritual reading of Scripture and the writings of our Saints, particularly those who are Doctors of the Church: St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross, and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus. The Church’s documents are also food and inspiration for a commitment to follow Jesus” (OCDS Const., Art. 19).

Resource Materials

The following list of resources is provided as an aid and is by no means exhaustive.

Beyond print materials, there are also numerous resources such as CDs, DVDs, YouTube videos and podcasts dedicated to Carmelite spirituality. For example:

- **CarmelCast** is a popular podcast produced by ICS Publications, available on YouTube in video format, along with various other popular audio podcast platforms. Internet search: CarmelCast Podcast or YouTube-ICS Publications.
- **Dr. Anthony Lilles’ YouTube** is a popular audio podcast platform/episode on the writings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Elizabeth of the Trinity.
- **YouTube videos** on St. John of the Cross with Fr. Donald Haggerty and Matthew Leonard.

An extensive list of books authored by Carmelite saints, religious, scholars and other writers is available at: www.icspublications.org.

When selecting a book written by a Carmelite doctor of the Church (or any book), be sure to choose an appropriate theme/topic which will help participants to experience spiritual growth. Avoid the tendency to skip over the introduction or prologue of a book and move too quickly to the main text. In the brief prologues to their texts, Teresa and John provide valuable information about their intended purpose for writing and help prepare the reader for what is contained in their written work.

The following resource materials are divided into eleven categories with additional sub-titles. Participants can choose one of the following topics for their ongoing discussion and reflection.

1. Writings on prayer in the tradition of Discalced Carmelites
2. Biographies, life and works of Carmelite saints, blessed, and religious
3. History of the Order, reform of Carmel, and Discalced Carmelite foundations
4. History, growth, and contributions of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites to the Order, the Church, and the world
5. Legislative documents of the OCDS
6. Church documents pertaining to the Universal Church
7. Church documents, letters, homilies, and general audiences specific to the Order of Discalced Carmelites
8. Catechism of the Catholic Church
9. Scripture reading as part of Carmelite spirituality
10. Letters, notices, and messages addressed to the members of the OCDS
11. Other resource materials that complement Carmelite spirituality

*Seek in reading and you will find in meditation;
knock in prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation.*
Sayings of Light and Love #158
St. John of the Cross

1. Writings on prayer in the tradition of the Discalced Carmelites

St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila)

Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Vol. One. ICS

Note: Volume One includes *The Book of Her Life*, *Spiritual Testimonies*, and *Soliloquies*, some of St. Teresa's earliest writings on her life, prayer, and her first foundation. Her writings survived despite being denounced by the Inquisition within the Catholic Church.

Note to the Council: Some of these chapters could also be used effectively for community formation.

The Book of Her Life

a) Chapters 1-10 and 23-31 consist of autobiographical descriptions of her family life and her Carmelite life in the monastery of the Incarnation.

"I voyaged on this tempestuous sea for almost twenty years with these fallings and risings... I should say that it is one of the most painful lives, I think, that one can imagine; for neither did I enjoy God nor did I find happiness in the world. When I was experiencing the enjoyments of the world, I felt sorrow when I recalled what I owed to God. When I was with God, my attachments to the world disturbed me. This is a war so troublesome that I don't know how I was able to suffer it even a month, much less for so many years" (*Life*, 8:2).

b) Chapters 11-22 contain some of the important teachings on prayer; Teresa describes the four stages of prayer as “four ways to water a garden.” She conjures up an image of one’s soul as a “garden” wherein God has done the work of planting the seed (desire), and it is up to the gardener (the person) with the grace of God to diligently tend and water the plants in the garden of the soul.

As the prayer progresses in one’s life, God becomes the gardener and takes over the watering of the garden. “The Lord so desires to help the gardener here that He Himself becomes practically the gardener and the one who does everything” (*Life*, 16:1). “... the water is given without measure because the gardener is who He is – in truth, the creator of the water” (*Life*, 17:2). “As a result, the prayer is not experienced as work but as glory” (*Life*, 18:1).

Teresa beautifully described the joy of experiencing God in prayer, not an end in itself, but as one’s continuing prayer life having a growing, blossoming effect on the soul. She described this growth as a “garden in full bloom.” The fragrance of the flowers is beginning to spread (see *Life*, 17:2). “It [the soul] begins to perform great deeds by means of the fragrance [virtue] the flowers give, for the Lord desires that they bloom so that it may see that it possesses virtue although it is very clearly aware that it couldn’t have acquired them – nor was it able to – in many years, and also that in that moment, the heavenly gardener gave them. Here the humility that remains in the soul is much greater and more profound than in the past. The soul sees more clearly that it did neither little nor much other than consent to the Lord’s favors and embrace them with its will” (*Life*, 17:3).

Teresa’s teaching on prayer comes alive, especially in some of the chapters in Volume One of her collected works, as she makes some valuable observations on the practice of prayer:

“It seemed to me that in this life there could be no greater good than the practice of prayer” (*Life*, 7:10).

“... bodily strength is not necessary [for prayer] but only love and a habit” (*Life*, 7:12).

“Prayer is an exercise of love, and it would be incorrect to think that if there is no time for solitude there is no prayer at all” (*Life*, 7:12).

“He looked not at my great sins but at the desires I often had to serve Him and at the sorrow I felt for not having the strength in me to put these desires into practice” (*Life*, 7:18).

“For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us” (*Life*, 8:5).

“In its progress [in prayer], it [the soul] advances a great deal because it advances in love” (*Life*, 9:5).

“For love is the genuine fruit of prayer when prayer is rooted in humility” (*Life*, 10:5).

c) In chapters 32-36 Teresa describes how her first monastery of the glorious St. Joseph was finally founded and of the strong opposition and persecution the nuns had to undergo after taking the habit.

Additional chapters (37-40) describe the favors and effects of prayer. She concludes the last chapter with her envisioning of a happy death: “So now it seems to me there is no other reason

for living... I am consoled to hear the clock strike, for at the passing away of that hour of life it seems to me I am drawing a little closer to the vision of God" (*Life*, 40:20).

Note: By the grace of God, Teresa continued to live. She founded additional monasteries, collaborated with John of the Cross to establish the male branch of the Order, and carried on with her writings until the end of her life.

Spiritual Testimonies

d) The last pages of the volume consist of her *Spiritual Testimonies* and *Soliloquies*. In her *Testimonies*, she speaks of her spiritual state and manner of prayer, detachment and other virtues, the Holy Trinity, the prophecy of her death, and a long account of her spiritual life for the Inquisitor of Seville.

Soliloquies

e) These include her "spontaneous prayer to God that flows so easily and frequently from her pen" (Introduction, pg. 441).

"May You through Your providence, Lord, provide the necessary means by which my soul may serve You at Your pleasure rather than on its own. ... May this 'I' die, and may another live in me greater than I and better for me than I, so that I may serve Him. May He live and give me life. May He reign, and may I be captive, for my soul doesn't want any other liberty" (*Soliloquies*, 17:3).

***The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. Two. ICS**

Volume Two contains two of Teresa's most important works: *The Way of Perfection* and *The Interior Castle*. The study guide editions of these two classics were introduced to the candidates in Formation I and II as required reading.

It is highly recommended that the participants in ongoing formation return to these classics using other resource materials, such as *The Way of Transformation* by Fr. Mark O'Keefe (see below), for a deeper understanding of Teresa's major works.

Note: Teresa's meditations on the Our Father in chapters 26-42 of *The Way of Perfection* would serve beautifully for private prayer and reflection as well as for discussion.

Along with the above two classics, Volume Two also contains *Meditations on the Song of Songs*. Teresa continues to write about her favorite subject, "prayer," based on the Old Testament book of Solomon's *Song of Songs*. "I shall write something about the understanding the Lord gives me of what is contained in the words that bring delight to my soul about this path of prayer" (Prologue, pg. 215). Her meditations on the *Song of Songs* contain some admirable passages on prayer.

Read-along books/articles that explain and clarify the teachings of St. Teresa of Avila:

The Way of Transformation: Saint Teresa of Avila on the Foundation and Fruit of Prayer. Mark O’Keefe, O.S.B. ICS Publications.

The title of this book, *The Way of Transformation*, is a play on the title of Teresa’s *The Way of Perfection*. The author begins “the study of Teresa’s work by looking first at the journey of transformation as a whole, using the framework provided by *The Interior Castle*, which sees the Christian itinerary as a passage through seven dwelling places” (Introduction, pg. 9). The rest of the book focuses on the foundation of prayer – detachment, humility, and love of neighbor, using Teresa’s *The Way of Perfection*. The book concludes using the metaphor of the silkworm, cocoon, and butterfly to explain the Carmelite charism of prayer – transformation and union in God.

Throughout the book, Father O’Keefe provides us with an insightful account of Teresa’s major writings. He observes:

“In a wonderful interpretation of the well-known Gospel story of Martha and Mary welcoming Jesus into their home (Lk. 10:38-42), Teresa says that the two come to work together to show true hospitality to the Lord (IC 7, 4, 12-14; W 31.5; M 7.3). Traditionally, Martha, busy with details of hospitality, has been interpreted to represent the active life of service of others. Mary, on the other hand, who sat quietly listening at the feet of Jesus, represents the contemplative life. But here, at the very end of *The Interior Castle*’s description of the journey into divine union, Teresa masterfully brings the two together – **not one or the other, not one over the other**, but Martha and Mary working together as different sides of offering hospitality to Christ. The person in abiding union with God cannot but reach out to others” (*The Way of Transformation*, ch. 8, pg. 164, emphasis added).

Note: The author here highlights the Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer. As previously noted, the Carmelite charism of prayer has an apostolic dimension and overflows with missionary fervor based on a fervent interior life. In the tradition of Carmel, the apostolate flows from the interior life; the two cannot be separated. It’s “not one or the other, not one over the other.” They are the two sides of the same coin.

This book is highly recommended for an overall understanding of prayer and transformation in the tradition of Carmel based on the writings of St. Teresa of Avila.

Entering Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle: A Reader’s Companion. Gillian T.W. Ahlgren, Paulist Press.

This book is recommended as additional reading in Formation II, Year B. It is a very insightful companion to Teresa’s *Interior Castle*. The final chapter, “Walking with Teresa Today,” provides a summary of some of the key theological themes of this work.

The Way of Prayer: A Commentary on Saint Teresa’s Way of Perfection. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, O.C.D. Ignatius Press.

This highly acclaimed commentary on Saint Teresa of Avila’s classic work, *The Way of Perfection*, discusses the various forms of Christian prayer, with an emphasis on Teresa’s meditation on the Our Father. The author, a renowned expert on Carmelite spirituality, includes

many quotations from Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross to explain Teresa's prayer in the tradition of the Discalced Carmelites. The summary in the last pages of the conclusion pulls together the unified structure of *The Way of Perfection* taught by the Saint.

St. John of the Cross

The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross. ICS

This book contains all major works of St. John of the Cross.

Note: The participants could read, meditate, discuss/reflect on his poetry, maxims, or a particular topic/theme as part of their ongoing formation.

The Poetry: Read the "Introduction to the Poetry" for a better understanding of its origin, style, and themes. John's poems express the quality of beauty, intensity of emotion, and the hidden gems of his spiritual teachings. John's commentaries on his three outstanding poems help us discern the theological and spiritual riches in the other poems that received no commentary. In some of his poetry, John contemplates the great Christian mysteries; in others, he speaks of his spiritual experiences, which also bear a doctrinal content (see Introduction to the Poetry).

The Sayings of Light and Love: These maxims or sayings were among John's first writings. Later, John incorporated them into the themes developed in his major works. They are not complete treatments of the subjects they address, but pithy reminders of important points (see Formation II, Year A, Appendix B: *Understanding the "Maxims" or "Sayings"*).

"A soul enkindled with love is a gentle, meek, humble, and patient soul" (*Sayings* #29).

"A tree that is cultivated and guarded through the care of its owner produces its fruit at the expected time" (*Sayings* #6).

The Ascent of Mount Carmel:

The Ascent contains three books:

Book One focuses on the purification of sense desires – the inordinate, unmortified desires which are known to be a hindrance to God's action in the soul.

Book Two covers the purification process of the intellect by faith.

Book Three, chapters 1-15 focus on the purification process of the memory by hope, and chapters 16-45 explain the purification of the will by charity.

Note: Book One and Book Two of *The Ascent* were introduced to the candidates in Formation II, Year A as required reading. Definitives could re-visit these materials, going into greater depth, along with recommended books/articles listed under "additional resource materials" below.

The Dark Night, Books One and Two

The Carmelite journey requires an understanding of the broader path of purification and the goal of union with God. *The Dark Night* further addresses the work of passive purification and liberation that are more properly God's action.

The Spiritual Canticle

A commentary on the stanzas that describes the exchange of love between a person and Christ as the journey unfolds through purification, transformation, and union.

The Living Flame of Love

John's commentary on the stanzas relates a very intimate and elevated union and transformation of the soul in God, written at the request of Doña Ana de Penalosa, a lay woman who housed the Discalced Carmelite nuns while they were in the process of making a foundation in the city of Granada (see introduction to *Prologue* and footnote 1).

Note: An in-depth study of all four major works of St. John of the Cross – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Spiritual Canticle*, and *The Living Flame of Love* – is addressed separately as Volume II of Ongoing Formation.

Special Counsels

This section of John's writings includes insightful observations and comments addressed to the nuns of the Discalced Carmelite Order. His *Special Counsels* include "The Precautions," "How to Reach Perfection," and "Degrees of Perfection."

The Letters

John's correspondence served mostly for the purpose of spiritual direction and was addressed primarily to the nuns and friars of the Order. "One recipient of his letters, a Carmelite nun in Toledo, testified that a letter from him had the same effect as hearing him speak" (Introduction to the Letters).

Note: John's *Special Counsels* and *Letters* speak to all Carmelites of the Order. These are excellent study materials for ongoing formation or community formation/discussion.

The Living Flame of Love, Study Edition. Translated and prepared by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. ICS

This edition includes: **Study guides** throughout the book, which provide helpful guidance and explanation. **A glossary of terms** offering definitions as they pertain to John's specific usage throughout the work. **Comprehensive indexes** of key themes and biblical references, which make this edition an indispensable reference resource. This edition affords readers the opportunity to gain a much deeper appreciation for the beauty and richness of St. John's perennial teaching on the experience and science of love.

Additional resource materials that explain and clarify the teachings of St. John of the Cross

Love Awakened by Love, Fr. Mark O'Keefe, O.S.B. ICS

It is highly recommended that the participants in ongoing formation return to John's writings by using other resource materials for further understanding of John's classic work – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

Fr. O’Keefe freely shares his remarkable insights and reflections for the benefit of many who are somewhat hesitant to read John’s writings. “I am simply another reader who has benefited from John of the Cross, someone who is anxious to share the wonderful insights that I have found in his writings” (Introduction, pg. 3).

This book is more of a companion to – rather than a commentary on – *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. In addition, the open-ended questions for each chapter are a wonderful springboard for reflection and discussion.

The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching, Leonard Doohan. ICS

The chapters include *Stages in the Journey* and *The Person in the System of John of the Cross*. A chronology of major dates in the life of St. John of the Cross is also added to this book. “This book provides a clear and comprehensive framework for the serious student of St. John of the Cross. It is a doctrinal introduction; it maps out the territory, setting down the goal, the stages and the way one advances in the journey to God. The book is a contemporary challenge, because John’s doctrine is addressed with an eye on today’s humanistic and social viewpoints” (Preface).

The Impact of God: Sounding from John of the Cross, Iain Matthew, O.C.D. Hodder & Stoughton.

This book is highly recommended for its precise explanation of John’s thoughts on prayer. The book makes the writings of John easily accessible to all readers.

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

Story of a Soul, St. Thérèse of Lisieux. ICS

The study guide version of this classic work was introduced to the candidates in Formation II, Year C as required reading. Definitively professed members may wish to re-visit these materials along with the recommended books/articles listed under “Other resource materials” on Thérèse below.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Her Last Conversations. ICS

This is the revised edition of Thérèse’s last conversations. She spent the final months of her short life in the infirmary of the Carmel of Lisieux. Those who attended to her needs included her three older sisters by birth. *Her Last Conversations* serves as a sequel to St. Thérèse’s autobiography, *Story of a Soul*. It contains the intimate words of her final conversations with her three sisters during the last months of her life. Fortunately for us, her words were written down without the awareness that eventually a great multitude of friends of St. Thérèse would hunger for her spiritual teaching. In addition to her conversations, this edition contains letters concerning Thérèse’s illness and a guide to the people who were associated with her.

The Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Vol. 1, 1877-1890. ICS

Volume 1 contains letters written to and from her blood sisters, her other immediate family members, and Fr. P. Pichon, S.J. (a family friend of the Martin family). This volume includes a few letters written by Thérèse to her father, Louis Martin, expressing her appreciation and gratitude. “How I must love a Father who wanted to obtain such a great happiness for me, and how I do love him!... It is not true, dear little Father, that you could not do more for your little queen. If she is not a Saint, it will really be her own fault, for with a father like you she really has the means for this!” (letter #72, pg. 493).

The Letters of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Vol. 2, 1890-1897. ICS

Saint Thérèse reveals to us through these letters her mature thoughts and message as a religious and spiritual writer. This volume includes Thérèse’s famous letter to her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart. This letter forms the first part of Manuscript B of *Story of a Soul*. “I find you are right in keeping silence, and it is only in order to please you that I write these lines, for I feel my powerlessness in repeating in earthly words the secrets of heaven. And then, after having written out pages and pages, I would find that I had still not begun...” (letter #196, pg. 993).

“Let us work together for the salvation of souls; we have only the one day of this life to save them and thus to give the Lord proofs of our love” (letter #213, pg. 1042).

The Poetry of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, translated by Donald Kinney, O.C.D. ICS

The poems of Thérèse are among the least known of her writings. Her poems are simple and fresh, expressing the Christian message of love, brevity of life, and eternity. “My life is but an instant, a passing hour/My life is but a day that escapes and flies away/O my God! You know that to love you on earth/I only have today!” (PN 5, *My Song for Today*).

The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, translated by Aletheia Kane, O.C.D. ICS

Besides the countless spontaneous prayers found throughout her autobiography, letters, poetry, and plays, Thérèse left behind 21 additional prayers. This book contains all her prayers including her famous *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love*. “In the evening of this life, I shall appear before you with empty hands, for I do not ask you, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in your own Justice and to receive from your Love the eternal possession of Yourself” (Prayer 6).

The Plays of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, translated by Susan Conroy and David J. Dwyer. ICS

“Even those familiar with the other writings of St. Thérèse are often surprised to learn that, over a period of about three years toward the end of her life, she somehow managed to compose eight ‘theatrical pieces’ for special occasions in her convent... Thérèse invested herself wholeheartedly in the writing and performance of these little dramas, which offered a welcome opportunity to articulate her growing spiritual insights and share them with her religious community” (Preface). These plays were written within the framework of her favorite biblical themes and personalities, such as Christmas, Jesus at Bethany, and Joan of Arc.

Other resource materials that explain and clarify the teachings of St. Thérèse

***The Context of Holiness: Psychological and Spiritual Reflections on the Life of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, Marc Foley, O.C.D. ICS**

Fr. Marc unfolds the real life of Thérèse based on her autobiography, *Story of a Soul*.

“In this book, I have tried to show through the life of one woman that the trials and tragedies of life, the fears and conflicts of the human heart are not obstacles to growth in holiness but the stage upon which the drama of holiness unfolds. The same is true for us. The gray mundaneness of daily life, our wounded psyches with all their fears and neurotic conflicts, our families, friends, and peers who never live up to our expectations and who often disappoint us, the impersonal and insecure world that we live in, is the *context* in which we choose to do God’s will...

“The only glory that survives the grave is a life well lived. In a hundred years it will not have made any difference how much money we have in the bank, how many cars we have in the garage, how much power we wielded in our jobs, how many books we have written, or how esteemed we were by colleagues and friends. The only thing that ultimately matters is whether or not we have done the will of God” (pg. 146).

***The Love That Keeps Us Sane: Living the Little Way of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, Marc Foley, O.C.D. Paulist Press (sold by ICS)**

This little book is an excellent portrayal of St. Thérèse and her teachings. “Many books have been written on the ‘little way’ as a means to holiness. This is not one of them. This is about Thérèse’s spirituality as a means of preserving sanity in an often-insane world. St. Thérèse’s sanity lay in her ability to be deeply involved in life without becoming absorbed by it. She had the genius of knowing how to love others without becoming entangled or enmeshed in their problems. She could deal with the absurdities of daily life without losing her perspective” (Introduction).

Note: The above two books of Fr. Foley are excellent and highly readable accounts of Thérèse’s day to day life from the perspective of human behavior. A very practical and contemporary outlook on the life of “the greatest saint of modern times.”

***Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Universal Church*, Steven Payne, O.C.D. St. Paul’s Publishing Co.**

This short work is a study of the doctorate of St. Thérèse. “One of the more remarkable ecclesiastical developments of 1997 occurred on World Mission Sunday, October 19, in St. Peter’s Square, when Pope John Paul II declared St. Thérèse of Lisieux a ‘doctor of the universal church.’ This event marked not only the culmination of an unprecedented series of honors bestowed on Thérèse Martin since her death a century earlier, but it also represented a watershed in the evolution of the understanding of this ecclesiastical title. The author explores the history of the title ‘doctor of the church’... and some potential implications of her doctorate for the church in general and theology in particular” (Preface).

Other Recommended Books on Prayer

Temptation and Discernment, Segundo Galilea. ICS

This book is recommended for formators in Formation I. It contains brief reflections showing how to avoid activism, messianism, and other common pitfalls in ministry and prayer, based on the discernment principles of Ignatius of Loyola, John of the Cross, and Teresa of Avila. This book is an excellent study guide for ongoing formation as well as community formation.

Carmelite Spirituality in the Teresian Tradition, Paul-Marie of the Cross, O.C.D. ICS

Various chapters of this book are required reading throughout Formation I and II. Studying and reflecting on the entire book will help the participants to understand the charism of prayer in the Teresian tradition. This book could be used for community formation as well.

Carmelite Studies 11: Carmelite Wisdom and Prophetic Hope: Treasures Both New and Old. Edited by Mary Frohlich, R.S.C.J. ICS

“This volume, tracing the contribution of Carmel’s richness from the hermit life at the prophet Elijah’s *wadi* to the challenges and invitations of the contemporary world, is an excellent resource for personal study as well as an invaluable tool for Carmelite formation, study groups, and anyone wanting to explore the intersection of Carmelite spirituality, biblical Wisdom, contemplation and prophetic action. Includes a helpful introduction outlining each essay’s focus, notes for each essay, biographical sketches of the contributors, and a comprehensive index.”

2. Biographies, Life and Works of Carmelite Saints and Blesseds

Reading biographies and works of our Carmelite saints and blesseds gives us a priceless glimpse of their lives and spiritual development. By reading about their family life, their struggles, and virtues, we are inspired and encouraged to live our vocation faithfully. Biographies are a powerful tool for one’s growth in prayer and developing a closer relationship with God. The following books are a few suggestions for spiritual enrichment, discussion, and building communities in Carmel.

St. Teresa of Jesus (Avila)

Saint Teresa of Avila: 100 Themes on Her Life and Work, Tomás Alvarez, O.C.D. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D. ICS

This book contains a collection of 100 themes on Teresa’s life and work. These themes offer the reader a number of other facets of Teresa’s image: The cultural and family context in which she lived, her biographical profile, her leadership qualities as a founder, and her work as a writer. In addition, this book includes a comprehensive introduction to *The Book of Her Life* (and its two redactions); *The Book of Her Foundations*; *The Way of Perfection*; *The Interior Castle*; *Spiritual Testimonies*; *Meditation on the Song of Songs*; *Soliloquies*; her poetry and letters.

Note: This book could be an excellent study guide for ongoing formation. Various selected themes could be used for community formation as well.

In Context: Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross and Their World, Mark O’Keefe, O.S.B. ICS

“The word ‘context’ in the title of this book signals the author’s intention: to explore the various situations that influenced the life and times of Teresa and John, two Carmelites who have been recognized as two of the best known and most influential Christian mystics. Fr. O’Keefe has produced a wide-ranging exploration of the back stories of these two Carmelites who have made large imprints on the tapestry that is Carmelite spirituality and mysticism. The horizons of these two mystics seem endless as one gets to know their writings, their backgrounds, and their significance for contemporary Christianity” (Foreword).

St. John of the Cross

John of the Cross: Man and Mystic, Richard P. Hardy. Pauline Books and Media. (Sold by ICS)

This engaging contemporary biography is the perfect introduction—or an enjoyable re-acquaintance—to a man whose life, writings, and spirituality have illuminated the Christian world.

This book eloquently portrays the real and compassionate saint named John of the Cross. The author writes: “The more I read and reread his work, the more I found that they spoke of a man so different from the one I had read about in biographies. So, I set out to do something about it. I determined to research his life once more...Slowly a new figure emerged: a man, human being who had fallen in love with God IN the world. I discovered a man who is indeed a saint, but not because he fled the world. I found a man who had discovered that sanctity meant searching for and finding God in THIS world of ours and in the vicissitudes of his own life and times. Here was a man for whom the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus meant the consecration of the world and its history. For Fray Juan, God was one who speaks in time, in life, in the world” (Introduction).

St. Thérèse of Lisieux

With Empty Hands: The Message of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Conrad de Meester O.C.D. ICS

This book contains a “brilliant and moving presentation of the life, thought and spirituality of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Fr. de Meester asks why and how this young girl, who asked to be admitted to the Carmel of Lisieux and persevered in her vocation to a hidden life in an obscure corner of France, is not only loved and invoked by millions of people but has become a profound influence on theology, spirituality, and the missionary apostolate, culminating in her being declared a Doctor of the Church.”

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Story of a Life, Guy Gaucher, O.C.D. Ignatius Press

This book is the answer to a widespread demand for the finest biography of this greatest saint of modern times. “This book is based entirely, and scrupulously, on authentic documents. It contains no fiction. These pages try to be faithful to Thérèse, who said on her deathbed: ‘I only love simplicity. I have a horror of pretense’” (Prologue).

3. History of the Order, Reform of Carmel and Foundations

Reading and reflecting on the history and reform of Carmel should be part of ongoing formation. Our focus should not be on chronological dates and numbers; rather, our study should unravel the transformation of consciousness/awareness throughout the history of the Order, within the context of the Carmelite charism of prayer. Specifically, one should recognize in the history of Carmel the saving hand of God and His presence in all events, trials, and struggles.

Teresa’s letters to her brother Lorenzo at the time of her first foundation is a clear indication of her awareness of God’s providence. “I have already written you a long letter about a matter that for many reasons I could not escape doing since God’s inspirations are the source... (letter 2:2). ... What is important is that Teresa has a clear awareness of doing it ‘inspired by God’” (*St. Teresa of Avila: 100 Themes on Her Life and Work*, pg. 133).

God is intimately involved in history that contains the meaning of time and space. He frequently and progressively reveals Himself through the circumstances and events of our daily lives, as well as by means of our growing awareness through our participation in history.

The history of Carmel gives a crucial perspective for understanding its spirituality and the charism of prayer in historical events. Reading the history of the Order encourages participants to deepen their knowledge of Carmel and, more importantly, it awakens in them the desire to live in depth the charism of the Discalced Carmelite Order.

“The fire of our origins is not longing for the past. It is faith in God’s fruitful present. The charism is not exhausted in the founders but becomes richly incarnated in every era, in every historical and geographical context, in different languages, in every Carmelite called to be a faithful and original expression of that living experience that animated Teresa of Jesus, John of the Cross, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Edith Stein, Father Gracian, Brother Lawrence ... and so many anonymous sons and daughters of St. Teresa” (Declaration on the Carmelite-Teresian Charism, General Chapter 2021, <https://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/documents/declaration-on-the-carmelite-teresian-charism>).

We read and reflect on the history of Carmel to live in the present moment in time. God is continuously active in the events and encounters of our own time and place. It is our responsibility to discern the presence of God in all happenings with the eyes of faith and be a part of the history of the Order and beyond.

The following are a few suggestions of books on the history, spirituality, and important historical figures in the Order of Discalced Carmelites.

The Book of Her Foundations, Study Edition, St. Teresa of Avila. ICS

The Book of Her Foundations is one of Teresa's major works. It is not an exaggeration to state that Teresa was the only religious to fully document the founding of her first monastery, St. Joseph in Avila, and subsequent foundations as described in this volume. (The founding of St. Joseph is described in detail in her *Life*.)

Each chapter of the study edition includes a background summary and questions for reflection. Some of the historically important chapters include her meeting of St. John of the Cross (F ch. 3); the first foundation of friars (F ch. 13 and 14) and information on the Discalced forming their own province (F ch. 29). "While I was in Palencia, God willed that the discalced Carmelites be separated from the calced. This was done by letting the discalced form their own province, which was all that we were desiring for the sake of our peace and tranquility. At the request of our Catholic king, Don Philip, a very long brief was obtained from Rome for this purpose. And thus his majesty by obtaining this brief favored us as much as he did in the beginning... And this for me was one of the great joys and satisfactions of my life... Now we are all at peace, calced and discalced; no one can hinder us from serving our Lord" (F ch. 29: 30-32).

It is important to note here that "the charism of Teresa the founder was not confined to her person, nor was it reduced to the founding of a series of Carmels and her consequent leadership at their head. Much more important and decisive is the spirit that she transmitted to them..." (*St. Teresa of Avila, 100 Themes on Her Life and Work: The Charism of the Teresian Carmel*, pg. 135).

Teresa never failed to recognize God's presence and guidance in all her work. "I do not seek my own benefit in anything, nor do I have any reason to do so, but only His glory and praise, for many things will be seen for which glory and praise should be given Him. Thus may it please our Lord that anyone who reads this will not think of attributing praise to me, since to do so would be against the truth... Let us, my daughters, give all our thanks to the divine goodness for the many favors He has granted us" (Prologue to *The Book of Her Foundations*, pg. 13).

Hence it is crucial for our Order, Secular Carmelites in particular, to keep the Teresian spirit of Carmel and the true charism of prayer alive through all generations.

The Collected Letters of St. Teresa of Avila, Volumes One (2001) and Two (2007). ICS

These two volumes contain Teresa's invaluable contribution to the history of Carmel and its growth. "A keen observer of the reality around her as well as within, Teresa focuses light on many of the struggles in both the Carmelite order and the church of sixteenth-century Spain. She introduces us to major personalities who have left their mark on history. In addition, historians benefit from the letters because many of the gaps in the outline of events that are presented in her *Foundations* are filled in through her letters. Through them we also gain better knowledge of the chronology of events in her life and of how she related to diverse people she dealt with" (*Letters*, Vol. One, Introduction).

Some of the historically important letters in Volume One include: #2 (a detailed letter to her brother, Lorenzo about her first foundation); #3 (letter to the Town Council, Avila); #81 (Teresa writes enthusiastically to Isabel, prioress in Pastrana, about her first meeting with Jeronimo

Gracian. He was eventually elected as the first provincial of the Discalced Carmelite Order); #218 (letter to King Philip II concerning the imprisonment of St. John of the Cross); #221 (This letter includes a description of the disturbing treatment of St. John of the Cross and his companion: “It is said that on the day they were captured, they were flogged twice. They are receiving the worst treatment possible ... They said that blood was coming from his mouth as he was taken away”). Volume One also contains biographical sketches of important historical figures who contributed to the growth of the reformed Carmel.

Volume Two contains historically valuable information on the formation of the reformed Carmel as a separate province and the election of Jeronimo Gracian as the first provincial of the Discalced Carmelite Order (#371, #372, #374, #377, #378, #380). This volume also contains biographical sketches of important historical figures of the Order in the years 1578-1582.

The Heirs of St. Teresa of Avila, Carmelite Studies, Vol. 9. ICS

This issue of Carmelite Studies presents new insights into the lives and writings of individuals who knew Teresa of Avila in life and who, after her death in 1582, worked hard to propagate and defend her legacy, including Anne of St. Bartholomew (Teresa’s personal assistant), Ana de Jesus (St. John of the Cross dedicated the *Spiritual Canticle* to Ana). These two nuns made significant contributions to the spreading of the Teresian charism in France and other European cities.

Pilgrimage of Anastasius: The Autobiography of the First Provincial of the Discalced Carmelites, Jerome Gracian. ICS

Jerome Gracián (1545–1614) was the first provincial of the Discalced Carmelite Order and a close collaborator of St. Teresa of Ávila. He brought stability and growth to St. Teresa’s reform when it was still in its infancy, particularly among the friars. Praising Gracián in *The Book of Her Foundations*, Teresa writes: “Had I very much desired to ask His Majesty for a person to organize all things pertaining to the order in these initial stages, I would not have succeeded in asking for all that He gave me in Father Gracián. Our Lady has chosen him to help her order.” (see back cover)

Pilgrimage of Anastasius serves as a first-hand chronicle of the beginning of the Discalced Carmelite Order and sheds light on St. Teresa’s vision and charism. In addition, Gracián fills his memoirs with captivating anecdotes involving influential historical figures and harrowing adventures. Above all, *Pilgrimage of Anastasius* offers readers a demonstration of Gracián’s character, purity, and innocence. Observing how he maintained his faith amid his many trials, it is clear why St. Teresa loved him and had such confidence in him to carry out her vision for a religious renewal.

Journey to Carith: The Source and Story of the Discalced Carmelites, Peter-Thomas Rohrbach. ICS

An excellent book about the history of the Discalced Carmelites. The chapters include the early history of the Order, Carmel in the West, the mitigation of the Rule, the reform, and the struggle for existence. The last two chapters cover Carmel in America and the Order’s influence in the twentieth century.

The Collected Works of Edith Stein: The Hidden Life, Vol. 4. ICS

This book contains several essays on the history of the Discalced Carmelites: *Before the Face of God: On the History and Spirit of Carmel*. “We who live in Carmel and who daily call on our Holy Father Elijah in prayer know that for us he is not a shadowy figure out of the dim past. His spirit is active among us in a vital tradition and determines how we live... To stand before the face of the living God – that is our vocation” (pg. 1).

Love for Love: The Life and Works of St. Teresa of Jesus. “A small group of nuns and visitors present for worship on the feast of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel on July 16, 1560, were discussing the obstacles to a life of prayer presented by the large number of nuns living in the monastery and the many visitors. Maria de Ocampo, a young relative of the saint [Teresa]...suggested that someone should establish a monastery in which the life of the ancient hermits could be revived...According to the will of the Lord, the new house was to be consecrated to St. Joseph” (pg. 53). Here was born the Order of the Discalced Carmelites.

4. History, Growth, and Contributions of the Secular Order

Carmelite Seculars together with the friars and nuns are part of the Discalced Carmelite Order. They share the same charism with the religious, each according to their particular state of life. “The Secular Order is not conventual nor monastic, but definitely secular; that is, it does not exercise its responsibility in the convent or in the monastery, but in the world – (*saeculum*). The Secular Order is definitely an Order, because of the essential relationship that exists between the friars and the seculars. The relationship between the friars and the seculars is not incidental. It is essential.” (*Welcome to the Secular Order*, pg. 60).

The following are a few suggestions of articles/books for further understanding of the history, growth, and contributions of the Secular Order.

The Promise & Vows in the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites. Fr. Alzinir Debastiani, O.C.D. (Appendix O of Formation I, Year B)

In the first few pages of his article, Fr. Alzinir gives a brief description of the history and development of various lay movements within the Church including the history specific to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites.

The Manual of 1921 was the first official document of the Third Order of Discalced Carmelites. This Manual refers to the vows as the original expression of the present Promise. These vows always followed a year of “novitiate” and were renewed devotionally during the Feast of the Holy Cross and at Epiphany.

With the introduction of The Rule of Life of 1979, the name was changed from the “Third Order” to the “Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites.”

Another important change had to do with the commitment of the Secular Carmelites. The original expression of “vow” was replaced by the “Promise.” The first Promise is temporary (three years) and is then followed by the life-long commitment of the definitive Promise (see Const. Art. 36.d).

In response to the Second Vatican Council and church documents, such as *Christifideles Laici*, that recognize the vocation of the lay faithful within the Order, it was considered necessary to revise and modernize the Rule of Life of 1979.

The new Constitutions of the Secular Order were approved by the Vatican on June 16, 2003. Under the new Constitutions, the Secular Order joined the rest of the Order in reserving the word “Rule” for the Rule of Saint Albert. This was an important moment in the history of the Secular Order.

Welcome to the Secular Order. Origin and Basic Identity of the Secular Order, by Fr. Aloysius Deeney, O.C.D. ICS

Certain chapters of this book have already been introduced to the Aspirants as required reading, and to the candidates in Formation I, Year B. The chapter on *Origin and Basic Identity of the Secular Order* provides valuable information on the brief history and the identity of the Secular Carmelites.

The mendicant life, beginning with orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites, etc. had a different structure and purpose (compared to other orders in the Church). Mendicant orders sought to live a spirituality and exercise an apostolate that grew out of the spirituality that they lived.

Mendicant orders do not base their identity on an apostolate, but on a spirituality, and that spirituality guides and directs the apostolates to which they dedicate themselves.

The dedication of the Dominicans to higher education is a fruit of Dominican spirituality of the preacher who spreads the word. Much of the Franciscan apostolate is a dedication to working with the poor. This is the fruit of the Franciscan desire to follow Jesus in the purity and simplicity of the Gospel.

Teresian Carmel’s charism is based on the place of relationship between God and the person found in prayer. From that connective base flows the work to which Carmelites dedicate themselves.

Note: While most orders are founded for an apostolic mission, the Carmelite Order is not restricted to one such apostolate. Instead, our apostolic activities result from our intimate relationship with God, and love permeates all our activities and services: “*Now that my every act is love*. This is like saying that now all this [my] work is directed to the practice of love of God, that is: All the ability of my soul and body (memory, intellect, and will, interior and exterior senses, appetites of the sensory and spiritual parts) move in love and because of love. Everything I do I do with love, and everything I suffer I suffer with the delight of love” (*The Spiritual Canticle*, stanza 28:8).

Within the bounds of the relationship between the friars and the seculars, the seculars have certain autonomy. In the Discalced Carmelite Order, that autonomy has always been expressed in the various rules that existed before the Manual, in the Manual of 1922, in the Rule of Life of 1979, and in the current legislation of the Constitutions. Autonomy touches upon matters of formation, leadership, and governance.

With the introduction of the new Constitutions in 2003, the Secular Order gained a new identity and status within the Order of Discalced Carmelites. Members were no longer viewed as auxiliary members with a different Rule. Instead, the secular members became recognized as an integral part of the entire Carmelite family.

Prayerful reflection: It is important to recognize the immense contribution that Fr. Aloysius Deeney (1948-2024) made to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites. The Secular Order is very much indebted to Fr. Deeney for his many years of dedication and service as the General Delegate to the Secular Order (1998-2012), most importantly for raising awareness of the identity of the Secular Carmelites and their responsibilities:

You are not additions to the Order of Discalced Carmelites or auxiliary members of the Order. You are an integral part of the Order.

Being a Carmelite is not a privilege, it is a responsibility, both personal and ecclesial.

Your Promise is an ecclesial act. And you are more part of the Church because you are a member of the Order.

Fr. Deeney's name will always remain synonymous with the history of the Secular Order and its mission. May his soul rest in peace.

As part of the ongoing formation in the area of OCDS history, it is important that participants include in their study and reflection the following additional topics:

- The OCDS in the USA and around the world
- The history of the local group, community, and the province
- Modern contributions in the area of formation. (For example, the creation of a Formation Task Force by the OCD Generalate in 2017 resulting in one cohesive formation program for all OCDS communities in the United States.)

5. Legislative documents of the OCDS

The OCDS legislative documents include:

- The Rule of St. Albert
- OCDS Constitutions
- Provincial Statutes
- Ratio Institutionis of the Secular Order
- OCDS Ritual

For the proper function and understanding of community life, it is all-important for candidates and professed to continue reading and reflecting on the legislative documents. These legislative documents give us the necessary guidance in terms of our community life, study, service, and prayer. It is helpful to recall the words of Fr. Saverio Cannistra, O.C.D., Superior General, 2009-2021:

Letter to the OCDS, March 20, 2020:

“... I urge you to know your [legislative] documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.”

6. Church Documents pertaining to the Universal Church

Church documents are published statements, primarily on matters of faith and morals, which are publicly promulgated by the Pope. Encyclicals are the highest form of papal document that can be released by the pope alone. Papal encyclicals offer proper guidance in a complex world often characterized by moral ambiguity. They address not only the importance of theology of the Church and scripture, but also the contemporary ethical dilemmas, such as poverty, human development, and social justice. These documents are used for teaching as well as to proclaim the Church’s stand on contemporary issues. Perhaps the most common teaching tool of the pope is his homilies. These are certainly teachings that carry more doctrinal weight than his private letters and messages.

As we delve deeper into the church documents, one can easily notice in these texts notable Carmelite themes such as prayer, beauty, encounter, love, and the transcendent nature of one’s existence. Pope Benedict repeatedly points out in his writings that one cannot achieve anything in the sphere of human development or social justice without encountering in prayer the person of Jesus – the Word of God. All papal documents help one to learn more about the faith and grow closer to Jesus Christ. We read them with a mind desiring to grow in faith.

The following are a few suggestions for deeper understanding of Church teaching.

Documents on the Call to Holiness

***Gaudete et exsultate* – On the Call to Holiness in Today’s World, Pope Francis, March 19, 2018**

Gaudete et exsultate – *Rejoice and Be Glad* – is an Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father Pope Francis on the call to holiness in today’s world. The key question is how we can practice holiness in the midst of a changing world.

“To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves” (#14).

“I like to contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in elderly religious who never lose their smile. In their daily perseverance I see the holiness of the Church militant. Very often it is a holiness found in our next-door neighbors, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence” (#7).

***Lumen gentium* – Light of the Nations, Pope Paul VI, November 21, 1964**

One of the most important documents produced by Vatican II is the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium* – *Light of the Nations*. The document’s central theme is that Christ is the light of the nations, and that the Church is called to bring that light to all people. It discusses topics such as the growth of the Church, the universal call to holiness, and how God manifests Himself in the world.

It presents the Church as a mystery and a communion of baptized believers (the people of God) who are called to holiness, and all have specific roles and responsibilities. “The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity” (#41).

Note: There are four main documents of Vatican II: *Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church); *Dei verbum* (Dogmatic Constitution of Divine Revelation); *Sacrosanctum concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy); *Gaudium et spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)

Documents on Scripture

***Dei verbum* – Word of God, Pope Paul VI, November 18, 1964**

This is another important Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation produced by Vatican II. While largely focused on Scripture, *Dei verbum* is a teaching about divine revelation as a whole, not just the Bible. Its six chapters cover the topics of (1) revelation, (2) Tradition, (3) inspiration, (4) the Old Testament, (5) the New Testament and (6) the use of Scripture in the Church.

“... through the reading and study of the sacred books ‘the word of God may spread rapidly and be glorified’ (2 Thess. 3:1) and the treasure of revelation, entrusted to the Church, may more and more fill the hearts of men. Just as the life of the Church is strengthened through more frequent celebration of the Eucharistic mystery, similarly we may hope for a new stimulus for the life of the Spirit from a growing reverence for the word of God, which ‘lasts forever’ (Is. 40:8; see 1 Peter 1:23-25)” (# 26).

***Evangelii gaudium* – On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, Pope Francis, November 24, 2013**

Evangelii gaudium calls us to be joyous in proclaiming our faith. The texts include the idolatry of money; a financial system that rules rather than serves. It reminds us that salvation is not a purely private, individual matter. Evangelization is a collective activity and engages the social nature of human beings based on the Gospel message.

The Role of the Laity and Apostolic Commitment

***Christifideles laici* – On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful, Pope John Paul II, December 30, 1988**

This document expresses a deeper understanding of the vocation of the laity and their important role in carrying out the mission given in the Gospel. All the members of the Church must cooperate actively, each in his/her own manner, in the mission of the Church, which is to continue the work of Christ on earth. The term “apostolate” indicates the action of announcing the Gospel and impregnating the life of the people of God with its spirit.

The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world as well as by practicing honesty in all their dealings so that they attract all to the love of the true and the good and finally to the Church and to Christ.

***Apostolicam actuositatem* – Decree on the Apostolate of Laity, Pope Paul VI, November 18, 1965**

Vatican II's Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem*, calls for a deeper involvement of the apostolate of lay people in light of widespread worldliness. It is the repeated call on the laity to exercise their common priesthood as a witness to Christ. Emphasis is placed on the laity's task of transforming culture, given the contemporary loss of transcendence, and particularly the world as part of a created order.

Note: The common priesthood in the Catholic Church includes all baptized members, not just the ministerial priesthood of the consecrated clergy. “The whole Church is a priestly people. Through Baptism all the faithful share in the priesthood of Christ. This participation is called the ‘common priesthood of the faithful’” (CCC 1591).

Documents on the Blessed Virgin Mary

***Marialis cultus*: For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pope Paul VI, February 2, 1974**

The document clarifies the way in which the Catholic Church celebrates and commemorates Mary, the mother of Jesus.

“Mary is the attentive Virgin, who receives the word of God with faith, that faith which in her case was the gateway and path to divine motherhood...” (#17).

“Mary is also the Virgin in prayer. She appears as such in the visit to the mother of the precursor, when she pours out her soul in expressions glorifying God, and expressions of humility, faith, and hope. This prayer is the Magnificat... (cf. Lk. 1:46-55)” (#18).

“Mary is not only an example for the whole Church in the exercise of divine worship but is also, clearly, a teacher of the spiritual life for individual Christians. The faithful at a very early date began to look to Mary and to imitate her in making their lives an act of worship of God and making their worship a commitment of their lives” (#21).

***Redemptoris mater* – Mother of the Redeemer: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the life of the Pilgrim Church, Pope John Paul II, March 25, 1987**

Redemptoris mater, which the Pope called his “reflection on the role of Mary in the mystery of Christ and on her active and exemplary presence in the life of the Church” (#1) was promulgated by John Paul II in connection with the Marian year declared for 1987/88. The texts strictly follow the Bible narratives of the Virgin Mary from the Annunciation to the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

“The Mother of that Son, therefore, mindful of what has been told her at the Annunciation and in subsequent events, bears within herself the radical ‘newness’ of faith: the beginning of the New Covenant. This is the beginning of the Gospel, the joyful Good News. However, it is not difficult to see in that beginning a particular heaviness of heart, linked with a sort of ‘night of faith’ – to use the words of St. John of the Cross – a kind of ‘veil’ through which one has to draw near to the Invisible One and to live in intimacy with the mystery” (#17, footnote, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 2, ch. 3:4-6).

Document on St. Joseph

***Redemptoris custos* – Guardian of the Redeemer: On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church, Pope John Paul II, August 15, 1989**

It discusses the importance of Saint Joseph in the Holy Family and presents Saint Joseph’s role in the plan of redemption.

“Together with Mary, Joseph is the first guardian of this divine mystery. Together with Mary, and in relation to Mary, he shares in this final phase of God’s self-revelation in Christ and he does so from the very beginning” (#5). “The Gospels clearly describe the fatherly responsibility of Joseph toward Jesus. For salvation – which comes through the humanity of Jesus – is realized in actions which are an everyday part of family life... All of the so-called ‘private’ or ‘hidden’ life of Jesus is entrusted to Joseph’s guardianship” (#8).

Document on the Universal Church

Gaudium et spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965

The Church in the Modern World is seen by many to be the most important document in the Church's social tradition. The encyclical emphasizes the dignity of each human being as created in the image of God which comes from their call to communion with God. God did not create people to live in isolation, but to develop society and community. We are to treat one another in the spirit of brotherhood. The Church's duty in the world is to work for the enhancement of human dignity and the common good.

"Modern man is on the road to a more thorough development [transformation] of his own personality, and to a growing discovery and vindication of his own rights. Since it has been entrusted to the Church to reveal the mystery of God, Who is the ultimate goal of man, she opens up to man at the same time the meaning of his own existence, that is, the innermost truth about himself. The Church truly knows that only God, Whom she serves, meets the deepest longings of the human heart, which is never fully satisfied by what this world has to offer" (#41).

Document on Care for our Common Home

Laudato si' – Praised be: On Care for Our Common Home, Pope Francis, May 24, 2015

In the encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis urges the Catholic Church, the Christian communities around the world, followers of other religious traditions, and all people of good will, to earnestly begin to care for our common home that is beginning to crumble and fall into decay. *Laudato si'* discusses the damage being inflicted on the earth by humans and calls on every person living on this planet to make urgent changes to their lifestyles. It deals with many environmental issues. Primarily, it is the cry of the earth to adapt to a simple lifestyle based on spirituality, community involvement, and participation. In addition, the document highlights the condition of the poor and how they are disproportionately affected by environmental damage. Catholic social teaching now includes teaching on care for the earth.

"Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that 'less is more.' A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures.

Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full” (#222-223).

If we continue using our resources carelessly without consideration for the care of our planet, mankind would soon be deprived of hearing the resounding sound of flowing rivers and the soaring voices of the lofty mountains. We will lose altogether “the supper that refreshes and deepens love.” The spiritual perspective of our environment should now be part of our meditation and contemplation. If we take heed to *Laudato si'*, generation after generation, all species of the planet earth could sing joyfully with our beloved Saint John of the Cross:

*My Beloved is the mountains,
the lonely, wooded valleys,
strange islands,
and resounding rivers,
the whistling of love-stirring breezes,
the tranquil night
at the time of the rising dawn,
silent music,
sounding solitude,
the supper that refreshes and deepens love.
The Spiritual Canticle, stanzas 14 and 15*

7. Church Documents, letters, homilies, and General Audiences specific to the Discalced Carmelites

Following are a few suggestions of the letters, messages, and General Audience:

Message of Pope John Paul II to Fr. Camilo Maccise, Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, on the occasion of the Ordinary General Chapter of the Order of Discalced Carmelites in Avila, April 21, 2003

“The Discalced Carmelite Family, made up of friars, nuns and lay people, was born from a single charism and is called to follow a common vocation but respecting the autonomy and specific character of each group. The theme chosen for the Chapter – Journeying with Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross: setting out from *the essentials* – emphasizes the firm determination of the Order to remain faithful to the charism inspired by the Holy Spirit in a specific historical and ecclesial context, developed down the centuries, that, today too, is destined to produce fruits of holiness in the Church ‘for the common good’ (1 Cor. 12:7), in response to the challenges of the third millennium” (For the full text, visit: https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2003/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20030429_carmelitani-scalzi.html)

General Audience on St. Teresa of Avila, Pope Benedict XVI, February 2, 2011

“Dear brothers and sisters, St. Teresa of Jesus is a true teacher of Christian life for the faithful of every time. In our society, which all too often lacks spiritual values, St. Teresa teaches us to be

unflagging witnesses of God, of his presence and of his action. She teaches us truly to feel this thirst for God that exists in the depths of our hearts, this desire to see God, to seek God, to be in conversation with him and to be his friends.

This is the friendship we all need that we must seek anew, day after day. May the example of this Saint, profoundly contemplative and effectively active, spur us too every day to dedicate the right time to prayer, to this openness to God, to this journey, in order to seek God, to see him, to discover his friendship and so to find true life; indeed many of us should truly say: 'I am not alive, I am not truly alive because I do not live the essence of my life'.

Therefore time devoted to prayer is not time wasted, it is time in which the path of life unfolds, the path unfolds to learning from God an ardent love for him, for his Church, and practical charity for our brothers and sisters. Many thanks.” (For the full text, visit: [General Audience of 2 February 2011: Saint Teresa of Avila | BENEDICT XVI \(vatican.va\)](#))

General Audience on St. John of the Cross, Pope Benedict XVI, February 16, 2011

“Dear brothers and sisters, in the end the question is: does this Saint with his lofty mysticism, with this demanding journey towards the peak of perfection have anything to say to us, to the ordinary Christian who lives in the circumstances of our life today, or is he an example, a model for only a few elect souls who are truly able to undertake this journey of purification, of mystical ascesis?

To find the answer we must first of all bear in mind that the life of St. John of the Cross did not 'float on mystical clouds'; rather he had a very hard life, practical and concrete, both as a reformer of the Order, in which he came up against much opposition, and from the Provincial Superior as well as in his confreres' prison where he was exposed to unbelievable insults and physical abuse.

His life was hard, yet it was precisely during the months he spent in prison that he wrote one of his most beautiful works. And so we can understand that the journey with Christ, travelling with Christ, 'the Way,' is not an additional burden in our life, it is not something that would make our burden even heavier but something quite different. It is a light, a power that helps us to bear it.

If a person bears great love in himself, this love gives him wings, as it were, and he can face all life's troubles more easily because he carries in himself this great light; this is faith: being loved by God and letting oneself be loved by God in Jesus Christ. Letting oneself be loved in this way is the light that helps us to bear our daily burden.

And holiness is not a very difficult action of ours but means exactly this 'openness': opening the windows of our soul to let in God's light, without forgetting God because it is precisely in opening oneself to his light that one finds strength, one finds the joy of the redeemed.

Let us pray the Lord to help us discover this holiness, to let ourselves be loved by God who is our common vocation and the true redemption. Many thanks.”

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110216.html

General Audience on Thérèse of Lisieux, Pope Benedict XVI, April 6, 2011

“I would like to invite you to rediscover this small-great treasure, this luminous comment on the Gospel lived to the full! *Story of a Soul*, in fact, is a marvelous story of Love, told with such authenticity, simplicity and freshness that the reader cannot but be fascinated by it! But what was this Love that filled Thérèse’s whole life, from childhood to death? Dear friends, this Love has a Face, it has a Name, it is Jesus! The Saint speaks continuously of Jesus. ...

Dear friends, we too, with St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus must be able to repeat to the Lord every day that we want to live of love for him and for others, to learn at the school of the saints to love authentically and totally. Thérèse is one of the ‘little’ ones of the Gospel who let themselves be led by God to the depths of his Mystery. A guide for all, especially those who, in the People of God, carry out their ministry as theologians. With humility and charity, faith and hope, Thérèse continually entered the heart of Sacred Scripture which contains the Mystery of Christ. And this interpretation of the Bible, nourished by the *science of love*, is not in opposition to academic knowledge. The *science of the saints*, in fact, of which she herself speaks on the last page of her *Story of a Soul*, is the loftiest science.

https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20110406.html

Note: A search on the Vatican website will show many documents related to the Carmelite Order, our saints, our role in the Church, and our mission in the world. www.vatican.va.

8. Catechism of the Catholic Church

The Catechism of the Catholic Church originated with a recommendation made at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985. In 1986 Pope John Paul II appointed a Commission of Cardinals and Bishops (chaired by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) to develop a compendium of Catholic doctrine. In 1989 the Commission sent the text to all the bishops of the world for consultation. In 1990 the Commission examined and evaluated over 24,000 amendments suggested by the world’s bishops. The final draft is quite different from the one circulated in 1989. In 1991 the Commission prepared the text for the Holy Father’s official approval. On June 25, 1992, Pope John Paul II officially approved the definitive version of the Catechism of the Catholic Church. On December 8, 1992, Pope John Paul II promulgated the Catechism with an apostolic constitution. (Courtesy: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops).

The Catechism contains the essential and fundamental content of the Catholic faith. It presents what Catholics throughout the world believe in common. The Catechism contains Catholic doctrine within the context of the Church’s history and tradition. It makes frequent references to Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, the lives and writings of the saints, papal documents, and liturgical texts. There are over three thousand footnotes in the

Catechism. Pope John Paul II ordered the publication of the Catechism by the Apostolic Constitution, *Fidei Depositum*, on October 11, 1992.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church should be part of the ongoing formation for an overall understanding of Church teaching. The prologue of the text states: “**The life of man – to know and love God:** God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church. To accomplish this, when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son as Redeemer and Savior. In his Son and through him, he invites men to become, in the Holy Spirit, his adopted children and thus heirs of his blessed life” (#1).

9. Scripture reading as part of Carmelite spirituality

Holy Bible: Reading the Holy Bible on a regular basis should be part of our ongoing formation. We find scriptural quotations throughout the writings of our Carmelite saints that awaken us to God at work in our lives and the lives of those around us.

In her writings, our Holy Mother Saint Teresa constantly uses biblical images to explain her mystical experiences. She says, Jesus himself revealed to her that “for all the harm that comes to the world comes from its not knowing the truths of Scripture in clarity and truth” (*The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Volume One, *Life* 40:1).

Likewise, by reading chapters 12 and 13 of the First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Thérèse discovered that “love” was her personal vocation. In *Story of a Soul*, she describes her attraction to the reading of Scripture: “Since Jesus has reascended into heaven, I can follow Him only in the traces He has left; but how luminous these traces are! how perfumed! I have only to cast a glance in the Gospels and immediately I breathe in the perfumes of Jesus’ life, and I know on which side to run” (*Story of a Soul*, Study Edition, MS. C, pg. 404).

One of the most important lessons Elizabeth of the Trinity learned in her formative years was how to pray with Scripture. For Elizabeth, every line of Scripture is there for a purpose. Her biblical spirituality, based on the epistles of her “dear Saint Paul” and the mystery of the divine indwelling, has inspired countless Christians.

Additionally, for our Holy Father Saint John of the Cross, the Bible served as a living and unfailing wellspring. The Bible was his hymnal, his meditation book, a book for travel, for contemplation, and for writing. The Bible offered him an excellent expression of his own spiritual experience. In special ways, he identified with persons of the Bible: with Moses, David, Job, the psalmists, Jeremiah, Paul, and John. He recounted and sang of his own joys, sufferings, and experiences of God’s mercies and favors by echoing the words of the prophets, the psalmists, and St. Paul (see Sources under General Introduction, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*).

In his prologue, John describes the importance of the Bible: “In discussing this dark night, therefore, I will not rely on experience or science, for these can fail and deceive us. Although I

will not neglect whatever possible use I can make of them, my help in all that, with God's favor, I shall say, will be Sacred Scripture, at least in the most important matters, or those that are difficult to understand. Taking Scripture as our guide we do not err, since the Holy Spirit speaks to us through it" (*The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Prologue, 2).

Hence, reading and meditating on Holy Scripture and how the Carmelite saints refer to the Scriptures should be part of ongoing formation. For Carmelites, the use of Holy Scripture is foundational to meditation, adoration, and opening oneself to contemplation.

Some recommended materials for further meditation and reflection in the context of the Word of God:

***Lectio Divina and the Practice of Teresian Prayer*, Sam Morello O.C.D.**

This helpful booklet shows how to incorporate St. Teresa's way of prayer, the prayer of recollection, into the centuries-old spiritual practice of *Lectio Divina*, and how to draw spiritual nourishment from both. A closing series of reflection questions make this an ideal introduction to Teresian prayer for both group discussion and individual study.

***The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis**

The Imitation of Christ is a devotional work with a profound, yet simple, message. It calls us to look away from our self-sufficiency to God who is all-sufficient, then to look back with transformed vision to a world in need where service replaces self-seeking. Thomas put the message in biblical form. Scholars have found anywhere from 850 to 1,200 biblical quotations or allusions. Every page in some way embodies a fundamental biblical idea. The power of Scripture surges through the work and gives it its spiritual depth. (Courtesy, C. S. Lewis Institute, Walter A. Elwell, June 6, 2005) <https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/the-imitation-of-christ>).

***Divine Intimacy*, Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalene, O.C.D.**

This book of meditations is a classic and is steeped in Carmelite spirituality. For day-to-day reflection, it offers two meditations, arranged according to the liturgical season (1962 Missal), that enables one to enter the conscious presence of God and to reflect on the theme of the day. There are many quotes from the bible and writings from the Saints.

10. Letters, notices, and messages given by the Superior General of the Order, the General Delegate to the Secular Order, provincial superiors, delegates, and provincial councils

These documents should be part of both community and ongoing formation and reflection. They help to foster the sense of belonging to the whole body of the Discalced Carmelite Order and its structure. Related to this topic, we might also discuss the Organizational Chart of the Order for better understanding of the positions, duties, and responsibilities of the designated person/persons, and how each level of the Order relates to one another with information in different levels of cooperation. We are part of a harmonious whole.

Formal communication conveys information that is important either to the whole Order or specific to the Secular Carmelites. These communications deliver the Order's thoughts and ideas and leave less room for misunderstandings or errors in interpretation.

Following are a few recommended websites and documents for further information on the Order's regular activities and communications:

The home page for the Order of Discalced Carmelites: <https://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/>

There is a link to the documents which includes various levels of communications (letters, messages) addressed to the OCDS.

https://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com/en/categoria_documenti/secular-order/

All three US provincial websites:

- California-Arizona Province: <https://www.ocds.info/>
- Province of Oklahoma <https://www.thereseocds.org/>
- Washington Province: <https://www.ocdswashprov.org/>

11. Other resource materials that complement Carmelite spirituality

The local Council, with the help of its professed members, may choose other appropriate reading materials for study and reflection. These should be specific to Carmelite spirituality.

Conclusion

We have come to the end of our comprehensive list of resource materials for ongoing formation, Volume I. It is broad in scope, covering themes and topics that are essential to our growth in prayer. What is important now is to put what we read into practice instead of looking for new materials. The human heart is always wanting more without realizing the underlying value and purpose of reading. As we continue our journey in Carmel, it is helpful to recall the words of Saint John of the Cross:

Letter to the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Beas, Granada, November 22, 1587, letter #8:

Note: In this letter John is replying to the nuns who are continuously asking for guidance and new spiritual resources from John.

... enough has already been said and written for doing what is important; and that what is wanting, if anything is wanting, is not writing or speaking – rather these usually superabound – but silence and work. Furthermore, speaking distracts one, while silence and work recollect and strengthen the spirit. Once individuals know what has been told them for their benefit, they no longer need to hear or speak, but put into practice, silently and carefully and in humility and charity... They must not go in search of new things that serve only to satisfy the appetite [desire for wanting more] outwardly – although they are not able to satisfy it – and leave the spirit weak and empty without interior virtue... We can compare this situation to one who eats before digesting what

was previously eaten; for since the natural heart is divided between the two portions, it has not the strength to convert everything into substance, and one becomes sick...

Keep this in mind, daughters [and sons]: the soul that is quick to turn to speaking and conversing [or constant reading] is slow to turn to God. For when it is turned toward God, it is then strongly and inwardly drawn toward silence and flight from all conversation. For God desires a soul to rejoice with him more than with any other person, however advanced and helpful the person may be.

*Our greatest need is to be silent before
this great God with the appetites and with the tongue,
for the only language he hears is the silent
language of love.*

St. John of the Cross

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