CHAPTER 5

Mary

Summary: The Blessed Virgin Mary, Our Lady, is considered one of the foundational figures of the Carmelite Family, and Mother and Sister of all Carmelites. In this chapter we will explore Mary’s role in the history and development of the Order, her part in Scripture as the woman of prayer who leads us to Christ, and her place in the spiritual landscape of Carmel as ‘Lady of the Place’.
Get prepared: As no doubt you know by now, your reading might profit from you having reference texts to hand, such as the Bible, the Rule of Saint Albert (printed at the front of this book), the 2003 Rule for the Third Order of Carmel, the 1995 Constitutions of the Carmelite Friars, as well as materials to take notes with. You don’t have to read the whole text of the chapter at once if you would find it easier to break it into sections. Why not begin your period of formation study and reflection with a prayer to Our Lady such as the Hail Mary or the Memorare.

Mary: Pointing us to Christ

The sacred humanity of Jesus, fully God and fully man, is the perfect model for all human beings. Most fully human when we most resemble Jesus, we are intended to reach the full maturity of sharing in the fullness of Christ (cf. Ephesians 4:13). A good way to respond to Jesus’ invitation to share his life is to follow the example of his mother Mary, for she sought always to know and to do the will of God.

Stop and think: What role, if any, has Mary played in your faith journey thus far?

The Rule for the Third Order of Carmel (RTOC) tells us that ‘Mary is a singular and eminent member of the Church’ (§34). In giving birth to Jesus, Mary is unique, but as the ‘woman of faith’ she is for every Christian – and therefore every Carmelite – the model of perfect discipleship. Mary is blessed because she heard the word of God and kept it (cf. Luke 11:28), the supreme example of how to respond to God’s grace and surrender to God’s will.

How do Carmelites come to know Mary?

Carmelites look to Mary in the Bible – ‘Miriam of Nazareth’ – as the authentic guide of how to follow Christ. Our Carmelite tradition reminds us that Mary was the first teacher of Jesus, and the first follower, and she accompanies us on our journey towards our heavenly home. Papal documents since the Second Vatican Council have also helped us to appreciate the role of Mary in the life of Jesus, such as Paul VI’s Marialis Cultus (‘To Honour Mary’, 1974), and John Paul II’s Redemptoris Mater (‘Mother of the Redeemer’, 1987).

Did you know? Carmelites believe that authentic devotion to Mary should not detract from making Christ central in our lives. They therefore treat with caution any description of Mary that does not derive from the Scriptures or the ancient traditions of the Church. To be authentic, visions of Mary should simply call people back to the Gospel.

Stop and think: Mary is regarded as the Patron of the Carmelite Order. What do you understand by the notion of ‘patronage’? How does this apply to Mary?

Mary: the ‘Lady of the Place’

One of the special titles Carmelites give to Mary is the ‘Lady of the Place’. This term takes us right back to the beginnings of our tradition. The first brothers gathered on Mount Carmel round a small chapel dedicated to Mary; in the spirit of medieval feudal society they devoted themselves to the service of their ‘Lady’ patroness, with the presence
of Jesus Christ, their liege Lord, at the centre of their lives in the Eucharist. Ever since, Carmelites have dedicated themselves to Our Lady, and Jesus has been the focus of prayer and contemplation at the heart of every Carmelite community, whether in the religious life, in the various active congregations, or in gatherings of tertiaries.

Stop and reread: You might like at this point to remind yourself of the idea of living ‘in allegiance to Jesus Christ’ as we considered in Chapter 3.

‘The Place’ is a Hebrew way of referring to God. Mary points us to the place where God is. The title ‘Lady of the Place’ reminds us that her son, Emmanuel, is ‘God with us’, wherever we are: ‘My word is very near you; it is already in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can put it into practice’ (Deuteronomy 30:14).

Did you know? Although the Carmelite Rule of Saint Albert makes no explicit mention of Mary, we know from pilgrim accounts that there was a chapel on Carmel dedicated to Mary. The name of Mary in the title of the Order first appeared officially in the 1240s. Since medieval Carmelites claimed that the Order was founded in honour of Mary, commentators such as John Baconthorpe explained that she was not referred to in the Rule because she was herself the very embodiment of the Rule.

Stop and read from Scripture: Read the episode from the Elijah story in 1 Kings 18:42-44.

Mary: the ‘little cloud’

In reading the account of the little cloud which Elijah saw rising from the sea (1 Kings 18:42-44), Carmelites have interpreted the coming of rain after prolonged drought as a foreshadowing of Mary. The most famous example of this is in Felip Ribot’s medieval masterpiece The Ten Books on the Way of Life and Great Deeds of the Carmelites (sometimes known as The Book of the First Monks):

When the servant of Elijah saw a modest cloud rising from the sea, God revealed to Elijah that a certain infant, that is, the blessed Mary, was symbolised by that cloud, and like that cloud, through her modest humility she would be born of sinful human nature, represented by the sea. This infant, already at her birth would be free from all stain of sin, just as that cloud was born from the bitter sea but without any bitterness.

(Richard Copsay’s translation of The Ten Books, p. 82).

This interpretation of the episode has become part of Carmelite tradition regarding Mary. As Elizabeth Ruth Obbard explains: ‘Mary, as Christ-bearer, was the one carrying the water of life. She brings healing and refreshment to the parched earth, just as she is also the earth which receives the rain. There is in Mary that rhythm of giving and receiving, of fullness and emptiness, which makes her so truly woman. In pouring herself out she receives life anew.’ (Land of Carmel, p. 84).
The Holy Spirit will overshadow you

Humanity’s time of dryness – its separation from God – came to an end when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). The bright cloud of God’s presence, the ‘shekinah’, had surrounded the Ark of the Old Covenant. Now Mary, the Ark of the New Covenant, receives Jesus. That great teacher and model for Carmelites, Saint Paul, reminds us that we too are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). In our baptism, the Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – makes a dwelling within us (cf. John 14:23). In the Eucharist too, Jesus comes to dwell within us. Like Mary, Carmelites pray to be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, so that we too may be, as it were, another incarnation of the Word in which Jesus continues to live out his mystery. Inspired by Mary, the Carmelite nun Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906) realised that our vocation is to become a home in which God lives, as she wrote in her celebrated Prayer to the Trinity:

O my God, Trinity whom I adore; help me to forget myself entirely that I may be established in You as still and as peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity. May nothing trouble my peace or make me leave You, Ó my Unchanging One, but may each minute carry me further into the depths of Your mystery. Give peace to my soul; make it Your heaven, Your beloved dwelling and Your resting place. May I never leave You there alone but be wholly present, my faith wholly vigilant, wholly adoring, and wholly surrendered to Your creative Action.

Mary reveals to us our vocation of union with God, of which the Carmelite martyr Blessed Titus Brandsma said in 1936:

From all eternity God has chosen us, has loved us and has predestined us to live in intimate union with Him. God desires to live in us through grace. This union is sublime, like that of the divine maternity of Our Lady. Rightfully, we also can be called ‘God bearers’. God sends the angel also to us to ask us continually to open our hearts to the light of the world in order to bear it like a lantern. We too must receive God in our hearts; we must carry God within our hearts, nourish him and allow him to grow in us in such a way that he will be born of us and live with us as God-with-us, Emmanuel.

(Quoted in Lady of the Place, p. 90).
We come to know Jesus through the pages of sacred Scripture, through the sacraments (especially the Eucharist), the teachings of the Church, the writings and example of the saints, through prayer, and through meeting with other Christians. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit opens up to us the treasures of all these things.

Just as Mary’s first act after the incarnation of Jesus within her womb was to visit her cousin Elizabeth – which shows that prayerfulness leads to the service of others – so Carmelites are impelled, as they experience the presence of Christ within them, to share Jesus with others. The active apostolate expressed in different ways within the Carmelite Family is a direct result of our prayerful waiting upon, and continual receiving of, the Holy Spirit. We are to be his presence in the world. It is this realisation that inspired the words attributed to St. Teresa of Jesus (of Avila):

Christ has no body now but yours.
No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes through which he looks with compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.

**Did you know?** One of the oldest known images of Mary venerated by Carmelites is an icon in the basilica of the ‘Carmine Maggiore’ (Great Carmel) in the Italian city of Naples. Known as *La Bruna* (‘the dark woman’) it was probably painted in thirteenth-century Siena, though legend says it was painted by St. Luke and taken to Naples by the hermits fleeing Mount Carmel. Associated with miracles in the year 1500, the icon is still the focus of pilgrims’ devotion to this day. This beautiful icon highlights the tenderness of Mary the mother.
Pondering all these things

Scripture tells us that Mary was a contemplative woman who pondered in her heart the action of God in her life (Luke 1:29, 2:19, 2:51). Mary’s whole life was like a form of Lectio Divina, meditating on God’s Word. With Mary, Carmelites love to ponder the mysteries of Christ’s life so that they can know him and imitate him. The sacred humanity of Jesus is our doorway to the divine. Mary shows us how to live in the presence of our brother and saviour Jesus Christ, and invites us to build up a personal relationship not only with her but primarily with him. St. Teresa said in her Autobiography: ‘Whoever lives in the presence of so good a friend and excellent a leader as is Jesus Christ can endure all things… he is a true friend. And I see clearly that God desires that if we are going to please him and receive his great favours this must come about through the most sacred humanity of Christ, in whom he takes his delight.’ (Ch. 22).

Woman of prayer

Meeting with her cousin Elizabeth, Mary sings her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), a text which is imbued with Scripture. With Mary, we learn how to listen to the Word of God, pondering God’s wisdom in our hearts (cf. Luke 2:19; 2:51), as did all the great Carmelite spiritual writers.

Did you know? The Magnificat prayer takes its name from the first word of the Latin translation: ‘to magnify’ meaning ‘to declare the greatness’ of the Lord. In this prayer, Mary – a woman of the Hebrew scriptures – echoes the prayer of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

Mary the Contemplative

Mary was a woman who built up community, but who also spent time in solitary prayer. The Rule of Saint Albert exhorts each of us Carmelites ‘to stay in their own cell or nearby, pondering the Lord’s law day and night and keeping watch at their prayers’. Blessed Jean Soreth, a medieval Prior General of the Order, wrote a Commentary or Exhortation on the Carmelite Rule, in which he speaks of the importance of the cell for a Carmelite: ‘The cell is a holy land and a holy place, where God and his servant exchange their confidences as a friend with a friend. It is here, oftentimes, that
the soul is caught up in union with God, as a bride is joined to her husband; it is here that heaven touches earth, and the divine is united with the human.’

As Carmelites living today, our cell is that ‘inner room’ in the heart which, as Elizabeth of the Trinity tells us, is one in which we can dwell at all times and encounter Jesus, whatever our outward preoccupations. Blessed Elizabeth wanted to be ‘another Bethany’, the home that Jesus loves, and the place where he could be at rest as once he was in the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

A valuable aid to pondering on the life of Jesus throughout the day, within the inner cell of our hearts, is the rosary. This Marian prayer developed in the Dominican tradition. Though it is not required for Carmelites to pray it, many do so because it can aid their efforts to focus on Christ, and since the mysteries of the rosary are mostly episodes from Scripture they resonate with the Carmelites’ love of the Bible. We can pray it as we work, as we walk to and from the shops, while waiting in a queue. In reciting the rosary we follow Jesus through the eyes of Mary, from his conception, through his public ministry, passion, and death, to his resurrection and triumph in heaven. By it, we can be reminded of the sanctity of our daily work and life as people of the Resurrection. As it says in the Rule for the Third Order of Carmel: ‘Gathered by Mary, like the disciples, in the upper room, lay Carmelites come together to praise the Lord in the mysteries of his life and that of his mother: the devout practice of the Rosary can become an inexhaustible source of genuine spirituality which nourishes daily life.’ (§41)

Did you know? Carmelites have led the way in developing ‘Mariology’, the theological study of Mary. Medieval Carmelites in England – whose province was dedicated, as the British Province is now, to the Assumption of Mary – pioneered the belief in Mary’s Immaculate Conception. It was also in England that the patronal feast of the Order, the solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (16th July) first developed.
Climbing the Mountain: The Carmelite Journey

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One of the Order’s great Mariologists in recent times, Fr. Christopher O’Donnell, O.Carm., writes: *We do not need more dogmas about Mary, or necessarily more prayers, celebrations or titles. We can never, however, sufficiently praise God for the wonders of his grace and love in the Mother of his Son. We can never thank her enough for her motherly care for us. We can never love her enough. As we think of her gentle presence, we are only beginning our future life in which with her we will eternally praise the Trinity.*

Mary: Queen and Beauty of Carmel

One of the ancient titles given to Mary by the Carmelite Order is ‘Beauty of Carmel’. Mary is deemed to be beautiful because she has been filled with the grace of the Creator. Reading the biblical descriptions of Mount Carmel, Carmelites have interpreted the mountain’s splendour as an allegory of Mary’s holiness:

> The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

(Isaiah 35:1-2).

Mary was one of the *anaωμιν*, a poor person looking to God for deliverance. Yet in keeping with the feudal approach to Mary as patron and Lady of the Place, Carmelites have revered Mary as Queen, the Woman of the Apocalypse (*Revelation* 12:1) clothed in the sun with a crown of twelve stars on her head. Her crown is the sign of the triumph of God’s grace in Mary, a glory awaiting all those baptised into the ‘royal priesthood’ who allow God’s grace to triumph in them by overcoming the sinfulness human nature is prone to. We – like Mary – share in Christ’s offices of prophet, priest and king (cf. *RTOC* 27), but Jesus reminds us that his kingdom is a kingship of service, not of this world.
Did you know? Many people have made links between the spirituality of Carmel, and the Marian apparitions at Fatima (where Mary is said to have appeared as Our Lady of Mount Carmel), and Lourdes (where the final vision of Mary took place on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel).

‘On your right stands the Queen’

Jesus is our supreme advocate (1 John 2:1) whose self-sacrifice is the new covenant that has reconciled us with the Father. In approaching Jesus as advocate, Christians have always sought the prayers and intercessions of those saints who dwell on earth, and those who dwell in his presence in heaven. Honouring Mary and praying to her does not bypass our relationship with Christ, but acknowledges our relationship with her in the communion of saints. Just as Mary interceded with Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana (John 2:1-12), so she brings our needs to him today. We, too, are called by our Carmelite vocation to intercede for our brothers and sisters throughout life, in time and eternity.

Mary: Mother and Sister

Since the early Church Mary has been revered not only as Mother of God (Theotokos, the God-bearer), but by extension as mother of all humanity. The Flos Carmeli is an ancient Carmelite antiphon to Our Lady that invokes her as mother and incorporates other Marian titles:

- Flos Carmeli: Flower of Carmel
- Vitis florigera: Tall vine, blossom-laden
- Splendor caeli: Splendour of heaven
- Virgo puerrupt: Child-bearing yet maiden
- Singularis!: None equals thee!
- Mater mitis: Mother so tender
- Sed viri nescia: Whom no man didst know
- Carmelitis: On Carmel’s children
- Da privilegia: Thy favour bestow.
- Stella Maris!: Star of the sea!

St. Thérèse of Lisieux said that Mary was ‘more mother than queen’, at a time when Mary’s regal power was often emphasised more than her maternal love. Mary does not leave us alone in our walk of faith, because she too has been a pilgrim on the journey to God. We are her sons and daughters, her brothers and sisters, given to her by Jesus as he hung upon the Cross, in the person of his beloved disciple John (John 19:25-27). With John, we accept Mary into our home.

The official title of the Carmelite Order is The Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. This means that Mary is our sister, as well as our mother, and together we are children of God. To refer to Mary as our sister is not to ‘reduce her to our level’, but rather raises us to our proper dignity as God’s beloved children.

Stop and ponder: How do you feel about referring to Mary as your sister?
The Symbolism of Mary in the Carmelite Tradition

Traditional depictions of Our Lady of Mount Carmel show Mary wearing the brown habit and white cloak of the Carmelite Order, since she is our patron, and the perfect model of how to be Carmelite. Our Lady of Mount Carmel is nearly always shown in artwork holding the infant Jesus, presenting Christ to the world and saying ‘Do whatever he tells you’ (John 2:5).

Images of Our Lady of Mount Carmel also usually show her holding a cloth known as the Brown Scapular. The scapular is part of a monastic habit, and is regarded as a symbol of Mary’s love and protection towards the Carmelite Family, and the Family’s service of Mary. Many depictions of Our Lady of Mount Carmel show her with her child presenting the scapular to St. Simon Stock.
That humble piece of brown cloth, derived from the scapular worn by religious to protect their habit whilst at work, reminds us that our spiritual journey is lived out in all the humdrum, ordinary events of daily life and labour. Today the scapular is a symbol of belonging to the Carmelite Family. It is worn by Carmelite religious as part of their habit, and in a smaller version by members of the Carmelite Third Order. A miniature version of the Scapular is worn by members of the ‘Brown Scapular Confraternity’, who are affiliated to the Carmelite Family in a less formal way than religious and members of the Third Order.

The scapular is not an object of superstition; rather it reminds us of our divine work of co-operating with God in the building of God’s kingdom and the salvation of souls. As the Rule for the Third Order of Carmel puts it: ‘Lay Carmelites let themselves be accompanied by Mary in gradually taking on responsibility for co-operation in salvation and for the communication of grace given in the Church.’ (§34).

Mary Most Pure
To receive Jesus, and to discern his will for us and his purposes for the world, we have to strive for a heart that is unfettered by distractions which detach us from God, a heart that worships not false idols but only the one true God. The Carmelite tradition often speaks of Mary’s purity of heart using the Latin phrase puritas cordis. Carmelites
see in Mary’s purity of heart an imitation of the prophet Elijah who sought the face of the Living God, and who rejected the worship of anything or anyone other than God. In seeking purity of life and intention, Mary and Elijah are our radiant examples.

Mary’s purity of heart meant that she cultivated what the Carmelite tradition terms *vacare Deo*, that is, ‘space for God’ or ‘openness to God’. It was her trusting openness to God that allowed Mary confidently to advise others simply ‘Do whatever he tells you’ (*John* 2:5). This same God revealed to the Carmelite nun Saint Mary Magdalene de Pazzi what a great gift purity of heart is:

> This purity is such an intrinsic and immense thing that no human creature can perceive it and understand it fully, even though thanks to my grace and my pure generosity one may have some knowledge of it … someone more and someone less, according to the disposition of each soul … To acquire this purity the soul must purify all its thoughts, reflections, and all its feelings and desires, and direct them to me, its God and Creator; and that it let no thought creep into its heart and stain it.

(*Selected Writings of Saint Mary Magdalen de Pazzi*, pp 242, 248).

**Journey of faith**

With Mary’s cousin Elizabeth, in the mystery of the Visitation, we praise the faith that radiates from Mary: ‘Blessed are you who believed that the Lord’s word would come true (*Luke* 1:45). This is not always easy, for we are pilgrims who journey in both the light and the darkness of faith. God the Father did not reveal all of his will to Mary; she chose to obey without seeing the path ahead. At the Presentation in the Temple, Simeon warned Mary that a sword would pierce her heart. She had to trust herself to Joseph as they fled the persecution of Herod into Egypt. She did not understand when Jesus stayed behind in the Temple at Jerusalem. She who was all pure still endured the darkness of faith, and in pure faith she walked the way of the cross with her Son Jesus, and stood beneath his cross. We, too, are purified by the trials we meet in our daily life: ‘Ascending the mountain implies a desert experience in which the living flame of God’s love transforms and detaches the lay Carmelite from everything; even their image of God is purified and transformed. By putting on Christ, they begin to shine like his living image, being a new creation in him.’ (*RTOC* §22).

**Beneath the cross of Jesus stood Mary his mother**

As our Mother, Mary accompanies us up the steep Mount of Carmel, which is both garden and desert. As one who stayed close to Christ during his suffering (*John* 19:24-27), so Mary stands in solidarity with us in the darkness of trials, reminding us that no sacrifice is wasted when offered in loving union with her son. Down through the ages, many of our Carmelite brothers and sisters have given their lives generously and lovingly, knowing themselves to be held in the loving arms of Mary, Queen of Martyrs: the martyrs of the Spanish Civil War, the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne, Titus Brandsma, Edith Stein, Isidore Bakanja, and countless others. We will learn more of these figures inspired by Mary as our Carmelite formation progresses.
Stop and reflect: Mary is often referred to as a ‘foundational figure’ within Carmelite spirituality. Think about the foundations of a building: they are unseen but keep the building rooted and secure. It is sometimes said that Carmelite devotion to Mary is like that; not always 'on display' but rather pervading all that we do at a very deep level. Is that your experience of Mary’s place within Carmel?

Gathered in prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus

At Pentecost, Mary was in the midst of the disciples, waiting in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and giving the first Christians – and hence Carmelites – an example of how they should form community. As she had given birth to Jesus in the stable at Bethlehem, so at Pentecost she was present at the birth of the new Body of Christ, the Church, which perpetuates the presence of Jesus down through the ages. She became the Mother of the Church. As Carmelites, what is true of Mary is true of us. Carmelites, by their prayer and self-giving love, become, like Mary, mothers of souls. This is true of cloistered Carmelite nuns, it is also true of our friars as they guide souls to holiness, and it is true of lay Carmelites as their lives of prayer are fruitful in active love for their neighbours. The example of Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), is a poignant icon of this. She entered Carmel to pray for God’s people, especially for her Jewish brothers and sisters. Before entering the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Edith stood out like the quiet centre in a whirlwind, praying though overwhelmed by sadness not for herself but for her people. She was, said an eyewitness, a Pietà without the Christ (cf. Joanne Mosley, Edith Stein: Woman of Prayer, pp. 54-55). Edith was truly a daughter and sister of Mary, of whom she wrote: ‘Only a few words from the Virgin Mary have come down to us in the Gospels. But these few words are like heavy grains of pure gold. When they melt in the ardour of loving meditation, they more than suffice to bathe our entire lives in a luminous golden glow.’

We conclude with two reflections on Mary offered to the Carmelite Family in the twentieth century. Firstly, let us read the words addressed to the Carmelite Family by Pope Paul VI:

May the most holy Virgin Mary confirm you in your Carmelite vocation. May she safeguard your love for the things of the Spirit. May she obtain for you the graces you need in your holy, laborious ascent towards the knowledge of the divine realm and the ineffable experiences of its dark nights and light-filled days. May she give you the desire for sanctity, the desire to bear eschatological witness to the kingdom of heaven. May she make you models for all the members of God’s Church, and bind you to them in brotherhood. And may she one day lead you into that possession of Christ and his glory which, even now, is the goal towards which your whole life is directed.

(from the Allocutions of Pope Paul VI).

Secondly, these are the words of the Carmelite friar and martyr Titus Brandsma, who said that ‘Carmel is all Marian’:

May the most holy Virgin Mary confirm you in your Carmelite vocation. May she safeguard your love for the things of the Spirit. May she obtain for you the graces you need in your holy, laborious ascent towards the knowledge of the divine realm and the ineffable experiences of its dark nights and light-filled days. May she give you the desire for sanctity, the desire to bear eschatological witness to the kingdom of heaven. May she make you models for all the members of God’s Church, and bind you to them in brotherhood. And may she one day lead you into that possession of Christ and his glory which, even now, is the goal towards which your whole life is directed.

(from the Allocutions of Pope Paul VI).
The devotion to Mary is one of the most delightful flowers in Carmel’s garden. I should like to call it a sunflower. This flower rises high above the other flowers. Borne aloft on a tall stem, rich in green leaves, the flower is raised yet higher from among the green foliage. It is characteristic of this flower to turn itself towards the sun and moreover it is an image of the sun. It is a simple flower: it can grow in all gardens and it is an ornament to all. It is tall and firm and has deep roots like a tree... The flower itself represents the soul created after God’s image in order to absorb the sunlight of God’s bounty... Such a flower was Mary. Like her, so may we, flowers from her seed, raise our flower buds to the sun who infused Himself into her and will transmit to us also the beams of His light and warmth.

**Conclusion:** In this fifth chapter we have considered the special role of Mary within the Church and within Carmel in particular. She is Mother, Queen, Patron, Beauty of Carmel, Lady of the Place, and Sister. She is the perfect model of a praying woman, at the heart of the community, who serves those in need, and we can turn to her as an advocate and friend. We come to know her through the Carmelite tradition and specially through the Scriptures, and this knowledge leads us closer to her son Jesus Christ.

You might like to conclude your time of study and reflection with a prayer in honour of the Blessed Virgin Mary, perhaps one of the ancient Marian prayers of the Church, or with the following text:

_O God,_

_you have given us Mary as our Mother,_
_and through the Order of Carmel we learn to call her Sister._

_May we imitate her goodness, faith, and purity of heart,_
_and be ever joyful in the wonderful things you have done for us._

_May Mary watch over and protect us_  
_on our pilgrim way to your holy mountain, Christ the Lord._  
_We make our prayer through the same Christ, Our Lord and Brother. Amen._

We are now a quarter of the way through this programme of initial formation. In the next chapter we will consider the role of another foundational figure within Carmelite spirituality, the prophet Elijah.
Ideas for Reflection, Discussion and Action

- Reflect – either individually or as a community – on any passage in this chapter that has particularly sparked your imagination. Is there anything you have found challenging? Have you learned anything new?

- If you were to make your own Magnificat prayer to the Lord, what would you praise him for?

- John ‘made room’ for Mary in his home. If Mary is our mother too, what would we have to do to make our homes fitting places in which to welcome her?

- Read Felip Ribot’s interpretation of Mary as the ‘Little Cloud’ in either the translation of the Ten Books by Richard Copsey (p. 82), or in Emanuele Boaga’s Lady of the Place (pp. 50-51); details of these books are given in the list of resources below.

- How much is your image of Mary derived from the Scriptures? Is your image more dependent upon ‘visionary’ encounters with Mary?

- Do you find Our Lady easy to approach as ‘Sister’ as well as ‘Mother’ and ‘Queen’?

- An ancient Carmelite adage is Totus Marianus est Carmelus – ‘Carmel belongs totally to Mary’. How do you understand this phrase?

- Mary combined prayer with practical service of those around her. In your prayer, ask her to help you to reach out to those around you. How has Mary inspired social movements within the Church?

- Try to learn about one Carmelite saint’s relationship with Mary by reading about him or her in Lady of the Place, referred to in the reading list below.
Recommended Further Resources

There are many publications on Carmel’s relationship with Mary. Though there is much wisdom in older books, it is best to read materials published after the 1960s that reflect the teachings and insights of the Second Vatican Council. The list of resources below should be easily found in most good Carmelite libraries, and a number of them can also be found on the internet.


Emanuele Boaga, O.Carm., The Lady of the Place: Mary in the History and in the Life of Carmel, (Rome: Edizioni Carmelitane, 2001).


Chris O’Donnell, O.Carm., Loving Presence: Mary and Carmel, available online via the website of the Carmelite Curia: www.ocarm.org


Notes and reflections on Chapter 5