

## **The Resurrection and the Carmelites**

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### **Hot Cross Buns, Easter Eggs and Carmel**

I spent six years in our inner city London parish, Walworth. One of the joys there was the school Mass. There was normally a school mass every Friday. Often the age range would be from five to eleven. For the reflection after the Gospel I asked as many questions as possible in order to gain the children's interest. One year, after Easter, I asked the children what had they to eat on Good Friday. One girl put her hand up immediately and very boldly told us she had eaten roast turkey on that day. Her parents sitting at the back looked rather embarrassed. Eventually I got the answer I was looking for which was "Hot Cross Buns". I did not have so much difficulty when I asked what the children received on Easter Sunday. I was told very quickly Easter Eggs!!!

### **The Resurrection and the Carmelites.**

The Resurrection of Our Lord is an important theme for Carmelites. I would like to reflect with you on the importance of the Resurrection in Carmelite liturgy. From the very beginning of its existence Carmelite liturgy has been connected with the Rite of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. For centuries, in all the official documents, the Liturgy of the Carmelites was described as the "Rite of the brothers of our Blessed Lady of Mount Carmel according to the custom of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem". The Holy Sepulchre was important for Carmelites not because it was the site of burial for Jesus but because it was the place of the Resurrection. The Rite itself comes from France as it was brought to the Holy Land by French crusaders. There were also influence from the Augustinian tradition as the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre followed the Rule of St. Augustine.

At the Holy Sepulchre on almost every Saturday from Easter to Advent, a solemn procession took place to the chapel of the Resurrection where the next day a Mass was solemnly celebrated in honour of the Resurrection. It was this liturgy that the Carmelites took as the source of their inspiration. Different Carmelites who have studied our liturgy suggest that the Carmelites from the earliest times on Mount Carmel celebrated the Rite of the Holy Sepulchre. The first written proof of this is in our Constitutions of 1281 from the London General Chapter. These Constitutions are important for a number of reasons since they are the earliest Constitutions to survive. It is suggested that the Carmelites of that time formally adopted what was already their custom since the days on Mount Carmel.

Much of what we know about early Carmelite liturgy has come down to us through an Ordinal or book of instructions about the celebration of the Mass and Office, which was written by Sibertus de Beka, a Carmelite of the Lower German Province. He entered the Order at Cologne in 1280 and died there in 1332. His Ordinal collected the existing Carmelite liturgical traditions and was in use throughout the Order until the second half of the sixteenth century. One of the interesting features of this manual was that the celebrant at Mass did not kneel at the consecration, which was the universal custom, but only bowed his head. By remaining standing the Carmelites depicted the risen Christ. On the last Sunday of the liturgical year there was a Solemn Commemoration of the

Resurrection. This would always have taken place in November when the Church traditionally remembered the dead. Therefore, the medieval Carmelites concluded their month of prayer for dead with a solemn celebration of the Resurrection. Another reminder that the Carmelites had their origins in the Holy Land is some of the feasts that were in the early calendar and which are no longer celebrated. The most interesting is the feast of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which was celebrated on October 6. This celebration was unique to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Carmelite Rite.

The Resurrection and the Carmelite tradition was a major theme of the some of our earliest writers. One of the most famous was the medieval English Carmelite, John Baconthrope. The 1281 Constitutions had changed the cloak from a striped one to a white one (which is worn by Carmelites today) and gives us the name 'Whitefriars'. About this change Baconthrope wrote: "It was therefore right that the Carmelites, who depicted earlier times in the mirror of their habit, should exhibit the immaculate future glory of the believers in a respectable manner with their splendid cloak. This, then, happens in times of grace." The change therefore, symbolised "the eternal peace and glory of the Resurrection to the believers".

In the Middle Ages due to the influence of St. Bernard and St. Francis there was much emphasis on the cross and the human suffering of Jesus. There were feasts such as the Crown of Thorns and the Lance of the Lord. These feasts came into the Carmelite calendar about two hundred years later. Many of the early Carmelites were not influenced by the spirituality of the cross. They chose instead to place their emphasis on the Resurrection. Carmelite liturgy has undergone many changes and we no longer have our own Rite. However, it is good for us as Carmelites to be aware of the original spirit of the Order. Celebrating Easter, we go to the Altar of the Risen Lord, knowing the Carmelite story began in the land of the Resurrection.

In the Rule given to the Carmelites by St. Albert of Jerusalem we see that the Eucharist is the centre of the first Carmelite community as it was for the Jerusalem community. The Rule can appear as an arc. At the two ends of the arc are the following of Christ (the prologue) and the waiting for the return of the Lord (no.24). At the apex is the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. We see that Christ is the centre of our Rule as we follow in his footsteps and are waiting for his return. As a community who are waiting with hope and expectation Christ is present sacramentally. Like the first Jerusalem community (Acts 2:42) Carmelites live as community supported by the Word and the Eucharist. We read in chapter ten that we are "to gather each morning to hear Mass". This is an echo of the resurrection account in John's Gospel: "On the first day of the week Mary of Magdala came to the tomb early in the morning while it was still dark" (John 20:1). Not surprisingly Mary of Magdala was celebrated in the medieval Carmelite calendar. For our reflection let us ponder on the Easter story. Let us look at the account found in the fourth Gospel (John 20: 1 - 18).

### **"Early in the morning, while it was still dark..." (Jn.20: 1)**

The Easter story begins in darkness and at the beginning of not just another week but at the beginning of a new creation. The story centres around Mary of Magdala, Peter, the beloved disciple and, of course, the Risen Jesus. It is interesting to note that it is a woman who is the first witness to the empty tomb and the first to encounter the Risen Lord. Women in the time of Jesus were not allowed to be witnesses in a court of law unless two men backed up their

testimony. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke there are three women who go to the tomb but in John's account there is only one, namely Mary of Magdala. What the four Gospels do agree on is that it was females who were the first witnesses to the resurrection. None of them were relatives of Jesus, which was unusual as it was normally the next of kin who prepared the dead for burial. Rather than the physical relatives it was the spiritual family who served this need.

We know very little about this woman from Magdala. In Luke's Gospel we read that she was possessed with seven demons. Jesus had cured her and given her new purpose in her life. She became a follower of Jesus. How did she feel that Easter morning? Did she feel a sense of loss and bewilderment? We might like to put ourselves in the place of Mary and think of how we would feel going to the tomb. What would have been her hopes, fears and concerns? The main purpose of her visit was to complete the burial ritual that had not been finished on the Friday. All of us have visited a cemetery. Why do we go? Why do we place flowers on a grave and why do we pray at the grave of someone who was important for us? When I was young I was frequently taken to the grave of my grandmother. I never met the lady. She died when my mother was young. As we travelled down to the cemetery in Margate I was told stories about my maternal grandparents. In a graveyard we sense death. But each grave has a story to tell. Someone unique lies below the stone and the flowers. When we visit do we let the story speak to us? If we go with the eyes of faith, the whole journey and purpose is transformed. We are aware that this is not the end of the journey. We merely have a physical place that we can visit. Mary was looking for the mortal remains of Jesus and she was devastated when she thought they had been stolen. When our eyes are open, we, like Mary, can leave with new hope and purpose. Because what the Lord of the Resurrection has done for our blessed dead he will do for us one day.

However, this visit was going to be different. Instead of finding death, Mary found new life. Death was never going to be the same again. She discovered the empty tomb and there was sufficient light for her to see that the stone has been rolled away. At first she preferred to believe in the night antics of grave robbers rather than in a God who refuses to allow Death to have the last word. She went to Peter and the beloved disciple. They did not believe Mary and felt a need to go immediately to the empty tomb. John's account is full of action with the two men running to the tomb. It was the first Easter jog! The beloved disciple reached the tomb first but allowed Peter to enter before him. He only saw discarded clothes while the other disciples saw the evidence and believed. His love and faith saw through the dark and he believed.

Let us return to Mary of Magdala. The two disciples returned home but Mary remained in the garden weeping. She discovered a stranger and thought he was the gardener. He used a title common to her sex "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?" However, she only recognised him when he called her by name. Mary addressed him as 'Rabboni', that is "Teacher", which is her act of faith. Jesus told her "Do not hold on to me; you see I have not yet ascended to the Father". Jesus is now the risen saviour and for a few days he will allow his followers to see him, though their relationship has to change. With prayer and faith they will let go of the physical presence of Jesus. She goes off and proclaims the resurrection with the words "I have seen the Lord". Mary would never be the same. Her relationship had changed. The resurrection had transformed her. We

will meet and encounter Jesus in our sorrows and our joys. Like Mary of Magdala we will find him among the living rather than the dead.

### **Further Reading**

James Boyce, O.Carm., *Praising God in Carmel*, (Washington, D.C.: The Carmelite Institute, 1999).

Donald Buggert, O.Carm., *The Christocentrism of the Carmelite Charism*, (Melbourne, Australia: Carmelite Communications, 1999)

John Welch, O.Carm., *The Carmelite Way*, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1996).

Arie Kallenberg, 'The Resurrection in the Early Carmelite Liturgy and Carmelite Spirituality', in *Carmelus*, Vol.44, 1997.