

A Carmelite Response to Young People's Needs

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People talk about a youth culture, especially when trying to understand the spiritual and emotional needs of young people. However, there is no single “youth culture” that you can easily define. The nearest you can get to a definition is simply one of diversity. This could be seen as the result of two things: the search for something around us to satisfy our inner desires, and the empowerment to explore these desires in our own individual way. These are two wonderful things that must be encouraged, without stifling this exploration. For more and more young people this has led to an individualising of religion – it becomes a personal journey, which is often not shared or acknowledged. For many young people there is not a rejection of needing something to fulfil our spiritual and emotional needs – it is just not a priority. It may be something that comes up in an interesting (and slightly drunk!) conversation in the early hours of the morning but is lost in the clear light of day.

As young people how do we acknowledge and go about the exploration of our inner desires? More and more we are taught to learn about the world around us but not the world within. To discover this complex world within us we need to block out the distractions around us and try to look into what may well be a hectic darkness inside. However, when we stop, turn off the music and listen, often we will not hear silence but the continual concerns and general oddities that our brain refuses to let go of. It is here that an external guidance and support is beneficial.

In Carmelite spirituality, there is a combination of charisms that provide great support to many of our needs. The first is the combination of space for the individual and coming together with others. The second is the embrace of the diverse journeys that we all have and the unique way God speaks to us all (Heb1:1). The third is the deep grounding in the Church, and the fourth is the call to be active and enthusiastic in the world around us. This combination creates a solid guide with which individuals can find their own paths to answer their own unique desires.

Having returned from the International Congress of the Third Order in Sassone, Rome, it has provoked much thought in my mind to what Carmelite spirituality is. From having the opportunity to share deep and personal thoughts with people from totally different cultures and walks of life, this idea of space was important to so many. It was described by some as a cloud - a space with its own mystical charism and perimeters, but nevertheless a space. In this space we can discover ourselves, our desires, and our relationship with God. We can explore the journey that we have already begun and ensure we continue moving forwards. In Carmel we can walk our own path, but know we are not alone. We can be active with others to make the world around us one that is just and allows each person to express his or her own desires. Above all we can be guided and supported by those around us, by God, and by Mary our Mother who in the silence leads us to the love of her Son, Jesus.