

FUNDAMENTAL VALUES OF CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

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It is a special joy to be with you at this International Congress of Lay Carmelites and to have the opportunity to renew many wonderful friendships that I have treasured in my past travels around the world. I have been asked by the organizing committee of the Congress to offer you some introductory thoughts about our spirituality and tradition, and I am very happy to do this.

While I was living in Rome from 1983-1995, and as I travelled to visit our Carmelite brothers and sisters in over 30 countries, I had a wonderful chance to give a special place or priority to a particular value of our way of life. It had seemed to me that my predecessor as Prior General for twelve years, Father Falco Thusi, had emphasized the prophetic ministry of Carmelites and the need for an option for the poor through a ministry of justice and peace. We all were certainly enriched by that emphasis. By the same token, my successor and our present Prior General, Father Joseph Chalmers, has been speaking and writing frequently about the contemplative aspect of our vocation and the need for a deeper prayer life. Without a doubt this too is a great blessing for each one of us.

Because of my own personal background and because of many wonderful, caring relationships that I had experienced during my journey in Carmel, I began in 1983 to use the term 'Carmelite Family' in my talks, in my writings, and in my visits around the world. I soon realized that each of the words in that term - '*Carmelite*' and '*Family*' - were important to me and needed to be studied and developed. In my initial talks at Provincial Chapters during 1984 and 1985, I tried to begin that work by emphasizing what I thought were the two greatest treasures that we possessed as Carmelites: first, *our members* - friars, sisters, laity (our *family* element), and secondly, *our spirituality* - charism and tradition (our *Carmelite* element). A year ago in my Province's publication, *The Sword*, I wrote an article that emphasized our first treasure - community and fraternity - the *family* aspect of our charism. In this conference, I will be sharing about our second treasure - our spirituality, the *Carmelite* aspect of our charism.

Since the beginning of religious life in the Church, there have been different schools of spirituality. Even though every spirituality has but one foundation,

Jesus Christ, some holy men and women throughout the centuries have been attracted to specific values from His teaching and have emphasized certain truths of His life. As a result, particular Gospel values have become identified with different religious families in the Church. These are truly gifts of the Holy Spirit, enriching and benefiting the lives of God's people.

We easily think of the gifts of Benedictine spirituality with its emphasis on the praise and worship of God, with each day being divided into hours of prayer in chapel, but there would also be time for work in the fields or in the scriptorium (*ora et labora*), and as a result Benedictine monasteries became the centers of stability and learning in the Church. Later, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, came Saint Dominic and Saint Francis. First, the Dominicans, preaching the Word of God in the midst of the people as mendicant friars, with one of their members, Saint Thomas Aquinas, deepening the Church's insight into the Eucharist. Secondly, the Franciscans, who committed themselves to follow Jesus in poverty and simplicity, with a deep appreciation and love for the beauty of God's creation. In the sixteenth century, there would be Saint Ignatius and the Jesuits, promoting the glory of God through obedience to the Holy Father, with an unfailing zeal for education and the missions.

Each of these saints and their schools of spirituality followed the same Christ, and all participated as religious in the one Church that He had founded, but they stressed different Gospel values to reach one specific goal – union with God. Each group realized that it did not “own” these Gospel values which were the foundation of their charism, but as religious they were called by the Lord to live these values and to pass them on to the members of the Church by the quality and witness of their lives.

In this talk I would ask you to reflect on ten fundamental values of our Carmelite spirituality. They will include the traditional values of prayer, community, and ministry that every religious group seems to emphasize when speaking or writing about its spirituality. I do feel strongly, however, that our charism has other more fundamental values that our saints have written about and that our tradition has stressed as the foundation of Carmelite life. I will try to share with you, very simply and briefly, some places in our tradition or in the writings of our saints, especially our three Doctors of the Church, Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, and Saint Thérèse, where these fundamental values can be found.

I would ask you to remember that these ten values are not “written in stone” like the Ten Commandments, but are only proposed for your consideration and discussion. I would encourage each one of you personally to do your own

reading and your own study of our spirituality in order to deepen your personal understanding, and perhaps to come up with your own list of ten fundamental values in our Carmelite tradition. I readily understand that at different moments in life, and certainly in particular areas and in specific communities, one or other of these values might seem more important and more necessary to each one of us. Obviously, the Holy Spirit breathes where He wills and inspires us differently, and we often respond according to our own particular personality and gifts. We should only be grateful to the Spirit that these values are a reality in our lives as we commit ourselves day after day to deepen our love for our Carmelite spirituality.

First Value: The Presence of God

Psalm 42 has expressed so well the longing of the human spirit: “Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for you, my God. My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life; when can I enter and see the face of God?” St. Augustine expressed this same truth so beautifully: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

Our Carmelite spirituality begins on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. The first hermits, some probably lay pilgrims, and others former crusaders, came together toward the end of the 12th century to a place well known in Scripture for the presence and deeds of the Prophet Elijah. They were drawn by his words in the *First Book of Kings*: “God lives, in whose presence I stand.” They were seeking the presence, the face of the living God, the God of Love whose image Jesus constantly reflected during His time on earth, as He reminded His disciples of the Good News – that the God, who created us in His image, has first loved us and has called us to a personal union with Himself.

I would suggest to you that *the presence of God* has been and should still remain the first and most fundamental value of our Carmelite spirituality and tradition. For centuries, this yearning, this striving, was expressed by the Latin words – *Vacare Deo* – a total availability to God as we become more aware of His presence in our life. Like so many of our Saints in Carmel, that phrase will take on a very personal meaning for each of us, as we strive to find time for Him, as we rest and relax in His presence, as we literally “take a vacation with God,” simply seeking God day after day in our many commitments and activities.

This inspiration to seek the presence of God is strongly rooted in our Carmelite spirituality because of the influence of Elijah the Prophet. The early hermits gathered on Mount Carmel by the fountain of Elijah. It was there that they

hoped to find a spiritual environment, a place where God's spirit and the human spirit would meet. Elijah and Elisha were inspiring models of this fundamental challenge for all Carmelites: to stand in the presence of the living God and to seek His face. The prophets of Mount Carmel reminded one and all that God lives among His people and that He loves each one of us with an everlasting love.

St. Teresa of Avila and St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus are two of our saints who witnessed so strongly to this first fundamental value. They remind us so well that the thirst for God is not the exclusive right of a privileged few, but that our God is eager to share Himself with every sincere soul. They are both so mindful of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman at the well: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him, leaping up to provide eternal life."

We are all familiar with the story of Teresa, who at the age of seven ran away from home with her brother Rodrigo, and when asked by her anxious parents why she had done this, she replied: "I went because I want to see God, and to see him we must die." The reply of a child, but it foreshadows her life-long quest – to live in the presence of the living God who loved her. She later wrote: "We need no wings to go in search of God but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us."

The spirituality of St. Teresa is simply this movement toward God present in the most inner mansion of her soul, where she seeks to be intimately united with Him. Teresa begins her quest for God by seeking only Jesus, but the whole Christ is revealed to her. She had looked to find God in relationship to herself, but she finds as "a daughter of the Church" that Christ Jesus is found in His members, in His mystical Body. Because of this profound understanding, she shared with us her beautiful prayer: "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 the world ..." How well does Teresa reflect the two-fold battle cry of Elijah, the prophet of Carmel: "God lives, in whose presence I stand," and "With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts."

St. Thérèse too, at a very young age, had a profound sense of the presence of God, one that was replete with love. Her image of God was taken from her own father whom she admired, respected, cherished and loved so much. Her mother tells us that Thérèse as a child "speaks only of God and wouldn't miss her prayers for anything." Later, in Carmel she had deepened this value to such an extent that as she was dying she tells us that the source of her joy came from a total acceptance of the will of "Papa, God" whom she was soon to see face to

face. She told her sisters very simply: “Don’t be sad at seeing me sick like this. You can see how happy God is making me”.

Second Value: An Allegiance to Jesus Christ

Carmelites are the only religious and lay family in the Church whose beginnings took place in the Holy Land, the place where Jesus was born, lived, taught, suffered, died and rose from the dead. Benedictines might speak of Subiaco and Monte Cassino, Dominicans of southern France, Franciscans of Assisi, Jesuits of Paris and Rome as their birthplaces. The Carmelites alone can point with justifiable pride to Mount Carmel, the place of Elijah and Elisha, the land of Jesus and Mary.

When Albert, the Bishop of Jerusalem and the Patriarch of the Holy Land, wrote a formula of living for the first hermits on Mount Carmel, approximately 800 years ago, he had in mind the most important event in all of history – the birth of Jesus, God becoming incarnate among His people. Albert made this truth the central value of the Rule of Carmel: “Everyone ... should live a life in allegiance to Jesus Christ ... each one, pure in heart and stout in conscience, must be unswerving in the service of the Master ... 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, unless attending to some other duty.”

Jesus continues to be the center of the Carmelite way of life. In our tradition and for our saints, this allegiance to Christ became the essential element in putting Albert’s formula of living into practice. They took to heart as their inspiration the words of St. Paul to the Galatians: “I have been crucified with Christ and the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me. I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (*Galatians 2:20*).

St. Teresa’s writings are filled with this allegiance and with the following of Jesus, and she emphatically tells her sisters that the person who would find God must go to Christ Jesus. She writes: “Imagine that the Lord Himself is at your side, and believe me, you should stay with so good a Friend for as long as you can before you leave Him. If you become accustomed to having Him at your side, as if He sees that you love Him to be there and are always trying to please Him, you will never be able, as we put it, to send Him away.” In contrast to many of the theologians of her day, both Dominicans and Jesuits, Teresa put great emphasis on the humanity of Jesus. She recounted His own words to her over and over again: “Be not disturbed, for I will give you a living book.” She

emphasized: “The Lord Himself says that He is the Way; the Lord Himself also says that He is the Light and that no one can come to the Father save by Him, and he that sees me sees my Father also.”

St. John of the Cross strongly stressed the same value. To him, Jesus is the revelation of God, His presence among us. In the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, he tells us that “in giving His Son, which is His Word – and He has no other – God spoke to us all together, once and for all, in this single Word.” For John, Jesus is the way, He is the door, the only door through which we reach the Father: “O would that I could get spiritual persons to understand that the road to God ... lies in denying ourselves in earnest within and without, and undergoing suffering with Christ”.

Third Value: The Dignity of the Human Person

After sharing with you about the first Carmelite value, the presence of God, the loving Father whom Jesus told us about in the Gospel, and then stressing the second value, allegiance to Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word who came to live among us, it would be fitting and proper – “*dignum et justum est*” – to speak of the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as the third fundamental value of Carmelite spirituality, but regrettably the Holy Spirit has not been strongly emphasized in our Carmelite tradition nor by our saints, throughout the centuries. This is true, however, not only of our heritage, but it is also a reality in Christian theology for 2000 years. The Holy Spirit has been called “the forgotten Person of the Trinity” by many Catholic theologians. Fortunately though, in our own day, a new group of religious in our Carmelite Family in Indonesia and Malaysia, the Daughters of Carmel (*Putri Karmel*) and the Sons of Elijah, have developed a strong devotion to the Holy Spirit as part of their charism. Their ministry among the people has become an integral part of the charismatic renewal programs in those countries.

Despite little being written of the Holy Spirit, however, we must remember that in our Catholic and Carmelite tradition *the dignity of the human person* has been strongly emphasized. The New Testament speaks so powerfully of this value: “Do you not know,” writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, “that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? Charity is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us” (*I Corinthians 3:16; Romans 5:5*). The presence of God in the soul and the work of sanctification, even though common to the three Persons of the Trinity, are especially attributed to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is, in fact, Love in the bosom of the Trinity – God’s gift to the soul through Love. And, of course, this respect

for the human person is one of the strongest values that Jesus shared in the Gospel – His love for Peter, John, Magdalen, Lazarus, Zacchaeus, for each of His followers and for every person. Every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and is to be treated with value, dignity and love.

Perhaps here in my talk, I might interject a personal note. Sixty years ago, precisely during the first week of September in 1946, I entered the Carmelite seminary just outside the city of Boston in the United States. From the very beginning of my association with Carmelites, this specific value – respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each individual – has been such a rich treasure in my experience. I became a seminarian because of the warmth and respect shown to me by the Carmelites priests whom I met for the very first time when I visited a friend who was in the seminary.

Later as I studied our spiritual tradition, I found that our saints emphasized this truth over and over again: God calls each person, each soul, each *alma* in the words of St. John of the Cross to a transforming union with the Trinity through a following of Jesus Christ. In this sense, our Rule is exemplary. It allows each friar, each sister, each lay person a great amount of individual freedom in seeking and finding God. It places great emphasis on the God who calls us to union, just as He called Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the prophets of the Old Testament. It stresses the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul of each person, as it cites the words of St. Paul. Our Rule is so different from that of Benedict which spells out every detail along a person's journey, or from the Exercises of Ignatius which map out very precisely the way to sanctity.

St. John of the Cross beautifully exemplifies this value – the dignity of the human person. He constantly writes about the individual soul – *alma* – in its relationship to God.

In his conferences and in his writings to the early members of the Teresian reform, he reminded each sister and brother that God desired a personal relationship and union. The authenticity of this relationship can only be measured in daily living, by the individual's commitment to find time for God day after day in prayer, and by a constant reaching out to one's neighbor in love. John says simply that this relationship is fed by a daily attendance at Mass and the Eucharist, by a daily reflection on the Word of God in imitation of Mary, the Mother of Carmel, who treasured the word in her heart. John reminds us that Jesus encouraged his apostles with the words: "Let us go apart to a deserted place." Carmel tries to offer this same invitation to each of its members, giving every person an opportunity for intimacy with God. He alone is the answer to the longing, to the searching, to the restlessness that is present

in every individual's heart.

Fourth value: The Journey of Faith

The theme of a *journey* is such a strong part of our Carmelite tradition. Our historians point out that the first hermits on Mount Carmel came from different countries of Europe. They had journeyed from their native soil to settle in the Holy Land of Jesus and Mary, seeking the face of the living God. Perhaps a deep faith had driven them to that special place where God might be found, and for this reason they made a pilgrimage of trust to the mountains and the deserts of Israel. And only a generation or two later, during the 1230s and the 1240s, because of the Saracens' persecution, some of these same hermits journeyed back to their native lands of Sicily, France, England and the Low Countries.

It is not surprising then that the *journey theme*, rooted in faith and trust, became such an integral part of our Carmelite spirituality. I would suggest to you that Mary – Our Lady of the Place, Our Lady of Mount Carmel – is the best model that we Carmelites might imitate in our personal journey of faith. The Second Vatican Council in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, called Mary “the Woman of Faith” because she persevered so loyally in union with her Son Jesus from Nazareth to Calvary. It is interesting to recall, however, that over sixty years before the Council, St. Thérèse anticipated this Church gathering and gave tremendous insights into the value of faith in Mary's life. In her poem, *Why Do I Love You, Mary*, written in May 1897, only four months before her death, Thérèse presents our Blessed Mother as the Woman who journeyed in faith. She writes that every incident of Mary's life portrayed in the Gospel – from the Annunciation to the birth of Jesus, from the loss in the Temple to the marriage feast of Cana, and finally to her standing at the foot of the Cross – was a challenge from God for her to make an act of faith.

We see this fourth value of Carmelite spirituality in the lives and writings of our greatest saints: Teresa, John of the Cross, and Thérèse. Teresa's journey of faith takes place primarily in the depths of her own soul, as a movement inward toward God who is present within her and with whom she desires to be perfectly united. She writes in *The Way of Perfection*: “Remember how St. Augustine tells us about his seeking God in many places and eventually finding Him within himself ... We need no wings to go in search of God but have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon Him present within us.” In her initial vision of the *Interior Castle*, she writes that God is in the center, in the seventh mansion, and that He is the great reality of the castle. For

Teresa, God is not a symbol, a creation of the soul's imagination. He truly dwells there. She firmly believed the words of Jesus in John's Gospel: "If anyone loves me, my Father will love him, and we will come and make our abode with him" (*John* 14:23). For Teresa, the spiritual life was, *par excellence*, an interior life – a movement, a journey toward God through faith into the depth, into the seventh mansion, of her soul.

Saint John of the Cross also strongly emphasized the priority of the journey of faith in Carmelite spirituality. First, he presented to his readers a drawing of the path of Mount Carmel leading to the union of the soul with God who dwells on the mountain. Then, he explained the meaning of this drawing in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night*. He is an excellent guide as he teaches each soul to resign itself into God's hands, even when there is so often a personal desire to be in control. He encourages a surrender to God in love. To many, John's manner of presentation, his language, and his patterns of thought seem difficult and forbidding, but the core of his teaching is nothing else than a stark emphasis of the heart of the Gospel message.

During the past 100 years, the Church, especially through the writings of the popes from Pius X to John Paul II, has consistently pointed out the journey of St. Thérèse as worthy of our imitation. She called her journey of faith "the little way of trust and absolute surrender". When asked by her sister Pauline on 17th July 1897, a few months before her death, "What way do you wish to teach souls after your death?", Thérèse answered unhesitatingly, "It's the way of spiritual childhood; it's the way of confidence and total abandon."

Thérèse realized that there is a constant refrain in the Gospel: "Do not fear, do not be afraid," as Jesus was so very sensitive to the emotion of fear that so many human beings experience. Thérèse learned this lesson well; it is her message to us in our fear-filled and anxious world. She continually emphasized the basic teaching of the Gospel – the loving Providence of God who is both a Father and Mother. She summed up her teaching with these words: "It is confidence and nothing but confidence that must lead us to Love ... What pleases God is that He sees me loving my littleness and my poverty, the blind hope that I have in His Mercy. To love Jesus – the weaker one is, without desires or virtues, the more suited one is for the workings of this consuming and transforming Love." She finishes with these challenging words: "Jesus deigned to show me the road that leads to God, and this road is the surrender of the little child who sleeps without fear in its Father's arms." This is a beautiful example of the Carmelite journey of faith.

Fifth Value: The Primacy of Love

When one of the scribes asked Jesus: “Which is the first of all the commandments?”, He replied: “This is the first: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ And this is the second: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” During His preaching, and especially through His suffering and death, Jesus made love the central value and truth of His life. To be a follower of Christ – whether lay or religious – love must have a primacy in our lives.

All of us have often reflected about the *meaning* of love in our life, and we would probably agree in many ways with the psychologist, Erich Fromm, that the term ‘love’ implies the following four qualities: *care* as a mother treasures and watches over her child; *responsibility* in our attentiveness to the needs of one another; *respect* for the uniqueness and value of each person; *growth* in knowing better the person whom we love. The challenge for Christians, however, is putting this love into *practice*. The theologian, C. S. Lewis, encouraged the practice and expression of love in four concrete ways: *affection* that is similar to the warmth and care that a parent shares with a child through a smile, a touch; *friendship* that creates a special bond between two persons through mutual sharing and interests; *charity* that selflessly gives to others in imitation of Jesus, following the beautiful qualities that St. Paul enumerates in his first letter to the Corinthians; *eros* or *sexual union* by which married people become “no longer two but are united in one flesh.”

Christian spirituality throughout the ages has given us tremendous insights into the meaning of love, and it certainly has a primacy in our Carmelite tradition. Perhaps the latest Doctor of the Church, St. Thérèse, has placed this primacy into particular focus for us. It is difficult to describe Thérèse’s intense love of God and of the members of her community in Lisieux, but her spirituality begins with this truth. Her sister Pauline once said of her: “She breathed the love of God just as I breathe air.” Thérèse completely believed and trusted the beautiful words of St. John: “God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

All of us are familiar with her words in the *Story of a Soul* as she was reading St. Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians: “And the Apostle explains how all the most perfect gifts are nothing without Love. That charity is the excellent way that leads most surely to God. I finally had rest ... I understood that love comprised all vocations, that love was everything, that it embraced all times and places ... in a word, that it was eternal .. Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O, Jesus, my love ... my *vocation*, at last I have found it ... my

vocation is love!”

Saint Teresa too has given us valuable insights into the meaning of love. She wrote often of the friendships that Jesus showed during His life on earth. He shared in a special way with Peter, James and John, Mary Magdalen, and during the last weeks of His sorrowful struggle in Jerusalem, He used to go in the evenings to rest a while at Bethany, in the atmosphere of affection offered by Lazarus, Martha and Mary, who were so close to His heart. Teresa used these examples in her writing to show the relationship between love and friendship. She wrote in the *Story of Her Life*: “It is a great evil for a soul beset by so many dangers to be alone. Friends are so necessary.” Her 1500 letters attest so strongly to this need for friendship in her life. It was from a circle of close friends at the Convent of the Incarnation that there came the idea to begin her reform with the foundation of the monastery of St. Joseph in Avila. She encouraged a deep spiritual friendship among the first members of the reform: “In this house ... all must be friends with each other, love each other, be fond of each other, and help each other.” To be a friend of Jesus, her sisters must learn first to be friends with one another.

This value – the primacy of love – is very strong in our tradition. I remember reading once, as a very young student in philosophy, about the meaning of contemplation and its role in our Carmelite identity and spirituality. It was a description of contemplation given by Carmelite theologians at the University of Salamanca in the 17th century: contemplation is a simple awareness of Truth under the influence of love. Franciscans might talk of poverty and peace, Dominicans of truth and the word of God, the Jesuits of obedience and the greater glory of God, but Carmelites identify the presence of God with love: “God is love and he who remains in love remains in God and God in him.”

Sixth Value: The Importance of Prayer

To many in the Catholic Church today, Carmel and prayer are synonymous. If we as Carmelites, both lay and religious, have anything to say to a contemporary world, it is about prayer. The writings and traditions of Carmel, which make up the history of our religious family are a result of attending to the Presence of the living God and responding to God in love. The Rule sums up our contemplative stance with the words: “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, unless attending to some other duty.”

In the history of Catholic spirituality, Saint Teresa and Saint John of the Cross

have been looked upon as experts in the science and in methods of prayer. Their goal for Carmelites, and even for Christians, might be simply stated: to know and see God, and to know and love oneself and one's neighbor in the light of God's face. How is this to happen? Teresa gives a very simple and concrete answer in the first pages of the *Interior Castle*: "Now let us return to our beautiful and delightful castle and see how we can enter it ... As far as I can understand, the door of entry into this castle is prayer and meditation."

John of the Cross is called the Mystical Doctor. Prayer and contemplation are at the center of his four poems and his writings. He has a reputation for a demanding asceticism but at the core of his teaching is a conviction that only God's love can break through the heart's attachments, and for John contemplation is simply opening one's life to God's love.

In my years as a Carmelite, I have been very attracted and deeply nourished by two qualities of our Carmelite tradition of experiencing prayer: first, its *listening element*, and secondly, its *relationship to love*. From our very beginning on Mount Carmel with the chapel dedicated to Mary in the midst of the cells, she has been an inspiration and a model of prayer: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart" (*Luke 2:19*), and "near the cross of Jesus there stood His mother" (*John 19:25*) – beautiful signs of her listening posture and her loving heart. Another story about these same qualities that is often referred to by our Carmelite saints is the story of Martha and Mary, "who seated herself at the Lord's feet and listened to His words." With Jesus' advise to Martha being: "You are anxious and upset about many things; one thing only is required. Mary has chosen the better part, and she shall not be deprived of it" (*Luke 10:39, 41-42*).

Teresa sums up her feelings about these same two qualities in the *Book of Her Life*: "Mental prayer, in my view, is nothing but friendly conversation and frequent solitary talks with Him who we know loves us." This is Teresa's well-known definition of prayer, and rightly so, because with a simplicity astonishingly precise, she gives us the essence of prayer – a friendship with God, an exchange of love which God has for us, and which we have for Him. For Teresa, God is Love, and He has created us out of love for an eternal union with Himself.

Seventh Value: The Significance of Community

This value in our Carmelite tradition is expressed by different terms: community, fraternity, brotherhood, family, or simply by our official title in the

Church: Brothers and Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel.

It seems fairly obvious that Albert, the Patriarch of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, in writing his Rule around the year 1206 to the first hermits, pilgrims, and former crusaders on Mount Carmel had the primitive Christian community in mind as he proposed a model to imitate and follow. Saint Luke described the life of the first followers of Jesus very simply: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instructions and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods, dividing everything on the basis of each one’s needs ... The community of believers were of one heart and one mind. None of them ever claimed anything as his own; rather everything was held in common” (*Acts* 2:42, 4:32).

For Albert this new religious group must first strive to be a Christian community. The hermits must seek “to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ,” following the *Acts of the Apostles* which pointed out the necessary steps to be a true community – one that is united and integrated in the Lord’s name. In *Acts*, five elements are emphasized: (a) *the instructions of the Apostles* – a listening to the Word in faith, as the community comes together often to reflect and to share in the light of God’s word; (b) *a fraternal union* – one that renders witness in *koinonia* of what it has seen and heard ... a communion which is the fruit of God’s presence in the life of each member; (c) *the breaking of the bread* – the community is called to celebrate the Eucharist on a daily basis, as it deepens its reflection on the word of God; (d) *the prayers* – the word is written in the plural to signify both communal and personal prayer, a listening to God in commitment with one’s brothers and sisters; (e) *the apostolic dimension* – a witness to the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus through the sharing of goods in common as a sign of unity. The Rule of Carmel gives stress to these elements, and it includes two other qualities that were so important to St. Paul: (f) *a diversity of charisms* – the gifts of the Spirit are shared gratuitously for the service of others, since all need the support and love of one another; (g) *a spirit of freedom* – as Carmelites are called to choose their leaders to a vocation of love in imitation of Christ “who came not to be served but to serve and lay down His life for others.”

The Rule of Carmel lays the foundation for the value of *community* in our lives, and during the past 30 years many official documents of the Order have focused on the desire to develop deeper communication and cooperation among all of our members. They have emphasized the importance of building fraternity and a family spirit at ever deeper levels, seeing local, national, and international communities as important elements of our Carmelite way of life.

Eighth Value: A Commitment to Service

On 16th July 1992, Fr. Camilo Macise, the General of the Discalced, and I had the opportunity and the privilege of writing the first joint letter to our international Carmelite Family, after almost four hundred years of separation and division (6th June 1593). The letter was entitled *A Praying Community at the Service of the People*. The letter was written on the occasion of the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of America.

In the final section of the letter, *Prophetic Presence and the Commitment to Justice*, we wrote: “As sons and daughters of the prophets, we cannot close our eyes to what is happening in the world. As an international family, living in each of the continents, we need to open our eyes to the fundamental injustice which is dividing the human race between rich and poor with all that this implies for the overwhelming majority. As contemplative men and women, we should be able to say a prophetic word, not only to denounce the evils, but also as a tender and welcoming word for the victims of injustice. Conscious of God’s presence in the human person, we cannot accept that human dignity be trampled upon.”

In our commitment to minister to God’s people as laity and religious, the first model of service for all Carmelites is Jesus our Lord, who reminded His followers that He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life for others. The Gospel, and especially St. Mark, speaks constantly of the healing ministry of Christ, the Man for others. In His Rule St. Albert holds up this model for the first Prior of the community and for all the brothers.

It is well to remember in this regard that often in our Carmelite history and in our spirituality, there have been tensions between ministry and prayer, between the twofold words of Elijah the prophet: “God lives, in whose presence I stand,” which became the battle cry of the mystics and contemplatives, and “With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts,” which became the battle cry of the defenders of the apostolic life. Certainly, the first hermits on Mount Carmel, because of the nature of the terrain and the difficulty of ministry in a Moslem culture, put great emphasis on prayer and meditation on the word of the Lord. Later in Europe, however, with the mitigation of the Rule in 1247 by Pope Innocent IV, this small group of hermits who were already dispersed in different areas became mendicant friars who lived and served in the midst of the people, following the example of the Dominicans and the Franciscans. I believe strongly that God blessed this fundamental change in our

spirituality and our tradition. It is very interesting for me to read that from the year 1247 until the General Chapter in 1291, the Order grew from a few isolated communities that had come from the Holy Land to 12 Provinces with over 150 houses in the major countries of Europe.

But that was 1291, and today is 2006. As Lay Carmelites and baptized Christians, you are called to be deeply involved in the mission of the Church, locally, nationally, and even on an international level. I certainly cannot indicate to you what your ministry should be, but the person of Elijah is a valid inspiration and model of your service in the Church. This congress will give you a wonderful opportunity to share and reflect with one another about your apostolic work in the Church. I would only encourage you to remember that any ministry, whether individually or in community, should hopefully flow from our Carmelite heritage and bring about the growth and sanctification of our families, our work environment, and our society.

Ninth Value: The Beauty of Creation

This is a value that I personally feel is very significant in our Carmelite tradition. Even though it has not been mentioned often in literature about our spirituality, it has truly been highlighted by many of our saints. I would encourage you strongly to look for the concept, *Beauty of God's Creation*, in your reading and study of our tradition.

In the list of religious groups in the Church today, we are probably the most significant family that is called after a place – Mount Carmel in the Holy Land. Most other groups are named after a religious founder: Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans, Salesians. We proudly remember the words of Isaiah the prophet when he praised and thanked God, writing about “the beauty and splendor of Carmel.”

In our tradition, we think first of Mary, who is called “the Beauty of Carmel” (*Decor Carmeli*), “the Flower of Carmel” (*Flos Carmeli*), and “Star of the Sea” (*Stella Maris*). In our early Carmelite writings, the sea was so prominent, and our first foundations in Europe were all close to seaports and harbors. The symbols of our Carmelite values are often taken from nature: desert, mountain, fire, water, flame, flowers.

When we think of the beauty of God's creation, a saint who comes readily to mind is St. Thérèse. At the very beginning of her autobiography, *The Story of a Soul*, Thérèse is trying to understand why God has preferences, even though

He loves everyone from all eternity with unconditional love. She writes: "Jesus deigned to teach me this mystery. He set before me the book of nature; I understood how all the flowers He has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the lily do not take away the perfume of the little flower or the delightful simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty, and the fields would not be decked out with little wild flowers. And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden ... I am writing the story of the little flower gathered by Jesus." Thérèse was truly in love with nature, the beauty of God's creation. She spoke and wrote of the stars, the sea, the mountains. Her description of her trip from Lisieux to Rome before she entered Carmel is truly beautiful. Later in Carmel, she wrote one of her most inspiring poems about creation to her sister Celine, entitled *The Canticle of Celine*.

The writings, and especially the poems, of St. John of the Cross also come readily to mind when we think of this special value of beauty in our tradition: *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *The Dark Night*, *The Living Flame of Love*, and *The Spiritual Canticle*. His writing are filled with signs of God's creation: woods, streams, mountains, flowers, meadows, fire and flame, fountains, winds and breezes, night and dawn, deers and doves, and especially his Beloved, both human and divine. He has a beautiful stanza in *The Spiritual Canticle* when he writes of the Beloved: "Scattering a thousand graces, he passed through these groves in haste, and gazing in his going, with only his glance, he left them clothed with beauty" ("*Mil gracias derramando, paso par estos sotos can presura, y yendolos mirando, can sola su figura vestidos los deja de hermosura*"). John sees all created things clothed in beauty. He even capitalizes the word *Beauty*, as a way to emphasize God's Being and His gifts. He rejoices in the marvels of creation where God has adorned persons and created things with such grace, loveliness and brilliance.

Other Carmelites have stressed similar aspects of the beauty of God's creation: St. Teresa in her writings about streams and water, relating them to Jesus and His words: "Whoever drinks the water I give him will never be thirsty; no, the water I give shall become a fountain within him leaping up to provide eternal life" (*John 4:14*); Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity and her love for the piano and music, light and photography, and her reflections on a favorite psalm: "God, You are my God, from dawn I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you, like earth arid and parched, without water" (*Psalms 63*); Blessed Titus Brandsma who wrote so glowingly on the beauty of the Falls at Niagara when he visited there in 1936. We should note here that our Carmelite spirituality is so close to that of the Franciscans in emphasizing this value. Saint Francis had such a great love for animals and for nature, as he shared his hymns to the sun,

the moon and all creatures in praise of the beauty of God's creation.

Tenth Value: The Need for Balance

In our inter-personal relationships – with our families, in our work environment, in our friendships both in community and with one another – there is a constant need for this value. We are always striving to find the proper relationship between the rational decision-making part of our personality, and our feelings and emotions – a harmony between our head and our heart. The Greek philosopher Plato put the need for balance so well as he encouraged all of us to find a proper harmony by which the inward person and the outward person might be one and at peace.

This challenge to find harmony and peace, this need for balance in our personal and Carmelite life, has been a constant theme in our tradition and in the writings of our saints. In the very last chapter of the Rule of Carmel, Albert shares his advice: “Here then are a few points I have written down to provide you with a standard of conduct to live up to ... See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues.” Today we call this “common sense” balance, moderation, discretion, or prudence, remembering the old Latin saying: *Virtus stat in media* – “Virtue lies in a middle course.”

Reflect for a moment upon your own life in the light of our Carmelite heritage and spirituality. So often this *need for balance* creates a challenge, and sometimes there might be some definite tensions involved. For example: how much time can you give to your Lay Carmelite commitments and keep a proper balance with the needs of your family, your work, having quality time for friends and loved ones? Each of us as individuals and as a community must find a good balance between our time for prayer and our commitment to our work. As I already mentioned, one of the real challenges of daily living is: when do we listen to the rational side of our personality – our mind, our thinking, our head – or when are we more sensitive to our feelings and our emotions, to the whisperings of our heart.

In the history of Carmel almost from the beginning, even with the encouragement of Albert in the Rule, the need for a proper balance has truly been a challenge! It has been expressed by these tensions: action-contemplation, work-prayer, dialog-silence, friar-hermit, in the midst of the people-a solitary place. More concretely in practice – the original life of the hermits living in solitude on Mount Carmel and/or the mendicant friars

serving in ministry among the people after the mitigation of Pope Innocent IV in 1247.

One of the earliest Prior Generals of the Order, Nicholas the Frenchman, was very adamant to his Carmelite brothers in 1270, encouraging them to give up ministry as friars in the city and to return to the desert and to the contemplative spirit of hermits. His letter, remembered in our tradition as *The Flaming Arrow (Ignea Sagitta)*, urged a retreat to the slopes of Mount Carmel, if not literally, then whenever and however such an eremitical life could be established.

This challenge to find the proper balance in living out the Carmelite ideal is seen especially in the Teresian reform of the late 1500s. As a cloistered nun, St. Teresa desired to return to the primitive inspiration of the Rule of Albert as she understood it, with an emphasis on a community of close friendship among her sisters, living in silence and solitude. She wrote beautifully of her goal, “I want to see God,” and yet there was the call “to be a daughter of the Church.” Within her lifetime, and especially after her death, the Discalced priests and brothers who followed her call to reform were soon divided among themselves because of the need to find a proper balance; one group emphasizing the observance of the eremitical life (those led by Nicholas Doria) and others seeking more apostolic ministry (those led by Jerome Gratian). This tension and this challenge, and a need for balance, obviously continue even in our own days.

Conclusion

Even as I have presented these ten fundamental values of our Carmelite spirituality, I want you to remember that they are only to be considered as suggestions for you, as they are drawn from my own personal reading and study as a Carmelite for sixty years. I would encourage each of you, both personally and as a member of a particular community, to discuss and share about the values that you feel are most significant and essential in your life. Often in my travels, in a spirit of humor and probably from the perspective of a former teacher, I used to like to tell our cloistered nuns that all of our Carmelite spirituality and our charism could be summed up and very easily explained to others by ten simple words: God, Jesus, person, faith, love, prayer, community, ministry, beauty and balance. May all the ideas contained in these simple words enrich your life, and may they make you proud to be a member of our Carmelite Family.

Questions

1. In your personal life what do you see as your number one value and why?
2. Where is Mary in your Carmelite values?

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