

Letter from the Prior General to the Carmelite participants At World Youth Day in Madrid, 17th August 2011

Look, contemplate ... love

Dear Young People from Carmelite groups who have come from all parts of the world to take part in this 2011 World Youth Day, you are all very welcome to this gathering of young Carmelites, in Madrid, the city where I was born. I hope that it will be for all of you a time of reflection, enrichment, a deepening of your faith and an opportunity to experience the universality of the Carmelite family.

Spain is the land of saints. Carmel in Spain down through the years, among many leading figures, gave us the sublime examples and teaching of St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross. We would like to draw on this latter figure, to offer a brief message that may help us in our reflection throughout this Carmelite day.

1. **Look.** The saint from Fontiveros (great poet and mystic) often used the word “look”. Sometimes it was only an expression, “Look”, or “Pay attention” (A 9; 41; 54). Sometimes it pointed to the curiosity of the one who goes around looking *at the speck in the other person’s eye* (1 N 2, 3), taking a poor view of the defects of the neighbour. But above all and most often he was talking about God’s way of looking. God looks at us with tenderness and mercy. “When you looked at me, your eyes imprinted your grace in me” (cf. CB 32), and that is how God clothes the whole of creation in beauty: “and having looked at them, with his image alone, clothed them in beauty” (cf. CB 5). The poetry of John of the Cross is an invitation to us to let God look at us. In the same way, Teresa of Jesus, reminds us, “look, he is looking at you” (*Life* 13, 22). We should not be afraid of his gaze. God is not a detective who goes around looking for a culprit. God does not threaten or constrict our freedom. “When Gods looks, He loves and grants favours” (CB 19, 6) the saint says, in words that are sublime. The first thing that God did is that he looked at us. When he looks he loves very much. This way of loving much the saint will tell us, “is much more than simply loving, it is like loving twice over” (CB 32, 5).

2. **Contemplate.** If union, in its deepest meaning, is “God’s looking at the human person”, contemplation has to be “the human person’s looking at God”, and at all the works of his hands. God’s loving gaze transforms our eyes to allow them to contemplate the mystery of God and the mystery of humanity. God’s gaze has left the world filled with signs of his beauty and loveliness. We need, perhaps today more than ever, poets, mystics and contemplatives, people capable of seeing the little signs of the presence of God in our lives. To be contemplative (I have said it many times) does not mean gazing emptily up at the sky, but rather the ability to look around us and see the signs, often very weak, little and fragile. These signs sometimes are ambiguous and have

many dimensions, and they ask of us to have an attitude of serious discernment and humility in order to be able to perceive these signs with all that is beautiful and radical in them. The world, and life and history then will be converted into something that speaks about God, a symphony that tells of his loving presence in our lives. God removes the short-sightedness from our eyes and will not allow our looking to be caught and stuck in the mediocre, the immediate, the vulgar... In order for that to happen (and the saint is very radical on this point) we need to purify our gaze, get rid of our small-mindedness and self-centredness. God's gaze "purifies, graces, enriches and enlightens the soul" (CB 32, 1). Christian contemplation is not an aesthetic and evasive attitude, or a narcissistic exercise of self-indulgence and perfectionism, but rather *a loving* contemplation that leads us to a feeling of being close to the men and women of our time.

3. Love. God looks at me, I look at God. God loves me, I love God. This interplay of looking is the way lovers like to pass the time, and what flows between them is love with a capital L, and not selfishness. Centrifugal Love, expansive Love, that gets us up and doing, to serve others, and lets us overcome all barriers in reaching out to our neighbour. "Love is never idle, it is in continuous movement" (Ll 1, 8). "Love has eyes" Hugh of Saint-Victor said, but "it also has hands and feet." Hard-working Love, that is balm for all the people who are worn out and overburdened. (cf. *Matthew* 11:28), for the poor, for people who suffer the desert of loneliness, of love lost. Our world is peppered with wounds that come from forgetting God, from our sinfulness, from violence and selfishness. That is why the poet and mystic appears also as a prophet with a word to denounce evil and with a heart to stand close to the victims of all that, "going further, deep into the thicket" (CB 36). Contemplation (if it is really Christian contemplation and not some kind of pseudo-spiritual escapism) makes us more human, more people of solidarity, more sensitive to the dark nights and the drama of our world. Contemplation thus becomes a form of conversion and kind of sending and mission. Lighten the burden others have to bear, heal wounds, open doors and windows to let hope come in, dry tears, caress a humanity that is suffering... and help the men and women of our time to become full human persons, more free, more just and more content... with a consciousness of being children of the God who gave us this wonderful world. That is why I ask you, young Carmelites, to take up this fascinating challenge.

May you find all the inspiration that you need in the saints of Carmel, in its spirituality and charism. May Mary, our Mother and Sister, the Star of the Sea, be your constant guide in this adventure.

Affectionately,

Fernando Millán Romeral, O.Carm.
Prior General