

Eucharist for 800 years of the Carmelite *Way of Life*

Johan Bergström-Allen

On Saturday 5th May several hundred members and friends of the Carmelite Family gathered in the Minster at the heart of the northern English city of York to celebrate 800 years of the Carmelite *way of life*.

The highpoint of the celebrations that day was a Eucharist to be celebrated by His Beatitude Michel Sabbah. As Latin Patriarch (Roman Catholic bishop) of Jerusalem, Patriarch Michel was a visible link back to the Church of Jerusalem where the Carmelite Order originated, and to Saint Albert Avogadro who gave the Carmelites their *way of life* (later to be known as the *Rule of Saint Albert*) sometime around 1207.



Patriarch Michel presiding in York Minster

The challenge of such liturgies is to provide a context for worship that is meaningful to people who are well-steeped in the traditions, language and symbols of the Carmelite Family, whilst also being accessible to those who are new to Carmel.

As with any liturgy the ‘tone’ of the celebration is set – before any hymns are sung or words are spoken – by the space being used. As one of the great cathedrals of Britain – formerly Roman Catholic but now in the care of the Anglican Church – York Minster is a wonderful space in which to gather for prayer. As ever the Carmelite Family (which first came to York within fifty years of Albert’s writing our *way of life*) was warmly welcomed by the Minster staff. Words of introduction were given by the Dean of the Minster, as well as the Lord Mayor of York, which highlighted the role of the Carmelites in the life of both the church and city of York over the centuries.

The celebration took place in the nave of the Minster. From the medieval pillars hung six banners which depicted Carmelite symbols, including the

cross of Jerusalem, and a picture of the ruins of the first oratory on Mount Carmel.

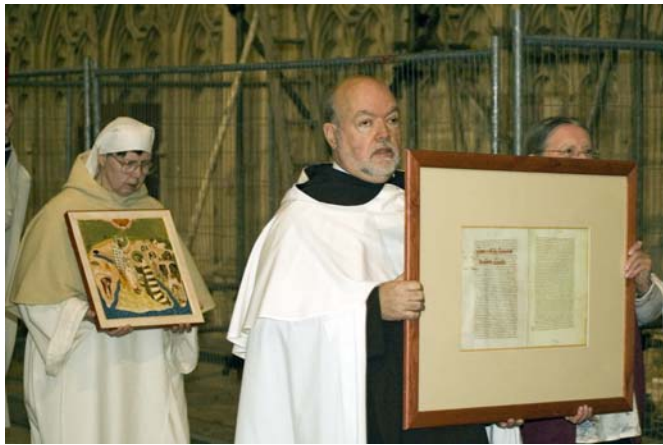


*A banner depicting the Cross of Jerusalem,
a symbol long associated with the Carmelite Family.*

At the front of the nave, before the raised altar, was a beautiful modern font. This represented the Spring of Elijah around which the first hermits on Mount Carmel gathered, as well as being a symbol of our baptism.

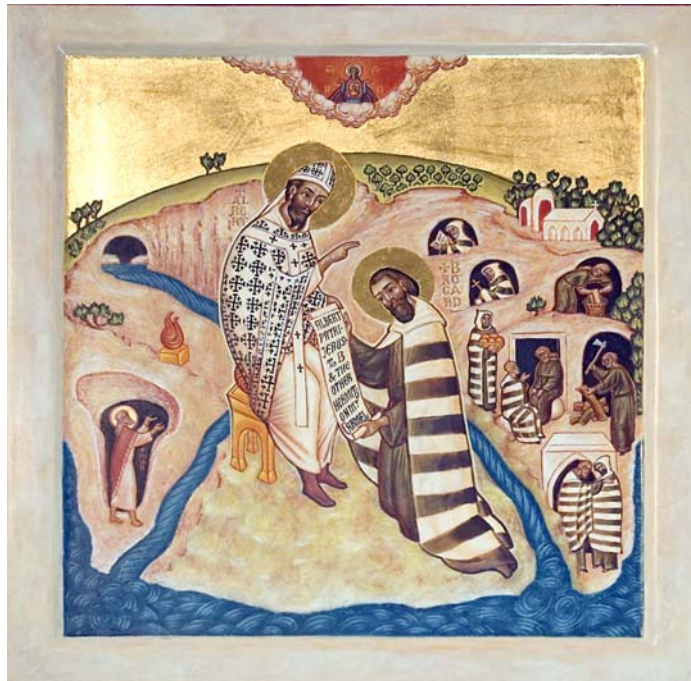
As members of the congregation gathered in the Minster they found orders of service which included the text of the Carmelite *Rule* as well as words of greetings from various bishops and friends of the Carmelite Family. The orders of service were also designed to help explain some of the symbolism of the liturgy. There is no point using symbols in a Mass unless they are understood; on the other hand if you have to explain everything you are doing the symbolism is pointless. Therefore the liturgy was carefully planned by a small team of people from across the Carmelite Family, which included Lay Carmelites from both the Carmelite and Discalced Carmelite Orders, a friar, a Corpus Christi Carmelite sister, and people from the local Diocese of Middlesbrough with experience of planning liturgies.

At 11.00am the Eucharist began with a procession. A copy of the *Rule of Saint Albert* was carried in by Fr. Patrick McMahon from the Carmelite Institute in Rome and by Jean Harrigan from Lay Carmel Central Office.



Jean Harrigan and Fr. Patrick McMahon carried a copy of the Rule of Saint Albert in the procession, followed by an icon of Saint Albert.

This was followed by a new icon of Saint Albert carried in by its 'writer' Sister Petra Clare.



The new icon depicting Saint Albert, Saint Brocard, and the holy hermits of Carmel

Also in the procession were Knights and Dames of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem who traditionally accompany the Patriarch on his travels. As well as the Patriarch there were three concelebrating bishops, as well as clergy from the Carmelite Family and various dioceses of England, Wales, and Scotland. As they entered we sung a hymn derived from the Carmelite Office:

Albert, as you shine before us
Legislator, Shepherd true,
hear in love the hymns of homage
which your children sing to you.
Messenger of peace and concord,

careful to foresee all need,
you instructed all your faithful
zealously by word and deed.

The Patriarch greeted those present by echoing the words of Saint Albert to the first Carmelites: “I, Michel, called by the grace of God to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, greet you my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ: salvation in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.”

After words of welcome Patriarch Michel blessed the water in the font before the altar, and following an ancient custom which recalls the action of Elijah’s successor Elisha he added a little salt to the water. In a spirit of ecumenical partnership the confession of faults was made using the liturgy of the Church of England, and then water from the font was sprinkled upon those gathered by Carmelites - lay people and religious - representing the early brothers on Mount Carmel, as the *Kyrie eleison* was sung.



The Patriarch, accompanied by his Chancellor Fr. Humam, blessed the water of the font.

A nun from the Discalced Carmelite monastery of Thicket Priory near York introduced the liturgy of the Word in the context of the Carmelite *Rule*, stressing Albert’s emphasis on listening to the teachings of Saint Paul. The first reading, from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (6:10-18b) - which is echoed in the *Rule* - was read by Jane Nicholson, the National President of the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order in England and Wales.

After the first reading Veronica Errington, a member of the National Consultative Body of the Third Order, explained the importance of silence in Carmelite spirituality, and the congregation remained a short moment in silence, open to the word of the Father. This was followed by the responsorial psalm, which like all the music was led by the choir of a local school.



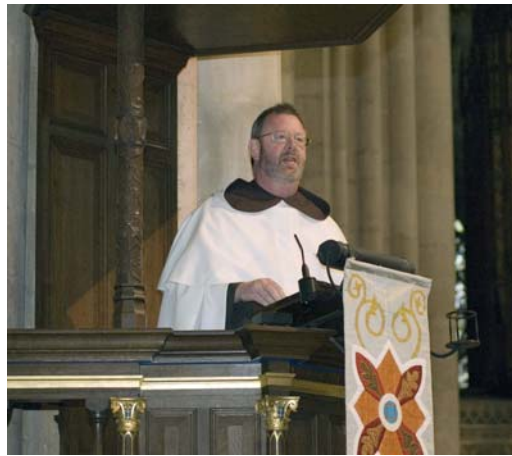
Veronica Errington spoke of the importance of silence in the Carmelite tradition, citing the example of Elijah on Horeb, and the insights of St. John of the Cross

The second reading was taken from *The Carmelite Way* by Fr. John Welch, since we wanted to include a text by a modern-day exponent of Carmel's vision and values. This was read beautifully by John Wilson of the Newcastle Lay Carmelite community. The Gospel was proclaimed by Fr. Michael Miners, O.C.D.S.



Fr. Michael Miners incensing the Gospel Book

The Prior Provincial, Fr. Tony Lester, preached an excellent homily on the importance of looking forward as well as backwards on such an important occasion as the eighth centenary of the Carmelite *way of life*.



Fr. Tony Lester preaching

Following the homily was a litany, praying for the needs of the Church, the World, and the Carmelite Family. During the prayers oil lamps were brought forward to the altar. These had come from Taybeh, a Palestinian village 30 kilometres north-east of Jerusalem, inside the occupied territories of the West Bank. The lamps were arranged on the altar by John Cole, whose life parallels that of the first Carmelite hermits in that he was a British soldier on Mount Carmel in the 1950s, and later became a founding member of the Carmelite spirituality group in York (a week after the Mass in the Minster John was received into the Carmelite Third Order).



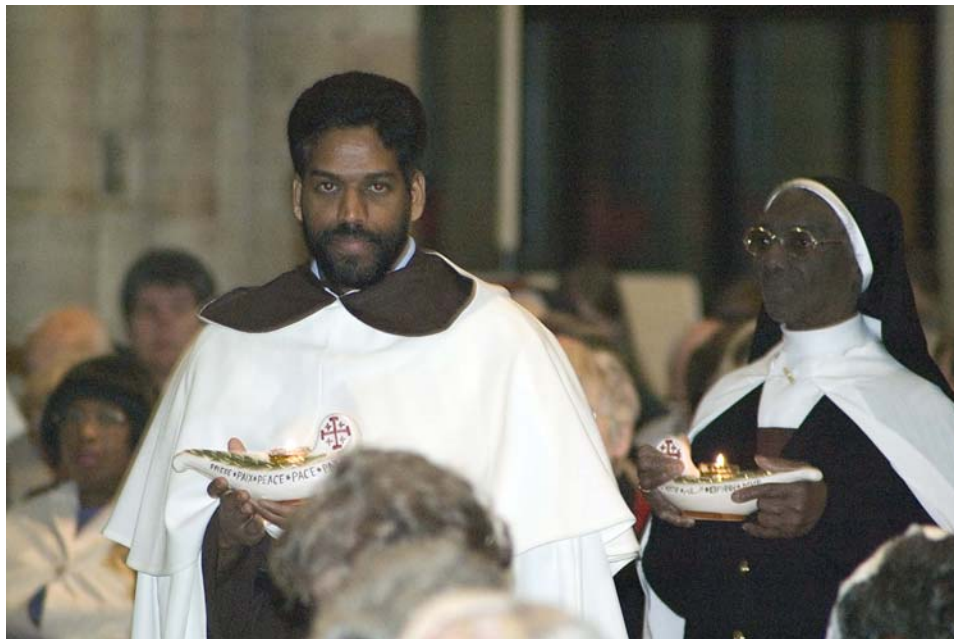
The Archdeacon of York, Richard Seed (right) and Fr. Pat O'Keeffe, O.Carm. (centre) waiting to read prayers of intercession following Tony French (left) from the Coventry Third Order Chapter.

The lamps were carried by members and friends of the Carmelite Family in all its diversity in Britain and abroad: the Carmelite Third Order; the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order; friars; nuns; Corpus Christi Carmelite sisters; Carmelite Spirituality Groups; The Leaven Secular Institute; the Community of

Our Lady of Walsingham (a new community following the *Rule of Saint Albert*); and ecumenical friends of Carmel. The litany concluded with a prayer for the Carmelite Way of Life (which is given at the end of this article).



Oil lamps were brought forward by (right-left) Walter Whitman (Sheffield Lay Carmelite Community), Elizabeth Nginya (The Leaven), Stephen Sanger (York Carmelite Spirituality Group), (below left) Fr. Robert Puthussery, O.Carm. and (below right) Sr. Mary-Gregory Lowe (Corpus Christi Carmelites).



Before the offering of the gifts the Patriarch explained the particular significance of the Eucharist in the *Rule of Saint Albert*. During the offertory the gifts of bread and wine were brought forward by Ron and Lyn Bryan of the York Carmelite Spirituality Group, and Nora Surpless of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites in Ireland. Many people had come across from Ireland for the celebration, as well as from the United States, Italy, France, and Finland. Flowers were brought forward to the altar by the Tulloch family, who live in

nearby Thirsk and have many links with the Carmelites.



Lyn (centre) and Ron Bryan (right) present offertory gifts to the Patriarch.

The collection taken up during the offertory was split between projects to support the poor in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the Minster which is currently undertaking a major restoration of the East end window. The Carmelite contribution is symbolised by a stone bearing the crest of the Carmelite Order which will be used as a finial stone (a carved piece at the top) in the restoration.



The Carmelite finial which will adorn York Minster.

The Eucharistic Prayer incorporated thanksgiving to God for the gift of the Carmelite *way of life*, and inspired us to follow the example of Mary the Mother of God, Saint Albert, the Holy Hermits of Mount Carmel, and all the holy men and women of the Order.

A theme running throughout the liturgy was prayer for peace in the Holy Land. As a community which had to flee Mount Carmel because of religious conflict

in the Middle Ages, it seemed very appropriate to pray for peace between Christians, Jews, Muslims, and all people of good will. During the sign of peace rainbow flags were unfurled displaying the word PEACE in English, Hebrew and Arabic as a sign of our prayer for peace between the children of Abraham in the Middle East and beyond. The rainbow is of course a symbol of the covenant of peace between God and God's people (*Genesis 9:13-16*). During the sign of peace we sang "Shalom, shalom, the peace of God be here. Shalom, shalom, God's justice be ever near."



Peace flags.

As you can imagine, in such a celebration many ciboria and chalices are needed for the distribution of communion.



Lay Carmelite Angela Bergström-Allen was one of 30 Eucharistic Ministers.

The Patriarch himself used the Mercier Chalice in which is mounted Cardinal

Mercier's ring which was given to the Earl of Halifax following the first dialogues in modern times between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches in the 1920s. Another ecumenical symbol was the crozier carried by the Patriarch. Known as the Braganza Crozier, it has been used in the Minster with little interruption since 1688 when it was made for James Smith when he was consecrated Bishop for the North as part of King James II's plans to return England to Roman Catholicism. During the upheavals of that year the staff was deposited in the Minster, and as a sign of continued ecumenical partnership the staff is made available to Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops when functioning in the cathedral.



His Beatitude Michel Sabbah, carrying the Braganza Crozier and greeting Joseph Durham of the Sheffield Lay Carmelite Community after the Eucharist.

After Communion the oil lamps on the altar were collected to be used as a focus of prayer for peace in the Holy Land by various Carmelite communities across Europe. They were sent out with blessings of peace from Scripture, proclaimed by Patriarch Michel. One of these lamps is now being taken by our Provincial Delegate, John Berry, to the Lay Carmelite communities he visits around Britain.



Oil lamps were raised during the prayer of blessing.

After some words of thanks to the Patriarch and to the Minster's Dean and Chapter, the final blessing was given which again echoed words of Saint Albert's *way of life*: "Like the first Jerusalem community you have been faithful in the breaking of bread, the sharing of gifts, and in the offering of prayer. May God make you ever more attentive to the needs of your brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, and in your own communities... The Carmelite Family has received a way of life which has served the Church and the World for eight hundred years; it is a good and holy way to follow, and if anyone does more the Lord himself when he comes again will reward them. May God sustain your lives of prayer, community, and service."

It was very moving then to sing unaccompanied the 'Flos Carmeli', a thirteenth-century Latin salutation to the Virgin Mary attributed to Saint Simon Stock. As the liturgical procession left the Minster we sang Timothy Dudley-Smith's rousing hymn *Tell out my soul*, based on Our Lady's Magnificat.

As the congregation left the Minster they had the opportunity to meet Patriarch Michel and other members of the altar party, which included the regional superior of the Discalced Order, Fr. Matt Blake, as well as Fr. Chris O'Donnell who was representing the Irish Province of Carmelites.

The text of Fr. Tony's homily and photographs of the celebrations - including the justice and peace forum which followed the Eucharist - are available online at: www.carmelite.org/rule2007/



From left to right: Fr. Matt Blake, O.C.D.; Rt. Rev. William Kenney (auxiliary bishop in Birmingham); His Beatitude Michel Sabbah; Rt. Rev. Thomas Williams (auxiliary bishop in Liverpool, representing Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor); Fr. Tony Lester, O.Carm.; Fr. Humam Khzouz (Chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem); Rev. Graham Jones (Methodist minister).



Outside the Carmelite friary in York: Fr. Humam Khzouz (Chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem); Fr. Tony Lester, O.Carm. (Prior Provincial of the British Province of Carmelites); His Beatitude Michel Sabbah (Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem); Mr. Johan Bergström-Allen, T.O.C. (coordinator of the 8th centenary celebrations in York).

Photos courtesy of Johan Bergström-Allen, Fr. Richard Copsy, and James Postlethwaite.

Prayer for the Carmelite Way of Life

Tender-hearted God,
Through Saint Albert of Jerusalem
you assembled the holy hermits of Mount Carmel as a family of pilgrim
people,
seeking to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ.
Like them, inspire us to imitate the first Christians of Jerusalem,
that we may build your kingdom, the heavenly Jerusalem.
Like them, turn our hearts from conflict with others
to the spiritual fight against all that distracts us from you.
Like them, help us to draw water from the spring of Elijah,
and to live deeply our baptismal calling.
With Mary, we commit to standing alongside those who are suffering.
Help us to find you alone in the cell of our hearts,
and lead us through solitude into community.
Let our prayer inspire our service of others,
and our service show us our need for prayer.
May our silent contemplation bear fruit,
and proclaim that God lives in whose presence we stand.
Use our poverty, chastity, and obedience to be Good News for others.
We thank you for our diversity,
united by a common vision.
We thank you for sustaining,
reforming and transforming us over centuries,
for the benefit of the Church and the World.
We thank you for the saints, those living and those gone before,
Who have shown us an ancient path to the Mountain that is Christ.
May all we do be done in your Word.
This we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.



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