



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HOLY FATHER FRANCIS
TO THE PRIOR GENERAL OF THE ORDER OF BROTHERS
OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY OF MOUNT CARMEL
ON THE OCCASION OF THEIR GENERAL CHAPTER**

To Most Reverend Father

Fernando Millán Romeral

Prior General of the Order of Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel

I address you, dear Brothers of the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, as you celebrate your General Chapter this September. At this time of grace and renewal that calls on you to discern the mission of the glorious Order of Carmelites, I would like to offer you a word of encouragement and hope. The ancient charism of Carmel has been a gift for the whole Church for eight centuries and continues to offer a special contribution to building up the Body of Christ and showing the world her luminous holy face. Your contemplative origins spring from the land of the epiphany of God's abiding love manifested in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. As you ponder your mission in Carmel today, I would ask you to consider three things that might guide you on your pilgrim way: love as allegiance, as prayer and as mission.

Allegiance

The Church has the mission to bring Christ to the world and thus, as Mother and Teacher she invites each one of us to draw near to him. In the Carmelite liturgy for the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel we contemplate Our Lady as being "near the Cross of Christ". This is also the place of the Church: close to Christ. It is also the place for every faithful member of the Carmelite Order. Your Rule begins with the exhortation to the brothers to "live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ"; to follow him and to serve him with a pure and undivided heart. This close relationship to Christ happens in solitude, in fraternal assembly and in mission. "The fundamental choice of a life that is concretely and radically dedicated to following Christ" (*Ratio Institutionis Vitae Carmelitanae*, 8) making of your lives a pilgrimage of loving transformation. The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council recalls the role of contemplation on the journey of life: "It is of the essence of the Church

that she be both human and divine, visible and invisibly endowed, eager to act and yet devoted to contemplation, present in this world” as a pilgrim (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* n. 2). The early hermits of Mount Carmel retained the memory of that holy place, and even if exiled and distanced from it constantly kept their gaze fixed on the glory of God. Reflecting on your origins and history and contemplating the vast host of those who have lived the Carmelite charism down through the centuries you will also discover your present vocation to be prophets of hope. It is precisely in this hope you will be reborn. Often what is new is only something very old seen in a new light.

Within your Rule is the heart of the Carmelite mission then as now. As you approach the eighth centenary of the death of Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem, in 1214 you will recall that he formulated “a way of life”, a space that enables you to live a spirituality that is totally orientated to Christ. He outlined both external and internal elements, a physical ecology of space and the spiritual armour needed in order to fulfil one’s vocation and mission appropriately and effectively.

In a world that often misunderstands Christ, and in fact rejects him, you are invited to draw near and to unite yourselves more closely with him. It is a continuous call to follow Christ and be conformed to him. This is of vital importance in our world so disoriented, “for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim” (*Lumen Fidei* n. 4) Christ is present in your fraternity, your common worship and in the ministry entrusted to you: renew the allegiance of your whole life!

Prayer

The Holy Father Benedict XVI, before your General Chapter of 2007 reminded you that “faith’s inner pilgrimage towards God begins in prayer”; and at Castel Gandolfo in August 2010 said to you that: “You are the ones who teach us how to pray”. You speak of yourselves as contemplatives in the midst of the people. If it is true that you are called to live on the heights of Carmel then it is also true that you are called to witness in the midst of the people. Prayer is that “royal road” that leads to the profound mystery of the One and Triune God, but it is also the narrow pathway to God in the midst of the People of God, on pilgrimage in the world to the Promised Land.

One of the most beautiful ways for entering into prayer is through the Word of God. *Lectio divina* brings you into direct conversation with the Lord and it opens for you wisdom’s treasure. The intimate friendship with the One who loves us, enables us to see with the eyes of God, to speak with his Word in our heart, to treasure the beauty of this experience and to share it with those who hunger for eternity.

Returning to the simplicity of a life centred on the Gospel is the challenge for a renewed Church: a community of faith that always finds new ways to evangelize a continually changing world. The saints of Carmel have been great preachers and teachers of prayer. This is what is required of Carmel once again in the 21st century. Throughout your history, the great Carmelites have emphasized contemplation, the ever fertile root of prayer. Here is the heart of your witness: the

“contemplative” dimension of the Order, to be lived, cultivated and transmitted. I would like each one of you to ask yourself: how is my contemplative life? How much time during my day do I devote to prayer and contemplation? A Carmelite without this contemplative life is a dead body! Today, perhaps more than in the past, it is so easy to allow ourselves to be distracted by the cares and worries of this world and to succumb to false idols. Our world is fractured in so many ways: rather the contemplative unites and powerfully builds the call to unity. Now more than ever is the moment for you to discover again that inner pathway to love through prayer; and to offer the witness of contemplation to the people of today through your preaching and mission, not by useless shortcuts but by that wisdom that comes from pondering “day and night the Law of the Lord”. The Word always brings one near to the glorious Cross of Christ. Besides, being united in contemplation and living a life of austerity are not secondary aspects of your calling and witness. The temptation is very strong, even for you, to fall into a mundane spirituality. The spirit of the world is the enemy of the life of prayer: never forget this! I exhort you to a more austere and penitential life, according to your authentic tradition, a life distant from all worldliness, distant from the world’s criteria.

Mission

My dear Carmelite brothers, yours is the same mission as Jesus’. All the planning and dialogue will be of little use, if the Chapter does not begin with a real renewal. The Carmelite family has seen a wonderful “springtime” across the world, a fruit given by God, and the missionary involvement of the past. Today, at times, the mission brings difficult challenges — the Gospel message is not always accepted, even violently rejected. We must never forget, even if we are thrown into murky and unknown waters, that the One who calls us to mission also gives us the courage to fulfil it. So, celebrate your Chapter with the hope that never dies, with a strong spirit of generosity return to the contemplative life and the simplicity and austerity of the Gospel.

Addressing pilgrims in St Peter’s Square I said: “Each individual Christian and every community is missionary to the extent that they bring to others and live the Gospel, and testify to God’s love for all, especially those experiencing difficulties. Be missionaries of God’s love and tenderness! Be missionaries of God’s mercy, which always forgives us, always awaits us and loves us dearly” ([*Homily, 5 May 2013*](#)). The witness of Carmel in the past belongs to a deep spiritual tradition that grew into one of the great schools of prayer. It has evoked courage in men and women facing danger and even death. Let us recall just two great contemporary martyrs — St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross and Blessed Titus Brandsma. So, I wonder: today among you, do you have the endurance, the courage of these saints?

Dear Brothers of Carmel, the witness of your love, and your hope rooted in your deep friendship with the living God, can reach out like a “gentle breeze” to renew and re-awaken your ecclesial mission in today’s world. To this you have been called. Your Profession Rite puts on your lips these words: “I entrust myself to God that by His grace and with the aid of the Blessed Virgin Mary I may attain perfect charity in the service of God and the Church”.

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel, accompany your steps and make fruitful your daily journey to the Mountain of God. I invoke upon all the members of the Carmelite Family, and most especially you Capitulars, the abundant blessings of the Holy Spirit and to all I heartily impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 22 August 2013

FRANCIS

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