

The Holy Spirit: Lord and Giver of Life: Carmel and Renewal.

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The subject that I would like to present for your consideration is taken from the Congress of the Secular Order celebrated in Rome in October of 1996. It is expressed in this quote: “The future of the Secular Carmel depends precisely on the active, mature and responsible collaboration (with the Holy Spirit) in the apostolate of the Order on all levels.”

There is a supposition in this subject as it is worded that is fundamental, but which must be stated explicitly. That supposition is that the future of the Order depends precisely on the Order’s ability to work in a united way on all levels. You, as men and women have a vocation to live out your baptismal call to sanctity in allegiance to Jesus Christ, as the rule of Saint Albert says, following the way indicated by Teresa of Jesus. You are not additions to the Order of Discalced Carmelites, or auxiliary members of the Order. You are an integral part of the Order.

The Church celebrated a synod in 1995, the subject of which was the religious life. The Holy Father wrote an Apostolic Exhortation, dated March 25th of 1996 which was addressed to the whole church. In that Apostolic Exhortation, entitled *Vita Consacrata*, he spoke about the secular orders associated with religious communities of men and women. He said in number 54 “The laity are therefore invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission of these institutes. We may say that, in the light of certain historical experiences such as those of the secular or third orders, a new chapter, rich in hope, has begun in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity.”

An earlier synod, the Synod on the Laity in 1987, studied the role of the laity in the Church. The document that came from that synod, entitled *Christifideles Laici* said this (15) about the relationship between religious and laity:

“Among the lay faithful this one baptismal dignity takes on a manner of life which sets a person apart without, however, bringing about a separation from the ministerial priesthood or from men and women religious. The Second Vatican Council has described this manner of life as the ‘secular character’, the secular character is properly and particularly that of the lay faithful” (LG, 32)

To understand properly the lay faithful’s position in the Church is a complete, adequate and specific manner it is necessary to come to a deeper theological understanding of their secular character in the light of God’s plan of salvation and in the context of the mystery of the Church. Pope Paul VI said the Church >has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her inner nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate and which is realized in different forms through her members.” (Address to Members of Secular Institutes 2 Feb 72)

“The new chapter” to which the Pope refers in the above-cited VC is the new chapter in the history of the Church begun at the Second Vatican Council. It is the chapter that, as we believers recognize in faith, is the direct result of the Holy Spirit’s impulse and inspiration in the workings of the Church. The most apparent changes which the Council mandated are perhaps those in the celebration of the liturgy. They were rapid in coming. And they were perhaps the easiest to organize. But the real changes are yet to be seen in some senses. The church’s self-understanding and self-definition is what is most radical. And we only have a glimpse of what those changes are. When the Council used the expression “The people of God” to identify its structure something new began in our history. It is not incidental that we in the Order stopped using the expressions ‘first’, ‘second’ and ‘third Orders’ to identify ourselves. We are Carmelite friars, Carmelite nuns, and Carmelite seculars. You are not shadows of the religious who form the real Carmelites. You are real Carmelites. Therefore, the elements of your Carmelite identity ought not to be those elements that are the identifying elements of the religious. The hierarchical structure is essential to the nature of the church precisely because it identifies the responsibility and area of competence of each of the members of the Order.

In the quote from VC it says that the invitation is to “share more intensely in the spirituality and mission” of the Order. That word mission is an extremely important word. We are only beginning to see how it is that the role of the laity in the church, and therefore the Order will take shape in the future which it is our responsibility to build. Up until the Council we were much clearer on the ways in which we shared in the spirituality of the order than in the mission of the Order. What is becoming more and more obvious in the Church and the Order is the responsibility you have in the area of the apostolate and mission of the Church and the Order.

With this understanding as the background I want to look at the person of the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life, the Divine Person who has, and always will be the one to give life and renew constantly the life we receive. To the degree that we follow the “impulses of the Holy Spirit” we are always new. If any of us does just what we want to do, because we want to do it and the Spirit wants us to do something else, we may continue to do it, but it will be fruitless for oneself as well as for others.

Jesus says in the 16th chapter of the gospel of John “and yet I can say truly that it is better for you I should go away; he who is to befriend you will not come to you unless I do go, but if only I make my way there, I will send him to you. He will come, and it will be for him to prove the world wrong, about sin, and about righteousness of heart, and about judging. About sin; they have not found belief in me. About righteousness of heart; I am going back to my Father, and you are not to see me any more. About judging; he who rules this world has had sentence passed on him already. I have still much to say to you, but it is beyond your reach as yet. It will be for him, the truth giving Spirit, when he comes, to guide you in all truth. He will not utter a message on his own; he will utter the message that has been given to him; and he will make plain to you what is still to come. And he will bring honour to me, because it is from me that he will derive what he makes plain to you. I say that he will derive from me what he makes plain to you to you, because all that belongs to the Father belongs to me.” (Jn. 16, 7-15)

1. The coming of the Holy Spirit depends directly on the mystery of the incarnate Lord.
2. We do not know all that is to be known.
3. The Holy Spirit is the Divine Person who guides us in the truth - but it is a journey made in faith.

We refer to Pentecost as the birthday of the Church. We ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and enlighten our minds. The Holy Spirit is the very air that the Church breathes to keep alive. Jesus, returning to the Father, keeps his promise and sends the Holy Spirit, confirming in that sending of the Spirit, the fundamental mystery of God's self revelation - the Trinity. The Council document on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (2) says: "In His goodness and wisdom God chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (see Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man might in the Holy Spirit have access to the Father and come to share in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Peter 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (see Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (see Ex. 33:11; John 15:14-15) and lives among them (see Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself." God, one in three, through the presence of the Spirit reveals Himself as He is on the day of Pentecost and the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit make their dwelling with us. That presence changes humanity.

Saint Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, also known as the Gospel of the Holy Spirit describes the change that takes place in the tiny group of believers in the resurrection of Jesus. "These occupied themselves continually with the apostle's teaching, their fellowship in the breaking of the bread, and the fixed times of prayer, and every soul was struck with awe, so many were the wonders and signs performed by the apostles in Jerusalem. All the faithful held together and shared all they had, selling their possessions and their means of livelihood, so as to distribute to all, as each had need. They persevered with one accord, day by day, in the temple worship, and as they broke bread in this house or that, took their share of food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God, and winning favour with all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship others that were to be saved." (Acts 2, 42-47)

There are then four signs (marks, characteristics) of the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit:

- a) Listening to the teaching of the apostles;
- b) Fellowship (unity);
- c) Breaking of the bread;
- d) Prayer.

These four characteristics then were and always will be the productive evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, and what we say of the life of the Church is, of course, true of the life of the Order. Each one of them needs to be understood and given its proper place in the understanding of the Church.

Listening to the teaching of the apostles: what did the apostles teach? It is evident from the writings of the new Testament that what they taught was knowledge of the life of Jesus - his miracles, his attention to the sick, the weak, sinners, his teaching, a new way of understanding the revelation that preceded him in the Old Testament, an interpretation of the facts of life and history in the light of the good news of God's presence among us. Saint Cyprian said that the Gospel is always much more convincing when it is lived. Cardinal Suenens said that you might be the only Gospel that some people ever read. The teaching of the apostles was that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus makes all the difference in the world.

Fellowship - fraternal union, unity, community. In one sense that might be understood in the light of the sharing of goods referred to in the Acts of the Apostles. But in the first sense I think it refers to the spiritual union that is the obvious will of Jesus expressed in the 17th chapter of Saint John's Gospel - "that all might be one". A unity based on the truth revealed in the mystery of the life of Jesus.

The breaking of bread. The third element of the Spirit's presence was the breaking of bread, Saint Luke's expression of the celebration of the Eucharist. It was the Eucharist that nourished and strengthened the followers of Christ. The celebration of his presence and his passion motivated them to live the Gospel. Fellowship and breaking of bread go together here in a very intimate union.

Prayer. Intimate relationship with God, praise, supplication, self-knowledge and contrition. This translation uses the expression of fixed times of prayer, I don't think so much to show some adhesion to a certain horarium, as to be able to facilitate meeting together for the purpose of prayer, and I think the context of the reading supports that interpretation. Everything else is done together, why should this element be left up to only the individual?

The presence of the Holy Spirit changed the believers in the Lord's resurrection and formed them into the community of believers, the Church. These four elements express the change made in individual believers. These four elements continue to be the expression of the change made in individual believers. These four elements are profoundly Teresian, because the Holy Spirit profoundly moved Teresa. They are, therefore, expressions of the Teresian way of life and the apostolate of the Order.

What I believe to be expressed in the statement that the future of the Secular Carmel depends on the collaboration with the Holy Spirit in the apostolate of the Order is the emphasis on the responsibility that is yours because of the call to live the Carmelite vocation as seculars. This is the new thing. Again returning to the call of the Holy Father in VC - intensely share in the spirituality and mission of the Order. That is to say, you are not called, nor moved by the Holy Spirit to be simply members of the Order in order to share in the spiritual privileges of your Carmelite identity. You are called to be agents of what Carmel has to offer the world through its spiritual heritage.

What do you have to give? The formation you have received as Carmelite Seculars has

been given to you so that you might “actively, maturely and responsibly collaborate with the Holy Spirit in the apostolate of the Order.”

Truman Dickens, in his now famous book on the spirituality of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross, *The Crucible of Love*, said that the most pressing pastoral problem of the modern world is to teach people how to pray. The understanding behind to statement on the future of the Secular Carmel is that because of what you receive through your Carmelite vocation you have the responsibility, but more than that, the capacity to communicate what you receive to others.

Simply look at the four characteristic elements of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the birth of the Church through the experience of your Carmelite vocation in order to see how what you have received has taken fruit in you.

Listening to the apostles’ teaching. First of all listening. The very first thing any of us has to learn in the growth of our spiritual life is the contemplative quality of listening. Only silence produces the quality of listening. We live in a world polluted with noise. I travel public transportation all over the world and am constantly struck by the number of people, both old and young who constantly have earplugs, connected to cassette and CD players to accompany them - endless noise. The lessening of the ability to listen affects greatly the capacity to dialogue.

Listening to teaching. Listening to someone else other than you in order to learn. The explosion of information and the demand of our society that you know, the rapidity with which we can know things through such wonderful things like the Internet have also affected the contemplative quality of wonder, of awe. Gone from our society is the mystical wonder of not knowing.

The second element - fellowship is at the heart of Teresian spirituality and our formation as Carmelites. The discipline of forming community, with all the sacrifices it entails is an art that this world of rugged individualism and fractured relationships needs to relearn. The presence of a community of men and women with a mature spirituality of prayer and relationship with God and each other enriches the local church.

Breaking of bread. Nearly all, if not all Saint Teresa’s mystical experiences of God took place in the context of the Eucharist - the body of Christ, which she saw as the experience of His most Sacred Humanity. A commitment to living fully the sacramental life of the Church has to lead to a desire to share the richness found in that life with others. The final sections of the post-synod document *Christifideles Laici* speak of the necessity of forming those who can form others.

And finally the gift of prayer. What prayer and the life of prayer is in our lives because of what we receive through the grace of our formation as Carmelites can only reach its fullness in us when it is productive for others as well. Saint Teresa says in the 7th Mansions, the 4th chapter “O my Sisters! How forgetful this soul, in which the Lord dwells in so particular a way, should be of its own rest, how little it should care for its

honor, and how far it should be from wanting esteem in anything! For if it is with Him very much, as is right, it should think little about itself. All its concern is taken up with how to please Him more and how or where it will show Him the love it bears Him. This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works.”

The call to holiness is never self-centering. It never has been. Truly holy people have always sought to make God known, that is to say, they have always been evangelizers. Your vocation to Carmel means that you have received a call to holiness precisely so that you might evangelize others. There is an apostolic purpose to your vocation. The signs of the times, the call of history is expressed in the statement that “the future of the Secular Carmel depends precisely on the active, mature and responsible collaboration (with the Holy Spirit) in the apostolate of the Order on all levels.”

I close with another quote from *Vita Consacrata*. It is a quote specifically addressed to religious Orders, but certainly applies to you as well. “You have not only a glorious history to remember and recount, but also a great history still to be accomplished. Look to the future, where the Spirit is sending you in order to do even greater things.” *Vita Consacrata*, 110.