

**Time in prayer (extracted from Provincial Delegate's Report, Winter 2010 Flos Carmeli)  
By Fr Bonaventure Sauer OCD**

As you know, the OCDS *Constitutions* (n.21, to be ex-act) ask the Secular Carmelite to spend time each day in mental prayer. They don't specify any particular amount of time, though. Your Provincial Statutes, on the other hand, do. *Section XVII* of the *Statues* reads in part: *The members of our province shall practice mental prayer for at least one half hour each day.*

From time to time the question comes up: Do Seculars have to spend that half-hour all in one sitting, so to speak? Or can they split it up during the day—praying 15 minutes in the morning and 15 minutes in the evening, for example, or praying for 10 minutes three separate times during the day? The answer, of course, is yes, you can do whatever you want according to what works for you in your particular circumstances. It is not in the spirit of Carmel—let alone in the spirit of Christian prayer—to be legalistic and rigid about such things.

On the other hand, by praying less than 30 minutes in one sitting, you are, in my view, depriving yourself of an important experience central to our charism and spirituality. The experience I have in mind is the regular practice of recollection. We use the expression “mental prayer”—one which I don't consider particularly happy. (*Oración mental* works in Spanish; *mental prayer* doesn't in English, sounding as though it's all about thinking.) A better expression, in my book, would be “recollection.” We re-collect ourselves from our usual state of distraction, we quiet ourselves inwardly and place ourselves in the present moment, we let ourselves come into the presence of God, so to speak, however we may experience or imagine that presence, and we abide there peacefully, as one who is loved and who loves in return, as a child of God. Recollection is supremely simple to understand and even, in one sense, to do. But it is very difficult to put into practice. We need a certain period of time to become recollected. And we need to experience the struggle of trying to re-main recollected amid the onslaught of distractions and fatigue that will inevitably assail us.

A 30-minute block of time, on a daily basis, seems about right to me. Anything less denies us of the experience. Why? It's a fact of life—experience not only takes place in time, it requires a certain amount of time in which to take place. Otherwise, it gets cut short. That is true of reading, writing, talking with a friend, taking a walk, going to Mass. It is no less true of prayer.