

“We Are Mission: Because We Are God’s Love Poured Out”

Every three years, we the two General Councils of the Friars O.Carm. and O.C.D., meet to reflect on various themes relating to our charism and mission in the Church. This year, we gathered in *Gort Muire*, the Provincial house of the Irish Province of the Carmelites (O.Carm.) located in Dublin, Ireland, to reflect on “Baptized and Sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World.” Fr. Gerry O’Hanlon, S.J., presented two conferences on the theme of mission: “The Context for Mission” and “A Church and Religious Life for Mission.” Fr. O’Hanlon reviewed some of the major challenges we face today in society and in the Church: secularization, a globalized world, pluralism, immigration, social justice, issues around the role of women in the Church, digitization, interreligious dialogue, and the sexual abuse scandals. Consequently, we cannot remain untouched by these realities and we are called to respond from our Carmelite charism.

In this context, we reflected on a text of Pope Francis’ discourse published in the guide *“Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World,”* the theme of the Extraordinary Missionary Month that will be celebrated in October 2019. Pope Francis reminds us that mission is rooted in Baptism and is the call to all the Baptized. Pope Francis’ discourse transforms our understanding of mission. We tend to understand mission primarily as preaching, building schools, hospitals, social service, and establishing charitable activities. Although these are important missionary initiatives and ministries, Pope Francis invites us to see mission from a deeper and broader perspective: *“We ARE mission* because we are God’s love poured out, God’s holiness created in his own image.” Mission is not primarily what we do, but who we are; it is essentially a matter of being rather than doing. It flows from our personal encounter with Jesus Christ who calls us to be with him and to accompany him in his on-going mission in the world. It is only from our intimacy with Jesus Christ, coming to know that he loves us unconditionally, that we can grow in continual conversion and be mission in our world. Viewed in this way, our call to be mission takes place where we live when we bear witness to love in our community, family, parish and neighborhood. It is a call to grow in holiness expressed in the loving actions of daily life.

This new idea of mission as being rather than doing calls us to be grateful for the blessings we have received in our history and from our Carmelite Saints, and to “fan into flame” (2 Tim. 1:6) the gift of our charism we have received from God. We recall two holy missionary Carmelites referred to in the guide “Baptized and sent: the Church of Christ on Mission in the World:” St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and Blessed Titus Brandsma. Both witness to what it means to be mission in the context of their life and time.

Even though St. Thérèse never left the enclosure of her Carmel, she was proclaimed universal patroness of the missions along with Saint Francis Xavier on December 14, 1927. St. Thérèse possessed a missionary heart. She tells us in the *Story of the Soul* that she “would have liked to be a missionary, not only for a few years but from the beginning of creation until the consummation of the ages.” Restricted by the walls of Carmel, she lived out her missionary zeal in her monastery. She discovered her vocation to be “Love in the Heart of the Church,” that is, to make the love of Jesus Christ the center of her life and to express her love for him concretely in the small actions of everyday life and in all her relationships. She believed that love is eternal; love transcends physical boundaries, space and time, and has a transforming power to heal and convert hearts. She was convinced that the more there is love in the Heart of the Church, the more there will be love in all the members of the Church and in the world. The exercise of love produces fruit for the entire Church and the world. In this sense, all the Baptized are called to be “Love in the Heart of the Church” and to make love the motivating force of our lives; in this way we become mission in the Church and our world.

Blessed Titus Brandsma who died in the concentration camp of Dachau in 1942 also had a missionary heart. As a young friar in formation, Titus desired to be sent out as a missionary to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples. However, poor health prevented the realization of his dream. God sent Titus into a mission territory he would never have chosen himself: the Nazi concentration camps. In 1942 he was transported to Dachau concentration camp. There he became of a missionary by his prayer, his confidence and trust in God in the midst horrendous suffering, by consoling the afflictions of his fellow prisoners, and by refusing to give into hatred of the Nazis. Titus believed that “prayer is not an oasis in the desert of life; it is all life.” This beautiful statement reveals the source of his strength to carry out his apostolic activities, to

witness to the Truth, and to endure patiently the poverty, suffering, and brutality of the camps and to forgive his enemies. In a speech delivered in 1931, Titus said: “Our vocation and our happiness consist in making others happy.” Perhaps these words, as well as the words of Jesus that meant so much to Blessed Titus, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you,” summarize his missionary spirit and what it means to be mission in the Church and world.

To be mission calls us in our time to reflect on the question: How can we as Carmelites respond to the challenges our world and Churches faces in this 21st century? We must strive to be: a) authentic men and women of prayer, b) to live an evangelical community life, open to dialogue and building relationships in the areas we live and serve, and c) to be prophetic in our ministries. We recognize that a new reality of Church is emerging, one that is synodal, dialogical, collaborative, inclusive and accountable. This calls for ongoing formation, discernment, and continual conversion.

We are grateful for the opportunity to gather and to reflect on the importance of mission in the world and Church today and to come to a deeper understanding that mission is not primarily what we do, but who we are. *We Carmelites ARE mission.* We realize, once more, the riches of our Carmelite heritage and, drawing from the wellspring of our charism, we desire to respond to the needs and challenges present in our world and Church. We believe that Carmel has something special to offer. We invite the whole Carmelite family (O.Carm. and O.C.D): the Friars, the Nuns, the affiliated congregations of Carmelite Sisters, and our Secular brothers and sisters to join with us in being mission in our world of the 21st century. As always, we rely on the intercession and sisterly presence of Mary, Queen Beauty of Carmel, whose missionary heart impelled her after the Annunciation to bring the joy of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ to her cousin Elizabeth. We pray that she accompany us in our efforts to be mission in our Church and our world.

Dublin, Ireland, May 31, 2019

General Councils OCarm - OCD