

General Definitory of the Discalced Carmelites  
Corso d'Italia, 38  
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Sexennium 2015-2021- Letter No. 3

Rome, December 23, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Teresian Carmel:

Following a custom from the past years which mandates a trimestral meeting of the General Definitory (in the months of March, June, September and December), we send you this letter at the conclusion of the regular meeting of the General Definitory that was held in Rome from December 15 to 22.

On this particular occasion, Fr. George Desmond Tambala, who was named Bishop of his home Diocese of Zomba (Malawi) last October 15, was not with us. He has returned to his country where he will receive episcopal ordination towards the end of the following month of January. Once again, we wish to express our gratitude to Fr. George for the witness of tranquil fraternity and generous service he has given to the Order for many years. We pray that this new phase of service to the Church may be fruitful. Because of this appointment, the General Definitory met in an extraordinary session last November 14, and after having made consultations, elected Fr. Daniel Ehigie of the Provincial Vicariate of Nigeria as the new Definitory for Africa. We hope that he will be with us in the next Definitory meeting.

We are in a most auspicious time in the history of the Order and the Church. The past months leading to the conclusion of the celebration for the Fifth Centenary of the birth of St Teresa of Jesus have been an intense experience for the Teresian Carmel. Indeed, it has been a year of grace for us. With the participation of Fr. General, the Centenary year was solemnly brought to its close in Avila, birthplace of St Teresa. The Carmelite Family is grateful to God for the enthusiastic reception the person and works of Teresa received through the various activities and celebrations throughout the world this year. Now, with Teresa and like Teresa, "it is time to walk on" claiming the fruits of the Centenary and living the Teresian spirit in a way that is relevant and concrete wherever we are.

On the other hand, in union with the Universal Church, we began the Year of Mercy last December 8; a year Pope Francis has especially dedicated "to living out in our daily lives the Mercy the Father extends to all of us" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 25). As Teresian Carmelites, we need to keep in mind that St Teresa was never weary of acknowledging and thanking the Lord for His Mercy to the point that she confessed: "Before I grew tired of offending Him, His Majesty began to pardon me;" and adds: "He never tires of giving nor can He exhaust His Mercies. Let us not tire in receiving" (*Life* 19, 15). For his part, St John of the Cross in a similar vein, cited by Pope Francis in *Misericordia Vultus*, 15, reminds us that "as we prepare to leave this life, we will

be judged on the basis of love. “ (*Words of Light and Love*, 57). Likewise, let us not forget St Therese of the Child Jesus who offered herself as a victim to God’s Merciful Love.

In keeping with a time-honored tradition, we welcomed the members of the General Council of our brother Carmelites (O.Carm) last December 15. There was a lively interaction and open exchange of views on a great variety of items of common interest: the rereading and revision of the Constitutions (which is ongoing for them) and the meeting of the Association of Carmelites in Latin America (ALACAR) held in San Salvador last October 26 to November 1. The commemoration of the 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of St Mary Magdalene di Pazzi that will open this coming April 2<sup>nd</sup>, and the World Youth Day in Krakow (Poland) this July 2016, were also among the topics discussed. Possible joint undertakings in line with the celebration of the Year of Mercy as well as other related themes were included in our discussions.

One of the points treated at length was the actual situation of the Wadi-es-Siah on Mount Carmel, the cradle of Carmelite life. The project of protecting and renovating the place continues to move forward thanks, in part, to a worldwide campaign in 2014 and the joint financial efforts of the two branches of Carmel. However, we need to obtain the permission of the Israeli archaeological authorities and the municipality of Haifa in order to proceed fully as planned. We hope to get this permission in the next few months.

It has been approximately two weeks since our General Definitory was in Israel at the beginning of December to seek firsthand information concerning the actual situation confronting the Order in the Holy Land and to dialogue with the friars about present pastoral realities and patrimonial exigencies and to explore possibilities for the future. We saw the great work done by the friars of the General Delegation starting with Fr. Enrique Castro, the General Delegate and Bro. Fausto Spinelli, the Bursar. They have labored with great dedication for the good of the Teresian Carmel in the Holy Land. The Definitory will identify various priorities and indicate the plans of action for the immediate future. The complex situation of the country requires that we pay particular attention to the juridical and administrative aspects of our presence. This we intend to clarify and resolve, with the necessary help of competent professionals.

In addition to this important question that has been the current item for discussion in the Definitory, there have been other topics discussed during the meetings of the past days. Some of these concern the life and daily activities in the Generalate. For example, the Bursar General has updated us about the economic situation. While it remains fragile, it is stable due to notable investments in the past years, especially as regards the construction of CITEs. We are sincerely grateful for the financial collaboration of some Provinces and Monasteries through their generous donations and loans. We reiterate our thanks to the Circumscriptions that have sent their annual financial contributions to the Generalate, and encourage the rest to do the same. Likewise, we have been exploring possible ways to modernize and update the information and communication facilities offered by the Generalate through the internet, a reality that needs a thorough renovation.

We also dedicated time to the secretary for the missions who continues working to animate the missionary work of the Order and to facilitate obtaining resources for the different missionary projects. In this sense, the Definitory has taken steps to put into practice decision VII of the General Chapter of 2015 that asked for the constitution of a fund for missionary help with an annual contribution from each circumscription. You will find the conditions for this contribution concretely explained in a letter that will be sent out these days. Contributions are a sign of solidarity and a missionary consciousness on the part of the entire Order.

Another Chapter decision refers to the continuation of the Teresian Historical Institute. The Definitory began sharing our impressions about this institution for which it is necessary to find competent friars who are willing to work in the study of the history of the Order and to form a team. For the time being, we have assigned the general archivist to take care of the archives of the Historical Institute, and of the artistic patrimony associated with it, so that he can study the best way to organize the material and place it at the disposal of researchers.

Related to this topic, we feel it is important to foster study and research so that we do not lack among ourselves true specialists in the most needed areas of the culture of the Order. For instance, particular attention is called for the study of St. Teresa of Jesus and of St. John of the Cross. Centers such as the Teresianum and CITeS must have this as their prime importance because they have been given the mission of assuring the academic and scientific dimension of study of our Saints.

We also spoke about other aspects of our service from the general government. One of the main instruments foreseen to promote the vitality of the Order and to foster cooperation between the provinces and the general government are pastoral visitations. Each one of the members of the Definitory has worked on the calendar of visitations to the Circumscriptions assigned to him and that he will come to know as the initially planned dates are confirmed. The first visits will begin in the next month of January. We have revised the actual guide for the pastoral visits (approved by the General Definitory in June of 2003), that will continue being the point of basic reference. We want to reinforce the collegial dimension of the general government in such a way that the most important decisions related to the pastoral visitations will be taken after a dialogue with the entire Definitory.

In other order of things, the Definitory commented on the project of the rereading of the Constitutions that the friars of our Order have begun as requested by the General Chapter of 2015. We began this process on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the closure of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Letter to all consecrated religious on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, recalled that thanks to the Council “consecrated life began a fruitful process of renewal that, with its lights and shadows, have been a time of grace, marked by the presence of the Spirit.” (I.1) In the same text he expressed his desire that “all forms of consecrated life ask themselves what God and humanity are asking for today.” (II.5) One of the specific requests of the Council was the revision and adaptation of the Constitutions of religious institutes (*Perfectae Caritatis*). Our Order responded to this directive, the fruit of which is our present Constitutions, approved in 1981, and then in 1985 adapted to the new Code of Canon Law. Now, more than thirty years afterwards, we believe that the moment has arrived to take a close look at the constitutional text

and confront it with the truth of our life situated as we are in a social, cultural and religious setting that has profoundly changed in the last years and that continues to do so at an ever accelerated rate. From the General Definitory, we encourage once more all those who participate with interest and authentic desire in this revision of life to which the Order has committed.

The commission named to coordinate and animate this project has worked on the calendar and the methodology to follow in the first phase that will continue until the Extraordinary General Definitory of 2018. The first preliminary materials were sent the middle of October. A few days ago, the first two study guides were sent out. The friars and communities will reflect on these beginning the month of January. We thank the collaboration of the different Circumscriptions, the majority of whom have designated a contact person to coordinate and animate the process in their respective territory.

We are drawing near to the end of the Year of Consecrated Life. The closing Eucharist will take place in Rome this coming February 2<sup>nd</sup>. With this motive, religious men and women from all over the world will participate in the celebrations and the planned meetings. In an innovative and significant gesture, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life has explicitly convoked representatives from the feminine contemplative federations and associations. In this way, the Discalced Carmelite Nuns will have the opportunity to participate directly in the celebrations, and at the same time, will be able to have a meeting among themselves with the presence of Father General. We ask the Lord that this unique opportunity will help the entire family of the Teresian Carmel to “grow in unity” as the Discalced Carmelite Nuns invited to the General Chapter OCD in Avila 2015, asked in their message.

We finish the Definitory near the Feast of Christmas that we will celebrate together with the entire community of the Generalate. We keep our brothers and sisters of the Carmelite family present in our hearts and prayers, wishing for each one the renewing experience of God’s mercy revealed in the crib of Bethlehem. We also pray that you will have a happy and fruitful year of 2016, full of peace and love.

Fraternally,

P. Saverio Cannistrà, General

P. Agustí Borrell

P. Łukas Kansy

P. Johannes Gorantla

P. Daniel Chowning

P. Francisco Javier Mena

P. Mariano Agruda III