

Saint John of the Cross

Rome, Teresianum, 14th December 2018

My dear brothers and sisters,

as is our tradition, we celebrate today, on the feast of St John of the Cross, the solemn profession of three of our students in the International College: Br Bonaventure, Br Jean Donald, and Br Herbert Joe. They come from three different countries, a long distance from Rome and Europe: Indonesia, Madagascar and India. In the geography of our Order, these are the regions in which the Teresian Carmel is growing more strongly and more swiftly. Vocations abound, the mean age of the the friars is very low, new foundations are planned and, in some cases, monasteries are being taken over in old Europe, that much older Provinces cannot manage to maintain. These are things filling our heart with joy and hope and lead us to praise and thank the Lord for the vitality he continues to give to our family.

You know that this year marks the 450th anniversary of the first community of Discalced Carmelite friars (or, as it has been called there from the beginning), “the contemplative Carmelite friars”) at Duruelo. They were also three, like our fellow friars who are preparing this evening to make their solemn vows. It would be easy to emphasize the differences between those first three Spaniards, who in the deepest and most depopulated Castile of the sixteenth century, began the adventure of the male contemplative Carmel, and our Bonaventure, Jean Donald and Herbert Joe. I would like, however, to reflect with them and with all of you on something totally the opposite, which is, in spite of all the differences of time and place, makes these three confreres the companions of those first three Discalced Carmelites. Let us think of a Duruelo of the Third Millennium! And let us think of it anywhere on the globe, on the outskirts of a large city in India, in a village in Madagascar or in one of the many islands of Indonesia. Let us also imagine that dwelling there are three friars coming from quite diverse contexts, as do our Bonaventura, Jean Donald and Herbert Joe, and how this is the present situation of our St John of the Cross International College. This exercise of the imagination, this type of “composition of place”, in fact is not a game: it is a way of placing ourselves quite concretely before the fundamental challenges of the Order in the near future. Where will be and, above all, how will be the “*portalico de Belén*” in which our Order can be reborn and once again take up its journey of growth and development, renewing in this ways the identity of its charism?

Dear Bonaventura, Jean Donald and Herbert Joe, forgive me if I am putting a too heavy burden upon your shoulders, but I must tell you that this is exactly what we are expecting of you, and I hope that this burden will be for you one that is light and a sweet yoke, like that which Jesus places on the

shoulders of his disciples. We are expecting this from you and from your communities, from your circumscriptions, but at the same time we are here to offer you all of our support: not just our prayer, but also our experience and our presence, if this can be of help to you.

Probably the Duruelo of the Third Millennium ought to be the exact contrary of that first community, which was, of necessity, strictly “monocultural”. Perhaps today, if we unite together in addressing the fatigue of the diversity of our cultures and our histories, we could find a meeting point that is not mundane, nor aimed at ensuring the efficiency of an ecclesiastical institution, but to testify to the action of the spirit in our flesh.

In this sense, for us there can be no higher nor greater teacher than St John of the Cross. If we try to read him from this perspective, we can discover a new facet of his up-to-dateness and prophetism: the breaking down of barriers, the overcoming of frontiers. In a world that tends, out of fear and selfishness, to close in upon itself into cultural and social ghettos, in spaces of reassuring similarity, John of the Cross speaks to us of open horizons, infinite, in which the spirit of mankind flies without letting itself be trapped by small beauties and known tastes, that now, for the person, have already lost taste:

“Sabor de bien que es finito,	“Delight in the world’s good things
Lo más que puede llegar	at the very most
Es cansar el apetito	can only tire the appetite
Y estragar el paladar;	and spoil the palate;
y así, por toda dulzura	and so, not for all of sweetness
nunca yo me perderé,	will I ever lose myself,
<i>sino por un no sé qué</i>	<i>but for I-don’t-know-what</i>
<i>que se halla por ventura.”</i>	<i>which is so gladly found.”</i>

I know that this is a huge challenge: to leave aside known pleasures, satisfactions that are reassuring, to go in search of something that you cannot even define and that we are not sure to find, because they are left aside in the chance of finding. But it is only in this way that a new Duruelo can be born. This is the “John of the Cross option”, totally diverse from the “Benedict option”, that is having such success in certain religious environments. Here we are not dealing with learning to build solid dry walls with well squared stones, but to fly,

“Volé tan alto tan alto,	“I flew so high so high,
que le di a la caza alcance”	that I reached the prey”

To fly, besides being a metaphor, means to overcome the barriers which close us in on ourselves, our differences, our limited horizons and to embrace human beings as such, designed in God's likeness, who within themselves embrace heaven.

I would like to express a desire and a prayer and place it here upon the altar besides your formulas of profession; that the vows you are about to make might be not only a going out towards Jesus who welcomes you, but also to the brother who is there beside you, to dream with him, to reach with him that prey that John had reached: A humanity full, because emptied of itself, firmly founded and at the same time, deprived of any foundation, inwardly enlightened and wandering in the night, lover of life but for this reason eager to share it.

Friar John of the Cross is here this evening to tell us that this is not poetry, not just dreams: It is our purpose of life, the newness that awaits us, if we do not renounce looking for it, if we have the courage to enter where we do not know, to take off in flight, that with a leap of love multiplies in a thousand flights and reaches the goal.