

HOMILY

Old Goa, 8 February 2019

Votive Mass of Blesseds Denis and Redemptus
Readings: *Eph* 6,10-20; *Mt* 5,1-12

It is with special emotion that I preside at this Eucharistic celebration together with all of you, my dear brothers in Carmel. We are in the place where the first Discalced Carmelite convent stood in Goa and in India. The first three Carmelites arrived in Goa on Christmas Day, 1619: they were Father Leandro of the Annunciation and two professed students, Brother Elías and Brother José Alejo.

The convent officially was inaugurated on 19th of March, 1621 with the vestition of seven novices, among whom was a young Portuguese soldier who took the name of Brother Redemptus of the Cross. On 16th July in the following year, the church was dedicated with solemnity to the Mother of God of Mount Carmel. The community remained here for about 90 years until 1709, when all non-Portuguese missionaries were forced to leave. The convent was handed over to the Oratorians of Saint Philip Neri.

In this convent on Christmas day in 1636 Father Dionysius of the Nativity made his solemn profession in the hands of Father Filippo of the Holy Trinity, who was a missionary, theologian, writer, and at the end of his life, Superior General of the Congregation of Italy. While Father Dionysius was studying theology to be ordained a priest, Brother Redemptus of the Cross, who had returned to Goa from the Tatta mission (in present-day Pakistan), was the porter and sacristan in the same monastery. As we know, in 1638 the two friars were sent to Sumatra to accompany a diplomatic mission to the Sultan of Aceh and there they were martyred.

These simple historical notes give us an idea of the richness of the history that we commemorate today: a history of holiness, of Carmelite life, of missionary zeal and, above all, of love for God and neighbor. There are many thoughts and feelings that we feel in remembering all this. The first is probably a surprise for the dynamism that the family founded by Santa Teresa has shown in the early days of its existence. Who would have imagined that after only fifty years the Discalced Carmelites, from the tiny community in the remote area of Duruelo, would have come to Goa, the capital of the Portuguese Indies, a metropolis of about 200,000 inhabitants, after having passed through Poland, Persia, the island of Ormuz, the empire of the Great Mogul? Scholars can explain the historical reasons behind this extraordinary

expansion of a small group of contemplative religious. To all of us, this gives us a reason to reflect on what the true strength of our religious vocation is: it is not the force of numbers, nor of tradition, nor of structures, which can become a burden and an obstacle. It is the power of the Spirit, the abundance of his gifts, which transforms our weakness and our fears into the courage and joy of the disciples and apostles of Jesus Christ. As we heard in the first reading, it is the armor of God that allows us to face the trials and challenges of history. Truth, justice, peace, faith, and listening to the Word of God are the weapons that compose it.

A second thought that comes to mind concerns the relationship between contemplation and action. Nothing is more misleading than the contrast of these two dimensions. To the extent that one is truly contemplative, then one is also truly active, or better: we are instruments of God's action, servants of his will. The first generations of Discalced Carmelites (I am thinking especially of Father John of Jesus-Mary) understood perfectly the basic message of St. Teresa: contemplation is letting oneself be invaded and transformed by God who is love. And love is only one thing: love for God and love for men. You can't separate one from the other. It is the fire of this love that makes our confreres of four centuries ago so dynamic and effective. They love God and give themselves to him without reserve. But precisely for this reason they love the Church and make themselves available to it with radical obedience, without objections or personal interests. And they love men, they appreciate and value the cultures, the languages, the places in which they live. This is why their contemplation opens up spontaneously to the mission, which is a genuine movement of going out to others. Those Carmelites were well aware that going on a mission meant getting close, listening, studying, discovering the riches of others. The study of theology is supported by the study of languages, religions, geography, and botany. Love is really like a sun that warms and makes all humanity flourish and yield fruit, which lets itself be illuminated by Him.

Dear brothers, let us thank the Lord for these 400 years of history. Let's do it with a heart full of joy and with the sincere humility of those who feel small and unworthy before so much greatness. But at the same time let's do it with the awareness that this story will and must continue in us. We are brothers of Father Leandro, of Father Filippo, of Father Dionisius, of Brother Redemptus. From them we can learn what it means to live concretely today as Carmelites, children of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. We ask for their intercession so that the flame that the Spirit has ignited in their hearts is not extinguished in us and in our communities.