



SUPERIOR GENERAL OF DISCALCED CARMELITES
Corso d'Italia, 38
00198 Roma – Italia

WITH MARY, SISTER: Hope and Way

LETTER TO THE WHOLE ORDER Solemnity of the Virgin of Carmel 2022



Mary, unfinished image, an experience to take deeply to heart, rethink and revive

In the monastery of Las Batuecas (Salamanca - Spain), going up to the chapel, there is a painting hanging on the wall: an unfinished icon of Mary. Over the veins of history, the reality of our history... a beautiful face of Mary emerges that is not finished, on purpose. Mary is a presence deep-seated in the veins of our humanity. Mary is possible because she has let the Father brush his image on her flesh and blood. She lends to God, for his work of salvation, the availability of her YES, without excuses. The image of Mary in Carmel is incomplete and is completed every day in the experience of her sons and daughters. Every day something beautiful of Mary's soul is discovered. It is never a finished image, the way God is always being born. That is why it surprises always and becomes new in the eyes of the child who sees everything for the first time.

As mystics or true believers do not play at possessing God in their thoughts, their ideas or in their devotions, so the Marian life of Carmel is a constant challenge to live the experience in the way Mary did: she allowed herself in each step to be moved and illuminated by that God who has made her heart and takes her to where she does not know, that God who allows Himself to be carried by her in her trembling step of a fragile yet strong woman, humble yet courageous.

So he also sees us, God looks at us, always for the first time. Giving birth to us in his gaze.

I want to send an invitation to the whole Order: to invite you to the adventure of completing the image of Mary from the experience of intimacy, entering into the experience of the Hail Mary, protagonists of the history that is woven in the womb of Mary, letting her to shape in us the image of her son, by showing herself every day alive.

Cloud – Fountain – Hermitage

Cloud (1K 18:44)

I am among the ruins of the primitive chapel on Mount Carmel, in the Wadi Siah, where every year I celebrate the Eucharist making the whole Order present. In this special place, I renew the liturgy that actualizes the presence and essence of Carmel. In Carmel, we remember that a cloud, like the palm of a hand, rising from the sea, brought to Elijah the certainty of rain, after three years of drought. An ancient tradition assumed by Carmel from time immemorial imagined Mary as the white and insignificant cloud that brings, in her smallness, the invincible promise of God. Mary's presence remains, in this world of arrogant bombs and clouds of smoke that blind the air, an invitation to the unwavering Faith of the humble. Carmel wants to accept that bold challenge of Faith. Against all hope. When it seems that the reasons to believe have come to an end, then Mary's hand reminds us of the Promise.

Fountain

Below the chapel, about two hundred metres away, is the Fountain of Elijah, by tradition located here many centuries after the great prophet of God had been snatched up into heaven. Yes, the fountain recalls Elijah, but it also represents Mary, the source of hope and consolation, a sister who accompanies in her constant flowing, the path of all Carmelites. Mary carries deep in her heart the water of grace and from it we drink thirstily every day to resume the path that God suggests. Never anchored in our plans. The music of the water that flows from the Fountain of Mary makes us available men and women, not tying our hands and the voice of God with our fears. Where he wants and as he wants. This word is heard in the sound of the water of that Marian fountain.

A hermitage in the ruins

The hermitage above, in the centre of the caves and hollows of the rock occupied by the first hermits before the Carmelites, remains the memory of the perennial search for God in all times. The ruins are a sacred and overwhelming testimony of life, even in their apparent desolation. They speak to us and remind us that the structure that now protects us and harbours us will not be tomorrow's.

These buildings, these houses, this structure that we have inherited, will fall, will change. We should not dramatize or lament so much about it, or resist unto death. In many cases, the structure is wearing us down and exhausting us. We wear out our brothers or sisters, in taking care of only inheritances. The important thing is the Guest. And this guest had nowhere to lay his head. The structure is now talking about an exodus that we have to go through and help navigate. What heritage to take care of? The human–spiritual heritage, a divine and human presence, precious, beautiful. The person is the patrimony. Mary is in Carmel a presence on the way, an icon that carries within her the Presence. She remembers the permanent and essential in the fleeting and provisional. Being Mary's brothers and sisters will make us not cling to the buildings when the opportune time comes to leave them, and let

ourselves be humbly led to the dwelling that God has prepared for us. We guard a living presence, which walks within us, living temples, like Mary.

Words about Mary that I hear next to her fountain:

NOW.

Our Lady of the Now. It sounds to me a very Carmelite title with which to speak about Mary. Mary teaches us to live time. She connects us to the here and now, God's eternal present: 'here I am'... Fiat. It is Mary's music in every moment of her life. Praying to Mary brings with it a grace of presence for ourselves. It makes us aware of the value of our lives as protagonists in God's plan, fertile land for his sowing. Mary lived every moment of her life without escaping, without fleeing, also in not understanding the designs of God. Keeping everything in her heart, she was a 'Yes' to the announcement of the Angel, she was a manger in the non-inn, she was acceptance in the loss of the son, she was a mother again when she gave birth to the son to a new life at the foot of the Cross.

The Virgin of Carmel is Saint Mary of the Now, of the *Kairos* of God. A school that teaches to live in the moment. She teaches us to live the past: to remember the origin, the root, the first love, the 'truth of when children' (cf. L 1,4), the proclamation of the angel; to forget and let go of past assurances in the trust of God's care, which goes before you; to walk from beginning to beginning. She teaches us to live in the present moment: to utter the simplest prayer: 'Here I am, Lord'; to recollect and reconcile ourselves in order to centre and simplify life. To be contemplative with Mary is to be ONE with God's now. She teaches us to live the future with a heart of Faith that glimpses, that listens in the midst of difficulty and night, the promise and hope of God. Mary's soul is expert at believing that life makes a comeback and rises from the dead.

CREATIVITY.

Mary, awake and attentive with the disciples, with their listening and trust, awaits the Pentecost of the new Church. With its presence in each of us, in the community, it opens up possibilities of creativity that reinvent life and a new landscape emerges in the monotony of 'it has always been done this way'. The Church and Carmel will be reborn together with Mary in this new Pentecost.

FRATERNITY.

Mary is the sister of all Carmelites. We are Discalced Brothers and Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel. She teaches us to live in fraternity. She schools our heart to understand the meaning of the word brother, sister. Company, involvement, game that opens up life to the joy of God through the trust of brothers and sisters. How much we need you, O Mary, to educate and model our hearts to be and build community! You are our sister making us feel responsible for the family and builders of the house for everyone and with everyone. This is our first mission: to be brothers and sisters of Mary, to be a community.

AUDACITY.

You are a woman alone and without defence, armed only with trust. You trust in the unheard Word of a surprising and disconcerting God. You move God's heart by letting yourself be carried away by the adventure of his plan of salvation. God found in you a small, simple, unarmed soul who, without looking at herself, threw herself into the unknown. Bold and humble, brave and simple. In your audacity, we are taught the way that Carmel is now called to try out for the first time.

HOPE.

In that always now, with you Mary, hope resurfaces. Where Mary is, life is illuminated within, in a never ceasing Incarnation. Where there is an unconditional 'yes' to God, like Mary's, Jesus is born, re-sprouts, opening life to a hope hitherto unknown, unsuspected.

That is why I have written this reflection, deeply convinced of hope in this time in which we are living, thinking of the whole of Carmel, and I have written it as that face of Mary that opened this prayer, in the veins of the wood of our reality, our poverty, which is our wealth and truth. I wrote the main part of this reflection with COVID, locked in my room and very carefully looked after by my brothers, participating in the disease that makes me stand in solidarity with so many other diseases of our time. From this confinement, I wanted to complete this letter synodally. It occurred to me to ask ten women how Mary is a source of hope for our time and in their own heart. I will not reveal their names. Among them are Carmelites, mothers, committed lay women, missionaries, women who have come out from the hell of the streets. I have asked them to draw with the brush of their lived experience some feature of Mary, Woman and Mother of Hope.

- Mary, a Woman of hope and of Life received. Mother and Teacher, yes. First of all, a WOMAN. A woman with guts and a wide heart. An apprentice, disciple, walker, a girl... Companion on the way because she is a woman like me, not different or distant. It has always helped me a lot to see her as an equal, someone who always continues to learn, who seeks, asks and trusts. That you know yourself to be sustained by the Hands of Love and recognized in your Being as Who You Are.
- In my not knowing, in my not understanding, in my not seeing, I hope and trust in Mary and with Mary, who long before I had hoped, has trusted. I too know myself inhabited, "pregnant" with the Mystery....
- A mystery of Love. Although it is night. To wait with her for the birth of Christ in me. In the midst of the darkness of the "womb" within me... Knowing that something is developing.
Without knowing...
- Good day, for me the Virgin is the mother who accompanies us constantly. She is my FRIEND, COMPANION. LIGHT WHEN THE ROAD IS DARK. SHE HELPS ME DISCERN. She is my SAFE REST. Our Lady for me is an invisible woman who is always comforting my sorrows and when I feel that my prayers do not reach God she makes God listen to me..
- Our mother. Especially in the evenings when I recite the rosary. When my aunt passed away, in despair, I knelt down and said 'Dear little mother, the most valuable thing I have right now is the pain. I give it to you, but give me discernment to keep on going.' I put the scapular on my aunt. The nurse who was there started crying. I really gave up my pain.
- Mary, of unshakable hope, is a companion, sister, confidant and much more, in the ways of my consecrated life. As a Christian, I can only think of it like this. Your resolute trust in the God of promises, the transparent one made into your life, enlightens and strengthens me. But the deepest joy springs to me to discover it in the lives of the people, with them, and listening to their experiences: accompanying as a serene light in their nights; encouraging tenderness and life, however fragile it may seem. Mary, our daily hope.

- Mary, woman of hope. You raise my hope. You teach me that great truths come to life in very humble ways: in small answers ("yes"); in attending to what has happened (the wine has run out); in being where it seems impossible to stay. You remind me that God seeks a house in me, in us; and you, who are a home, teach me to put flesh to the only gesture, that of welcoming. Mary, my memory on a path in which traces are erased.
- It was their faith on Holy Saturday that allowed the Resurrection of Jesus to be accepted by humanity and, therefore, given to us. This struck me once very concretely, on a Holy Saturday, and I understood to what extent this mystery of Holy Saturday in Mary is a source of hope when apparently there is no more possible hope, because she is my Mother and gives me to God through all the purity of her faith, her abandonment, her love.
- With her unconditional yes she encourages me to walk confidently, even if it be night.
- No matter how much turbulence we go through, she teaches us. With all the mistreatment of her son until death, she did not lose hope and faith that Jesus was going to rise again, so that we never lose hope. No matter how much sadness and turbulence we go through, we will come out of every evil we go through, in his all-powerful name.
- Believing woman, Mother and sister, the fullness of God, lives among the people! Of great silence and burning heart, simple praise and courageous steps.

These are brushes full of beauty and life, pain and hope. Each of these comments must be read with respect, on our knees and with prayer. It is Mary in the voice of each of these women.

Paul VI said that Mary is the Virgin *audiens, orans, pariens and offerens* (Marialis Cultus 17-20). Thus, today Carmel with Mary listens, prays, gives birth and offers.

Carmel owes a debt to Mary; we need to return to Mary and re-establish a living and creative relationship. I would venture to say that it is a crucial and central aspect, what we proclaim is in her: It is essential, unpostponable, urgent. Mary is the declaration on the charism unfolding, an unfinished icon. I invite the whole Order to enter into a renewed relationship with Mary and in Mary, as the essence of our vocation. She grafts us into God's Today as a prophetic fraternity, docile to the Spirit. She will teach us the way.

Dear sisters, dear brothers, to Mary I entrust your life, in her we trust and with her we set out on our way... With her there are no ruins that do not proclaim a house, darkness that does not contain a decisive light, poverty that does not enclose a treasure... May Mary always carry you by her hand. Let us walk together! A Happy Solemnity of Carmel. Mary cares for and protects all our communities and each one of us, lay people, nuns and friars.

To the whole great family of the Teresian Carmel.

God bless you all!

Br. Miguel Márquez Calle, OCD,
Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites

Rome, 16th of July, 2022