



INCONTRO INTERNAZIONALE
Carmelitane Scalze- Nemi, 2024

Camminiamo insieme, signore
Si dialoga per comprendere



International Meeting of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns
Nemi (Rome, Italia), April 14-19, 2024

DAILY SYNTHESIS OF EVENTS

Sunday, April 14

April 14, 2024, the Third Sunday of Easter, was the first day of the International Meeting of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns. Starting at 3 pm, the organizers and participants began to arrive in varied ways (not always at the arranged hour) at the Centro Ad Gentes run by the Divine Word Missionaries in Nemi (Rome, Lazio, Italy). The countless embraces that followed made the joy of the meeting evident and contagious.

After evening Mass (said by Fr. Angelo Lanfranchi in Italian) and supper, we had an initial meeting all together in the aula. First, one of the Divine Word Missionaries in charge of the Centro greeted us and revealed an important secret: the door to enter the castle (if we found ourselves outside the Centro “after hours”) was...the number 1875.

Next, Father General took the floor to welcome us all and set the foundation for the Meeting. He underlined the joy of being there together, recalled the itinerary of our journey here (following the indications given by the Dicastery for Consecrated Life), and specified the objectives of the Meeting: to dialogue in order to deepen our living of the charism at this moment in our history and to

identify clues and criteria for a renewed Constitutional text. He shared grateful memories of those who had previously worked amid many difficulties to achieve the good Constitutional text that we now have. After acknowledging the work of those who prepared the Meeting, he offered a biblical icon to us: that of the disciples on the road to Emmaus; a reference model for us today.

A PowerPoint presentation followed, which depicted each of the participating Associations/Federations. The projection of a world-wide map and the data from each Association/Federation served to confirm the variety and universal scope of the Order and of our Meeting.

Our moderator, the Carmelite Missionary (of Bl. Francisco Palau) Sr. Lidia Wrona, gave us the first practical instructions to facilitate the work of the days ahead, particularly the makeup of the nine linguistic groups and their designated members. The groups were invited to meet together immediately in order to discuss their impressions of a short video that we all had seen as a group. This was a fascinating presentation that illustrated how by concentrating one very small detail of a larger whole, one can lose sight of or misinterpret “the whole.”

This first session ended well into the night, closer to 11:00 than 10:00 – so we hoped may this would not serve as a precedent!

Monday, April 15

Monday, April 15 was the first full day of work. During the morning Mass in Italian, Father General encouraged us to freedom and “freshness” (*which can also be translated as “audacity;” translator’s note*) in order to sense what God desires and to seek His will.

In the morning session, Fr. Salvador Ros, OCD connected with us via Zoom to offer us a rich presentation on “The Constitutional Thought of Sr. Teresa.” With her desire to return to the sources, he told us, Teresa set her sights on the Primitive Rule, but combined the aspects of both solitude and community life, and always did it with a humanistic approach. The Teresian Constitutions (approved by Fr. Rubeo in 1567) are an initiation into the contemplative experience and introduce novel elements, such as recommended books of formation, the traditions of oral teaching, spiritual communication with one another and community recreation. The real manual of formation for the Nuns is the Way of Perfection, where the Saint transmits the contemplative experience, her teaching on prayer, and the formulation of a new ecclesial charism. Teresa proposed a permanent revitalization of the charism with a dynamism that is always renewed.

After this presentation, the nine working groups considered Teresa’s attitude and highlighted the following points: her humanism, gentleness, balance, capacity for change, dialogue, listening, communication, her contact with reality, her life experience, novelty, joy, attention to what is essential, the richness of diversity, the theological life, listening to the Spirit...

That afternoon, we welcomed Sr. Simona Brambilla to the aula. She is a Consolata Missionary and the present Secretary for the Dicastery for Consecrated Life. In her presentation, very much inspired by the magisterium of Pope Francis, Sr. Simona presented the revision of the Constitutions as a time of rebirth and life, comparable to childbirth. She exhorted us to face the current crisis in religious life as an opportunity, to interpret it with a contemplative gaze and to fight against the forces that want to prevent this “new birth.”

The revision of the Constitutions offered us the occasion to enter a synodal process which is, above all, a listening to the Spirit. The method of conversation in the Spirit (which we are following in the small groups these days) was

particularly important. Sr. Simona invited us “to be truly Discalced,” evoking Moses before the Burning Bush, as well as the call of Jesus to his disciples not to carry “a purse, bag or sandals:” it is a matter of entering into a process of revision and of rebirth, free from the securities that we often want to defend and impose on others.

The final message she left for us in contemplative life was: “Teach us to pray and show us fraternity.”

Tuesday, April 16

At this morning’s Mass in Spanish, Fr. Ramiro called to our minds St. Stephen the first martyr, and encouraged us to be witnesses today in our contemplative life. The day’s first sharings of the working groups, regarding the presentation of Sr. Simona Brambilla, demonstrated a positive reception of the images she used, such as “being discalced,” the Burning Bush, the body, and especially childbirth, all of which were very appropriate to the present moment. Some expectations and questions regarding the meeting also emerged, with a discussion between expectations and openness to the newness of the Spirit.

In his presentation today, Father General delved into some of the fundamental elements that mark this meeting, especially its mottos: “We dialogue to understand,” and “Let us walk together, Lord,” along with the appeals “to become truly discalced,” to walk in truth, to listen...he particularly stressed the insistent invitation to look at reality as it is, with its problems, challenges and hopes. He ended by leaving us seven challenges in order to face the future: to fall in love (or let ourselves fall in love), to accompany one another, to allow ourselves to discern, to simplify, to communicate sincerely, to venture into life and to bless the beginnings that are “budding” now.

With deep emotion, we all listened to the testimony of two Discalced Carmelite Nuns, one in the Netherlands (Sr. Lucia) and another in Indonesia (Sr. Agustina). Our Sisters presented two precious, distinct and complementary ways of living as Discalced Carmelites: one in a time of aging and decline in a secularized society and the other of growth, youth, and missionary witness in a multi-religious environment.

The work of the groups today highlighted the perspectives that are maturing among us these days. We were all perceiving the presence of the Spirit. We are broadening our perspectives to what is universal, to the essential, to the charism, to reality, to the truth...

In the afternoon, Fr. Rafal Wilkowski presented an extensive and documented reflection on the Constitutions from juridical, historical and charismatic points of view. He explained the meaning and purpose of a constitutional text and the criteria for its drafting and revision, always combined with concrete references to the present Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns.

After this, the working groups then began to identify some of the elements to be included in the constitutional text, the attitudes that could hinder its drafting, and those attitudes that could help it.

Wednesday, April 17

On April 17, we began again with the celebration of Mass in English, during which Fr. Rafal exhorted us to feed on Christ, the Bread of Life.

During these first two days of the Meeting, we received much useful information for a modification or revision of the Constitutions from the Teresian, ecclesial,

juridical, historical as well as the Order's point of view...and we reflected and dialogued extensively on all of this.

On this third day, we went a step further and began to share the opinions and suggestions prepared earlier in the communities and the Associations/Federations. Within each group, the members listened to and welcomed the contributions brought by each of them on behalf of their Association/Federation, and tried to understand them thoroughly. Each group then agreed on a maximum of five arguments that could best guarantee a working process for the renewal of the Constitutions.

In our sharing, we noted the variety and complementarity of the elements we proposed and found that we widely (and coincidentally) shared important ones. For example, the desire to focus on identity and to express the essence of the Teresian charism stood out, as well as the desire to have a constitutional text that favors unity and respects the richness of diversity. Various characteristics of the language that should be adopted in the text have been pointed out: that it be feminine, put in the first person, that it be charismatic, simple, plain, clear, Teresian, current...

Some suggestions appeared for the next stages of the process: a possible international commission, a synodal style that will ensure the participation and coresponsibility of the communities, etc.

There was still time for another meeting of the working groups, this time aimed at commenting on the impressions of the previous sharing and observing the arguments that were appearing more frequently and more strongly in order that we might identify the movements of the Spirit that are acting in the assembly. We prayed that He would continue to enlighten us.

Thursday, April 18

On Thursday, the 18th, the fourth day of our Meeting, we got up before dawn to travel to the Vatican for the private audience granted to us by Pope Francis. Each of us had the joy of greeting him personally after welcoming his words as our father and pastor with attention and gratitude.

The Pope told us that the revision of the Constitutions is a time of the Spirit and exhorted us to live it as an occasion for prayer and discernment, seeking new languages, new ways and new means that will foster the contemplative life with greater enthusiasm, so that the charism may be preserved, come to be understood, and attract many hearts. He concluded by asking us: "Look to the future with evangelical hope, with discolored feet, that is, with the freedom born of abandonment to God. Look to the future with roots in the past.."

Comforted and encouraged by the meeting with the Pope, we returned to Nemi and resumed our dialogue to work out the practical conclusions of the Meeting. A consensus began to emerge on how to proceed. Conversation in the Spirit created an atmosphere of listening from the heart and a common search for a shared path. We wanted to move towards the formulation of Constitutions for our times, which take into account the Carmelite Rule, the Teresian texts, the Declarations, the Constitutions of 1991, the recent ecclesial documents...It seemed opportune to create an international commission that would be representative and operative, and work in a synodal style that would allow a real participation of all communities in the process.

We also strongly felt the need to transmit what we were living in Nemi to all our Sisters of the world. To this end, materials in different languages would be

prepared, but we agreed that the most important thing was to communicate the experience that we shared here.

At Mass that evening, celebrated in Spanish by Fr. Alfredo, he invited us to allow ourselves to be drawn by the Father to Christ. We pray that He always be our Master and Friend.

Friday, April 19

At Mass celebrated this morning in French, Fr. José reflected on the experience of Saul/Paul and Ananias, who saw their convictions and plans changed by the Lord's intervention.

The work of this morning centered on the International Commission that will be formed for the revision of the Constitutions. The working groups dialogued about the criteria for forming it, its work, its timeframes, as well as the profiles and possible names of some of its members.

Various ways of promoting the transmission of the Nemi experience were suggested: making the documents of the Meeting available in their various languages; community, federal and inter-federal meetings (both face-to-face and virtual); possible assistance from the Generalate...

The assembly approved a final message for the Discalced Carmelite Nuns and for the whole Order, after completing it from the draft prepared by Srs. Gema and Silvia. We dedicated a specific time that afternoon to receive information from the

Postulator General (Fr. Marco Chiesa), the Order's Economo (Fr. Paolo De Carli), and to hear about the Order's mission projects (from Fr. Jérôme Paluku, who joined us from Cameroon through Zoom).

All participants were then asked for a personal evaluation of the meeting in its various aspects.

Finally, Father General, the convener of the assembly, explained the steps that would be taken immediately, in particular: to set up the international working commission as soon as possible. He then commented on his joy for these days and concluded the meeting, expressing his gratitude both to those who made it possible and to all the participants.

On the morning of April 20, we met one another once more at the final Mass to give thanks to the Lord and begin our return trips home. We carry in our hearts the joy of having shared an intense and joyful experience of communion in Teresa's family.

The process of revising the Constitutions will continue now with renewed strength. We have specified some steps to be taken as well as a methodology of the work ahead and, above all, we want to transmit and spread abroad the style of dialogue that we have lived: we have experienced that when we open ourselves to the sincere listening to the Spirit and to one another, our life is enlightened and transformed. May the "spirit of Nemi" continue to guide us to live the Teresian charism in an ever-renewed way.

Fr. Agustí Borrell, ocd