



NEMI MEETING

1991 Constitutions of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns

“The Teresian Carmel TODAY”

Miguel Márquez, ocd – April 16, 2024

- I want to tell you that I am happy, along with my Brothers, to share this path with you. We do not feel like we are teachers, we feel like apprentices as we walk together. Teach us, Sisters, frankly, how to be Brothers, friends, fathers and sons, how to be the Carmelites that Teresa of Jesus longs for today...(for) each monastery is a family home for us and a Bethany where life is cared for and strength is regained.
- We are learning to relate to each other, nuns, friars and laity from a place of communion, respect, growth and mutual listening (*Declaration on the Charism, 43-44*).
- The four “words” that I have carried with me since the beginning of these two and a half years as General: Exodus; Impossible; Fruitful future; and Magnificat; continue to accompany me closely. The word “impossible” has hovered strongly around this project of revising the Constitutions from the very beginning.

My words at this moment are intended, above all, to motivate us to delve deeper into the purpose that has brought us together here, recognizing the essentials of the letter that I sent you on February 2 of this year in preparation for this meeting. We have already touched on some fundamental themes with Sr. Simona’s invitation and with the suggestion of listening to one another in the Spirit. I propose to you an outline in five points, abbreviating the first three and simply hearing them again, as they seem to have been sufficiently dealt with now, even though they remain in

my text. The outline is as follows:

1. **MOTTO (explanation):** “We dialogue to understand” ... “Let us walk together, Lord”
2. **TO BECOME DISCALCED:** “To have empty hands”
3. **A CONCERT: *To walk in the truth***
4. **REALITY: *Problems, challenges, hopes***
 - 4.1 Hope
 - 4.2 The treasure and the pearl
 - 4.3 Reality both accepted and denied
 - 4.4 Discernment and humility
 - 4.5 Obedience and fidelity
5. **LISTENING:** creative listening (empathy)
6. **WITNESSES of the experience of God:** “Go and tell my brothers”
 - 6.1 Falling in love (letting ourselves fall in love)
 - 6.2 Accompanying us
 - 6.3 Allowing ourselves to discern
 - 6.4 To simplify
 - 6.5 Sincere communication
 - 6.6 Allowing ourselves be adventurous in life
 - 6.7 Allowing ourselves to bless the “buds” that are beginning
7. **CONTEMPLATION:** A quote from Bl. Eduardo Pironio

1. THE MOTTO OF THE MEETING

Let me offer a word about the motto of this meeting and the reasoning behind it. I have chosen words of Benedict XVI and Teresa of Jesus:

“We dialogue to understand (not to convince)” Address of December 21, 2021 to the Vatican Curia.

“Let us walk together, Lord”¹ (Way of Perfection, 26, 6)

¹ In chapter 26, Teresa continues speaking about prayer and how to recollect the thoughts. This is a very beautiful chapter in which she speaks of the fundamental elements of one’s relation to Jesus: “O Lord of the world, my true Spouse!... what is this that I suffer for You? Of what am I complaining? I am already ashamed, since I have seen You in such a condition. I desire to suffer, Lord, all the trials that come to me and esteem them as a great good enabling me to imitate You in something. Let us walk together, Lord. Wherever You go, I will go; whatever you suffer, I will suffer” (Way, 26,6).

These are “keys” for us to live these days (that I will briefly explain):

This is Benedict XVI’s last Christmas address to the Vatican Curia. The speech has several themes, one of which is interreligious dialogue and truth. There are two strong statements here that apply to us too:

*Dialogue is not aimed at converting the other, but rather at understanding. We have not come here, above all, to convince, to defend a position, or to convert others to my/your truth, even if we have our own criteria and convictions. But in dialogue, for it to be true dialogue, honest and true listening is needed. It needs to be an exercise in the Teresian style: deep, sincere, cordial and receptive communion, seeking the truth together and opening ourselves to a light greater than our own. In the “welcome” of these days I have proposed to you the EMMAUS model as a way to follow here, opening our hearts, allowing ourselves to be enlightened by the Word, in mutual acceptance, the Eucharist, and “the sending forth” to proclaim with joy what we have seen and heard, if there has been a true silence of listening and understanding. This attitude requires, in the words of Pope Benedict: *docile availability, in search, on the way, in community, traveling in communion. In other words: walking with Jesus makes us people who see.**

The other affirmation of the Pope is that *we do not possess the truth* (Christian truth is not an idea or dogma, it is a Person):

Certainly, it is not we who possess the truth, it is the truth that possesses us: Christ, who is the Truth, has taken us by the hand, and we know that he holds us firmly by the hand on the path of our passionate search for knowledge. (...) He does not abandon us unless we ourselves separate ourselves from him. United with Him, we stand in the light of truth.

This freedom of being interiorly sustained by the hand of Christ connects us with a very beautiful text of Teresa of Jesus: LET US WALK TOGETHER, LORD, from chapter 26 of the *Way of Perfection*. Teresa refers to Jesus. Our union is based on this communion and friendship with Jesus, in Jesus, in His gaze which is the inner “fabric” of our communion. It is there where Teresa invites us, not so much to think, or to draw many concepts or considerations, but only to look at Him, because He never takes his “very

beautiful and compassionate” eyes off you.² I invite you, if you have the works of the Saint with you, to read the entire chapter 26 slowly.

The Teresian “key” for this beginning is: TOGETHER under the gaze of Jesus. To place His gaze at the center of the encounter, allowing Him to make fruitful all that can sprout from here, all that will be born from here. Look at Him. He never takes His eyes off of you...

2. TO BECOME DISCALCED (Ex 3, 5)

Together with these two “keys,” I invite you to a “discalced” walk that is barefoot, unhurried, unarmed, able to feel the land of your origins, that time before you may were provided with securities, protections, armor and parachutes ... (cf. poem “Instants”)³ that takes us to a place previous to the Rule and the Constitutions, to a sacred land that I want you to breathe in again, remaining silent in it, without fear of facing the “outdoors” of bare feet and an unknown future. We enter, like Moses, into God's land, not into human structures. We enter God's realm....

We enter into that place where Elijah felt like a child, underneath the broom tree, afraid, and was then led to the door of the cave in order to hear the silence of God. We enter the time when the first hermits of Carmel did not have a rule of life, they had, rather, a *Propositum*, that is to say, a fire in their hearts, a source, a fount that compelled them and made them fall in love. We come to that day when Teresa of Jesus felt she had made a mistake by encouraging those four poor girls to undertake the “crazy” adventure of beginning St. Joseph’s of Ávila, to that day in which Therese felt only night and emptiness. We come to the path of the two disappointed disciples on the road to Emmaus. We come to the place where the Angel of the Lord invited Gideon to rest with him in the midst of the toils of the field, beneath the terebinth of Oprah, when he called him

² Way, 26, 3: “I'm not asking you now that you think about Him or that you draw out a lot of concepts or make long and subtle reflections with your intellect. I'm not asking you to do anything more than look at Him. For who can keep you from turning the eyes of your soul toward this Lord, even if you do so just for a moment if you can't do more? You can look at very ugly things; won't you be able to look at the most beautiful thing imaginable? Well now, daughters, your Spouse never takes His eyes off you.”

³ Cf. the poem, “Instants” (author unknown) ...” If I had my life ahead of me again... I was one of those who never went anywhere without a thermometer, a hot water bottle, an umbrella and a parachute; if I could live again, I would travel lighter. If I could live again (...) But you see, I am 85 years old and I know I am dying.”

“a valiant warrior” (Judges, 6:12). We come to that night during which Samuel was called four times by the voice of the Lord, Whom he had not yet known, and he was able to answer, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:10). Lastly we come to the ground in front of the Burning Bush, where a fleeing Moses was invited to take off his sandals (“to become discalced”), an act that was to prepare him for what lay ahead of him.

I invite you to become discalced; to disarm ourselves; to silence our expectations for a moment, to come to the sacred land of trust and abandonment, where it all began, a place of adoration, absolute trust. “Do not prepare your defense,” (Luke 21:12; Mk 13:11) Jesus says...for what is to come.

I invite you to come to that place where Jesus, tied to the pillar and unable to act, transforms the world with His powerlessness; to come to that place on the Cross, where he gave the most effective discourse of all those he had pronounced: the *Verbum Crucis*. Or to come to the opening of the salvific ministry of Jesus that began in the womb of Mary, in the night when she uttered her *Fiat*. The best of the Church and of Carmel has always been born of waiting with Mary in the Cenacle of communion that seeks the risen Face of Jesus. We find Him when let ourselves be found.

This is beautifully expressed in the Declaration on the Charism (cf. *DC*, 3): We do not know the future of the Order, nor the changes that await us. That should not worry us, but from where our life and our secret springs, *we know that everything can be taken away from us, but not this ‘hidden source,’ which nourishes our hope.*⁴

In the Third Mansions of the Interior Castle, Teresa speaks of “balanced” souls ... (*Interior Castle*, III, 1, 5; 2, 13) “Very balanced in their use of speech and dress and in the governing of their households” (*IC*, III: 1, 5). They not only want to maintain their security and order, but they also want to teach or convince others of their way: “nor is there any reason to desire, that

⁴ “We do not know what the future of the Order will be, much less that of the portion to which we belong. We do not even know what form consecrated life will take, or what changes will occur in the ecclesial institutions to which we belong and which we are accustomed to consider as immutable. However, we should not worry about this, but rather walk in the light of the experience we keep in our hearts, from which our life and our spiritual identity have sprung and continue to spring. Everything can be taken away from us, but not this ‘hidden source’ that nourishes our hope” (*DC*, 3).

everyone follow our own path at once” (IC, III, 2, 13).⁵

Then there is the passage in the Third Mansions, where she refers to the Gospel story of the rich young man to whom Jesus says FOLLOW ME... (IC, III: 1, 6) the young man went away sad, because he was rich...Jesus invites us to follow Him to true wealth and treasure.

In the Fourth Mansions of the *Interior Castle*, “THE SHEPHERD’S WHISTLE (IC, IV: 3, 2-3; VI: 2, 3, where it is translated “whisper”) sounds with force: it is a renewed call to the passion of the origins, to the voice of the Bridegroom Who calls us home, to begin again and fall in love again. Our home is not the building, “my monastery is Jesus,” said Sr. Mary Madgalene, the oldest member (at 87) of the Carmel of Raipur in India, when the community wondered if it was time to think about closing. “Wherever I go, Jesus is my home.”⁶ This attitude “unlocks” us: unlocks us from our very selves, which are so entangled in our fears and limits. The Church has always been saved when she let herself be saved and “disalced” from herself, trusting in the Word and Voice of her Shepherd.

3. A CONCERT (*Life*, 16, 7)

A very beautiful Easter greeting came to me from the Carmelite Nuns in Iceland. It included a video from February 28, 2024, where thousands of starlings (birds) performed a dance in the sky, admirably, without colliding. This was something amazing: they created this beautiful spectacle in the sky, dancing an impressive ballet similar to the aurora borealis:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDZrK5bohYc>

We recall here another very significant text of Teresa of Jesus:

⁵ “...nor is there any reason to desire that everyone follow at once our own path, or to set about teaching the way of the spirit to someone who perhaps doesn't know what such a thing is. For with these desires that God gives us, Sisters, about the good of souls, we can make many mistakes. So, it is better to carry out what our rule says, to strive to live always in silence and hope, for the Lord will take care of these souls. If we ourselves are not negligent in beseeching His Majesty to do so, we shall, with His favor, do much good. May He be blessed forever.” (IC, III: 1, 13).

⁶ “Like a good shepherd, with a whistle so gentle that even they themselves almost fail to hear it, He makes them recognize His voice and stops them from going so far astray so that they will return to their dwelling place. And this shepherd's whistle has such power that they abandon the exterior things in which they were estranged from Him and enter the castle” (IC, IV: 3:2).

Life, ch. 16, 7: “I should like the five of us who at present love each other in Christ^[5] to make a kind of *pact*⁷ that, since others in these times gather together in secret against His Majesty to prepare wicked deeds and heresies, we might seek to gather together some time to free each other from illusion and to speak about how we might mend our ways and please God more since we do not know ourselves as well as others who observe us if they do so with love and concern for our progress.”

Teresa proposed this “concert” to those who “at present love each other in Christ” as she proposes it to us now. No one is “small,” no one occupies a second-class place. No “majorities,” she said. Comparison and a lack of simplicity and humility ruin our life. In a concert of music, the instruments are very different and are guided by the conductor; they make perfect harmony. This is a good simile to use in order to speak about what we mean here. Every word is valuable from the point of view of respect. We are a family. Each one is a living and necessary stone. Each instrument could be content playing its own music, in its own way ... but there is no comparison with the harmony and beauty of the concert. Teresa vigorously reminds us:

- We gather together to free one another from illusions (to walk in the truth);
- We make amends;
- We wish to please God more;
- We are known by others who observe us if they do so with love.

In a single passage of chapter 16 of the *Life*, Teresa focuses the foundations of her project of the Teresian community: walking in fraternity to build each other up in the truth; correcting one another with love; allowing ourselves to be helped and enlightened. We must not be afraid of the truth but rather of the lies and deceptions of our own imaginations and desires. We need to allow ourselves to “be visited” by those who help us to grow and improve.

Edith Stein says in this regard: Do not accept anything as truth that lacks love; and do not accept anything as love that lacks truth. One without the other becomes as destructive lie” (Quoted by St. John Paul II on

⁷ Teresa does not refer to a concert of music, but rather to a “pact” joining and arranging the pieces, searching for the truth.

October 11, 1998, during her canonization ceremony in Rome).

In a concert, the keys are: periods of silence; listening to the other players; measured rhythms; intonation and tuning of the instruments; the conducting of the group; communion.

4. REALITY: PROBLEMS, CHALLENGES, HOPES

Teresa's passion for the truth runs throughout her life, and it is an essential part of the Teresian charism. She spent her entire life begging for light, help and advice from wise, learned persons and saints. She had a clear and courageous "word," born of humility and of fidelity, but also of intelligent and lucid obedience. She is a teacher of *docibilitas* (docility), with the heart of a disciple, passionate about living in the truth and growing personally with others.

In this section, I would like to propose a reflection on one of the most urgent issues that I perceive since I became General: the need to recognize, accept and accept reality.

We come with a clear objective: the revision of the Constitutions. But in the preparation for these days, in the various meetings, we have felt the need, before "entering in" and tackling the text and the contributions, to ask ourselves about the life that underlies every law: our *Propositum*... the meaning of our life. I think it would be important to take advantage of this unique and historical meeting, to ask ourselves for a short period about three basic realities: our most pressing problems, the challenges we face in the immediate future and the hopes that encourage us and light up our hearts, what is the "light and guide that burned in the heart" which guided John of the Cross to where the Beloved awaited him (*Dark Night*, st. 3-4). We have to try to avoid attractive words or unreal, fantastic speeches. We need to speak to the heart and in the truth. Without denying the head, we need to descend to the heart and perhaps even to our inmost being, where, as in Mary, that Jesus is formed who wants to be born in us.

This is my proposal and it will be united to words from Srs. Lucia (The Netherlands) and Agustina (Indonesia), on life experience, so we can ask ourselves where we are. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" the Lord asked him (I Kgs 19: 9, 13). What are you doing here and now at this moment, where is your life going?

We are living in difficult times in our world, in the Church and in Carmel. The uncertainty of the future is not distant, but immediate. There are many open conflicts very close to us, dramatic situations; there are both just rulers and crazy rulers in the world. In the Church, we have strong tensions – to mention only one: the discussion on the figure of Pope Francis, a sign of contradiction. In Carmel, we do not speak of the fracture that occurred in the 1990s (which actually does not prevent us from being a family in communion, without “better or worse,” with some beautiful examples of some Federations that include monasteries of the two Constitutions), but we speak of the challenge of the present, full of uncertainty and an urgent call to the essential and the permanent in the provisional. I propose five words that speak to me of the present:

4.1 HOPE

“We have never been so much in God’s hands, because we have never been so vulnerable:” Pedro Arrupe, S.J. Superior General of the Jesuits (1907-1991).

The Saints have been men and women of hope in the midst of night and conflict. In Carmel, the Desert, Night and Failure (*“the fruitfulness of failure”*⁸) are all fertile ground. The most fertile moments in the history of Carmel coincide with the moments of the greatest fragility and vulnerability. Hope bursts forth in the disappointment of the disciples of Emmaus. It is a good question to ask ourselves: what about certain, real hope, which is not based on unreal dreams or fantasies without discernment?

Every dark, difficult or contradictory moment in Carmel (the Night) hides a decisive, opportune grace. New and solid paths are not undertaken without passing through the Cross and death, or failure. We want to be open to a perspective that is not born from our intelligence or our limited vision alone, but from a grace and a gift that is given to us in docility to the Spirit. We firmly believe in new ways, amid old age, fragility and crisis. Hope has nothing to do with one’s character; it is essential to the Gospel, to the Paschal mystery.

⁸ This is the title of a book on the life of Bl. Francis Palau, by Arnaud Duval.

4.2 THE TREASURE AND THE PEARL

Speaking of reality, I want to point out that we must recover the joy of the treasure and the pearl that has been given to us. Often immersed in so much precariousness and fragility (one of today's fashionable words), we forget that we are immensely fortunate to have so many things of incalculable value ... (the daily Eucharist, for example). Besides, we need to remember that our communities mostly live in dedication, sacrificing themselves, giving their lives ... so many of our sisters and brothers get up early and offer an infinity of invisible gestures out of pure love and with precious generosity. Someday we will discover how history has been illuminated by people who never appeared in the papers or in the news, as Edith Stein said ... we must value and be grateful for this immense wealth of Carmel, of our communities, and believe in the gratuitous goodness of so many of our sisters and brothers "who are light without making noise" – who are quiet love (John of the Cross). May negativity and problems not cloud our vision of the treasure!

4.3 REALITY ACCEPTED AND DENIED

Those who are close to me know that one of the things that makes the most astonishes me in my knowledge of the nuns and friars of Carmel at this time is our lack of realism, the difficulty of recognizing the reality we have before us. This is a kind of weakness of sight and of mind that prevents us accepting what we are, without fear of naming it, without defeatism and without regrets. It seems to be a pandemic that also makes us not want to hear the voices of those who could help us to discern our situations. We are afraid to ask how others see us and those things we ourselves cannot see (all drivers know that there is always a "blind spot" when you drive). Often the reality is hidden for fear of having to change, to "change habits." Teresa says that those who look at us from the outside know us (if this is done with love and with the desire for our advantage).

Fantasy often occurs without realism. For example: how do we maintain a Carmel for very few nuns who have not had vocations for many years? How do some few elderly nuns face the president of the Federation, the bishop, the pope or an angel from heaven, if they do not tell them what they want to hear? The examples could go on. Even civil complaints against visitators and superiors are beginning in some countries.

4.4 DISCERNMENT AND HUMILITY

Let us discern and visit one of the greatest urgencies of Carmel today.

I would like to transmit to the entire Order my insistent recommendation of the need to let ourselves be looked at, to ask what those who look at us from the outside see in us, and to humbly ask for advice. The charism of discernment is attributed to St. Ignatius and the Jesuits as well as to bishops, but in Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross there is a bottomless supply of “keys” for discernment which we must recover. Read Teresa in order to let ourselves be read by her! I preached retreats to the Spanish bishops and told them that they also had to expose their prayer and their journey to the Lord. An elderly bishop told me that he did three hours of prayer a day, and asked me if this was correct, or if he ought to change something (which was so admirable!). We are not so selfsufficient to go “solo” along the way; the “way is always superior to our strength” (cf. the story of Elijah). But we must take much more care in the discernment of candidates – with patience, but without fear. Sometimes, the fear of saying clearly to someone that this is not their vocation costs us our life! Yet we do not do them any good if we don’t do this.

COMPASSION AND DISCERNMENT do not sympathize. Compassion applied to discernment has done much harm and continues to do harm to religious life. There is another frequent practice among monasteries of not asking for reports on someone who wants to transfer from another monastery, or not wanting to give reports on someone who goes to another monastery. Information is thus withheld, as if this were respecting the person, when it turns out to be a serious lack of sharing necessary information. In a marriage, to withhold fundamental data about a person is a cause for nullity. Reports are not a judgement, but information so that we know with whom we are dealing, with whom we are going to live. I do not even speak of cases in which the information is hidden on purpose, knowing that the person is insufferable or incapable of living in community and is sent to another monastery.

4.5 OBEDIENCE AND CREATIVE FIDELITY

- Docility and rebellion

There is a docility that can be comfortable and passive, and there is a

rebelliousness that is necessary and appropriate. But there are many sisters and brothers who have true docility, who have a desire to collaborate and not make their own plans alone. Then there are sisters and brothers who systemically oppose everything with a sour face, with a bellyache, and they question everything, they discuss everything, and in every community meeting there is war and egocentric conflict. We know: there are priests, friars and nuns who have no vocation, who are not made for community life even if they have been in the monastery for many years. Sometimes they manage to integrate and learn to get along, but if they become bitter, they are insufferable.

I told Fr. Santiago, who was 87 years old and had just undergone heart surgery, that I wanted to assign him to a formation house, and he told me, without waiting to know the place he would go, said: "send me wherever you want, because wherever you send me, I will be happy."

- Obedience and the abuse of power

We need to recover the sense of Teresian obedience. When Teresa writes the *Interior Castle* during in one of the worst periods of her life, she says that she had noise in her head and could not think how to begin to fulfill that obedience, but as obedience smooths things out, she wrote: "I determined...", and then writes one of the most beautiful pages of her writings... (*Interior Castle*, Prologue and I: 1, 1).

A great majority of us obey and cooperate. But there is also the danger of individualism: some do as they please and are not willing to take no for an answer. Abuse of power is one of the evils of our time, so often dressed in mysticism or enlightenment,⁹ or narcissism, or protective cronyism. There were eternal prioresses (today no longer so frequent) or those who find it very difficult not to be prioress and who cannot put trust in others (the "plug generation"¹⁰ [or "infirmity clique," translator's note] which blocks the formation of others for leadership for the sake of the future of the community). There are persons whose sole interest is to occupy positions of power and do the impossible to obtain them. To covet positions is a

⁹ There are those who give more credit to their visions, revelations, particular apparitions than to the Gospel. For Teresa of Jesus, it was clear... obedience always came before any particular revelation.

¹⁰ There is a great deal written on the Internet about the 'plug generation' if you want to look for some information.

serious sin in religious life.

Abuse of power can come from superiors, but also from those who do not have positions but who want to impose their will without listening and without thinking of others, but only of their own interests or whims. Obedience comes from listening well; a true leader knows how to listen to what is going on inside, he lets himself be advised by what he hears inside, without imposing himself by force. In some cases, there is a growing disobedience to what may come from outside and from superiors, from Rome or from the Dicastery. We no longer say that the Dicastery cannot make mistakes, but for us not to obey, not to accept the norms and the word of the Church head on, is not the Teresian spirit.

Today in monasteries there is still an atmosphere of asphyxia and excessive control (I am not talking about the need for order and discipline), which ruins trust and causes much sadness. Teresa achieves a demanding style of life and generous dedication in an atmosphere of trust, of freedom, where one can breathe and where “all must love each other.” Today there are also some illnesses: manipulators with charm, people who seduce, who have a kind or fascinating side and do not accept opponents or dissenters. They love you and the day you don't dance to their tune, they make your life impossible. There are “affective” blackmailers, abusers who play the victim when you contradict them or have a different opinion. We must open our eyes and create communities where there is transparency and truth, composed of mature women and men, who recognize their limits and let themselves be helped. We must clean up our lives and “disabuse ourselves.” We must help those who protect their complexes by using rigidity and excessive authoritarianism with others. - **Fraternal listening and lack of humanity**

There are communities that have made the patient journey of silence, listening and dialogue, seeking to understand, without imposing criteria, who seek to grow together. One notices a community in which the sisters listen to each other, and each one is valued for herself. In some communities there are sisters who speak too often or too much and do not hold back from speaking without listening to the others, and others who hardly speak, and not because they have nothing to say. Let each one have the confidence to express herself with words or silences, but without fear or misgivings. True mysticism begins with human virtues, mutual understanding, consideration and respect for others, concern for others'

well-being and happiness before their own. Religious ought to be experts in humanity; if they are not, it is preferable for them to retire. - **The statistic and the miracle**

Juan Pablo Patiño has given himself a real “craftsman's beating” with the statistics of the monasteries, numbers and ages...

Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Constitutions **of 1991:**

Countries, **93**

Monasteries (including those not yet erected), **683**

Non-Federated Monasteries, **26**

Nuns with solemn vows, **7343**

Nuns with temporary vows, **587**

Novices, **271**

Postulants y Aspirants, **366**

TOTAL: 8567

Age ranges:

29 and younger: **507**

30-39: **891**

40-49: **1269**

50-59: **1493**

60-69: **1348**

70-79: **1168**

80-89: **1313**

90 +: **578**

The numbers should not be our main concern, even when we are approaching the number of six, which seems to have become “the border of horror” (In the world there are 72 monasteries with six or less than six nuns). The main concern should be, in my opinion, that we face reality without defeatism, and let ourselves be accompanied; not to cover our eyes but to ask the Lord with an open heart, as so many beautiful psalms do (Psalm 24) by asking: which is the way? This cannot be done by the community alone, not by consulting whoever tells us what we want to hear, not by “fishing for” or recruiting nuns from wherever.

We recall *Cor Orans* 257: " The recruitment of candidates from other countries solely for the sake of ensuring the survival of a monastery is to be absolutely avoided."

Note 155 of CO refers to *Vultum Dei quaerere* 3, §6: “Even though the establishment of international and multicultural communities is a sign of the universality of the charism, the recruitment of candidates from other countries solely for the sake of ensuring the survival of a monastery is to be absolutely avoided. To ensure that this is the case, certain criteria are to be determined.”

As a criterion, the General and the Generalate respects these two numbers of the Magisterium. **We do not advise, nor do we authorize the “recruitment” of nuns from other countries to make other monasteries survive.** We have always allowed some exceptions, such as the Holy Land: Mount Carmel, Nazareth, Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as well as Aleppo (Syria), Greece, Tangier and Egypt also, recently, Alba de Tormes. I emphasize these last two places as urgent communities to be safeguarded. The situation of the Alba de Tormes monastery is not only because it is the witness to the end of the life of the Saint but also because it conserves her body. While it is possible to count on a community of nuns, we look for sisters that sustain that community. And Egypt (Fayoum) is now in “temporary closure” and I appeal to all the presidents for this monastery. We will make a special written request for this Carmel.

There is something that spirituality does not usually give: common sense and maturity... if it is not accompanied by docility and openness, by true self-criticism ... We have read John of the Cross a thousand times, but when we must change our habits, we defend ourselves as if someone wants to tear our lives away from us. Teresa said that there are those who have come to the convent solely not to die ... And, nevertheless, the grace of our life is the

Easter experience. It is necessary to dialogue about what is happening to us and how to live the coming years without denying reality, without hiding our heads in the sand like an ostrich or clinging, first and foremost, to patrimony, buildings, customs, etc. Who will teach us to travel the arduous and beautiful road ahead of us, to live the decrease or growth, external or internal, as disciples? There are communities that have taken the theological path of decrease without fleeing, and communities that have revitalized themselves, but they have not done it at any price. Religious life and Carmel is preparing itself in the coming years for an epochal and radical change. If we do not accept this change, we will also lose the grace of living this time with theological joy.

“The best is yet to be born here while what we perceive is a change of epoch, which we should not regret. We do not have a problem of vocations, nor of numbers, nor of strength... we need freshness, hope and reality. Our hope is not in vain. The Church and religious life are opening up to a new life, in an empty tomb, on the Cross and in the manger: to die, to suffer, to be born at every step. For in everything He has conquered and will conquer, and for this reason we conquer easily, 'through Him who loved us'." (Miguel Marquez, Religious Life Week, Madrid, April 13, 2023: "Christ, our hope").

5. CREATIVE LISTENING (EMPATHY)

This key is fundamental to this meeting. It has to do with the wisdom and pedagogy of listening. Good listening. Creative listening. Empathetic listening. Listening in the Spirit. Letting the Spirit be present in what we hear and what we say. Deep listening. Not rushed. Not judgmental or “labeling.” Not framing the interventions by my interest or prejudice or from positions that are previously taken or are immovable.

The discrepancy or the diverse opinions, points of view, perceptions, is not a problem... we want to walk in truth, not in uniformity or with a unique thought. The Teresian style is critical and self-critical. There is no true criticism if we are not self-critical. We need to recognize "the truth of allowing ourselves to be questioned and the evil of always blaming others," said the Jesuit Provincial of Spain. There are very “*true*” sisters to whom no suggestion or criticism can be aimed.

Our ideas will not save us, even if we must exercise our intelligence more, but the Church is not saved by its predictions or its strategies; the Church is only given birth when it accompanies Jesus in the Paschal journey. Ask Teresa to give us her hand. Ask her to free us from what is not her style or from ideologized interpretations....

6. WITNESSES OF GOD'S EXPERIENCE: “Go and tell...”

There is something to shout out with our lives, a story of salvation, an incalculable treasure. Beyond fears or apprehensions, misgivings or illusions, an inner joy for the vocation that has been given to us should be born from this meeting. But if I must take up my announcement in the form of **seven challenges** to help face the future, I propose these:

1. TO FALL IN LOVE (Looking for my love...)

John of the Cross was a man of one love. Teresa fell madly in love with Jesus Christ. Elizabeth, Edith Stein, Therese, Chiquitunga, Teresa of the Andes ... They are saints because they lived madly in love, focused on one love and they left everything for Him. I can find no other strategy for the years ahead, in the face of the coming earthquake, there is no other antivirus for pandemics, wars and suppression of convents.

2. FELLOWSHIP (The company of sisters and brothers)

Take care of each other. Take care of one another. There is much loneliness among some of our sisters and brothers. Be close to each other. Walk together. Care for each other. Guard the face of Jesus in our dealings with each person, with each sister and brother. Do not neglect; do not “invade” another without respect.

3. LET US DISCERN (Those who look at us, know us)

We are living in a time of much blindness, of much confusion, of a growing ideological fundamentalism used to protect primordial insecurity and inconsistency. Salvation lies in the humility of asking for help and walking with others. To discern means to know how to listen well and be listened to, to seek light together. This also implies obedience: not to solve our life and problems alone, not to make plans alone.

4. SIMPLIFY, CENTER, CHOOSE (The truth as a child)

Faced with the growing dispersion and the burden of endless tasks, do not lose the point of reference. Constantly return to the simple. Give attention to what is in front of us. Be where we are. Take care of the moment. Do not forget to live.

This also means resting and knowing how to manage time.

5. SINCERE COMMUNICATION (Charity grows by being communicated)

Be careful not to remain on the surface. Speak of what happens inside

us. Speak from the heart. Train ourselves to tell of and to witness the work of God in us. Maintain attention to each person that we have in front of us as unique. They said that Fr. Jesús Castellano treated each person as unique. And they said of Fr. Tomás Álvarez that at his side you felt important. He gave you courage.

6. LET US "ADVENTURE LIFE:" (*For there is no peace on earth*)

"Without risk there is no discovery." Everything that the Saint lived was born in an intrepid heart that was daring and born humble. She had to take a leap into the void, cross the walls, see herself alone and yet trust, let herself be found by Jesus. Nothing good can be discovered if we do not dare to enter into that unexplored terrain of intimacy, where there is no teacher, no book, no lamp that illuminates. I believe that the Teresian Carmel is very safe, very protected and it lacks risk and courage to explore and grow ... "Trust, and nothing but trust ..."
(Therese of Lisieux).

7. BLESSING THE BUDS

Something new is being born, even under the garbage, in the desert, in the sterility. For the years to come, we must prepare ourselves to let go of securities, to distinguish between what is unhealthy and what is dead, but above all to bless what wants to be born: the little seeds of life.

8. TO RETURN TO MARY...

It is key to allow ourselves to be nurtured by Mary and be born in the intimacy of her womb. The Carmel that Jesus wants to give us through her will be born. Not the Carmel that we want, but the one to which God wants to give birth through Mary.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE (Bl. Eduardo Cardinal Pironio)

When one thinks of a contemplative, one immediately thinks of a serene and peaceful person, almost installed in eternity, capable of communicating joy and hope, able to easily understand others because she looks at everything from God's point of view. And this

is true.

Every monastery is a true gift of God to the Church, and every contemplative is a close invitation of the LORD to be happy in the silence of solitude, in the intimacy of prayer, in the serenity of the Cross.

But we often forget that the contemplative is also a person on a journey, in search, in exile. She is someone who lives in the desert, ardently desiring the promised land. She is a poor woman and feels more than anyone else the limits of her poverty and the pain of her impotence. She believes in the ineffable efficacy of prayer, but often does not perceive the direct fruit of her prayer.

THAT IS WHY IT IS NECESSARY TO PRAY FOR THE “PRAY-ERS” - HOLD UP THE ARMS OF MOSES!!!

(Cardinal Pironio, May 15, 1983)

Miguel Márquez Calle, ocd
Nemi April 16, 2024