



CASA GENERALIZIA CARMELITANI SCALZI
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Clothed in Mary, Moved by the Spirit. A Renewed Covenant: The Brown Scapular

Dear brothers and sisters of the great family of the Teresian Carmel—nuns, laity, friars, associated congregations, priests who live Carmelite spirituality, and all our friends and family. I greet you with great joy on this Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, wherever you may be and in whatever circumstances you may be facing.

I began this month of July in the Holy Land, at our monastery and shrine of Stella Maris on Mount Carmel, under Mary's watchful gaze, beside the Spring of Elijah, sharing this time with my brothers and sisters in those lands, whom I thank for their witness and precious presence. I place the entire Order under Mary's protection and care, with complete trust in her maternal care.

I would like to share three ideas with you: being clothed in the scapular; moved by the Holy Spirit; and being witnesses to the experience of God.

We Carmelites feel and know that we are Mary's beloved children and brothers and sisters. We have been given a sign of this love in the Brown Scapular, which signifies her presence and her heartbeat within each one of us. We want to live always clothed in Mary. She, in the words of St. John of the Cross, "was, from the beginning, moved by the Holy Spirit" (3S 2:10). We, too, like her, docile to the Holy Spirit, want to be always on the move, guided by her gaze and held by her hand, accepting this historic moment with humble boldness and fearless joy.

On this day, I would like to invite you, in a special way, to let Mary bring us back to that first experience of prayer in the Spirit, to the simplicity of first love, and to enter into a profound prayer that leads us, like Teresa, to inspire others with a life of prayer and a passion for Jesus. Once again, we are both disciples and, at the same time, teachers through our lives of this experience and gift we have received.

1. The Gift of the Scapular and the Marian Dimension of Carmel

1.1. Remembering with Gratitude

This year, the entire Carmelite family—OCarm, OCD, and all those devoted to the scapular—celebrates the 775th anniversary of the gift of the Brown Scapular.

It has been 25 years since Pope John Paul II addressed the two General Superiors of the OCarm and OCD regarding the scapular on March 25, 2001, and since the circular letter "With Mary, the Mother of Jesus; Our Lady in the Life of Carmel," written by the two General Superiors, Joseph Chalmers and Camilo Maccise; two excellent documents that I invite you to reread and pray over, given their theological depth and pastoral focus.

1.2. The Ongoing Challenge of Renewing Marianism

The Brown Scapular is a sign of the Marian dimension of our vocation: to live in the service of Jesus Christ, imitating the Virgin Mary. It is a synthesis of our vocation and consecration, whether baptismal or religious.

In line with those documents, we wish to continue deepening our understanding of the theology, spirituality, and pastoral dimension of the Brown Scapular. Recent surveys conducted throughout the Order regarding our Marian life reveal our family's deep appreciation for the gift of the Scapular, as well as the central place it continues to occupy in our pastoral ministry. This call to renew and deepen our Marian identity and devotion to the scapular is rooted in the urgent need for an authentic evangelical theology, spirituality, and pastoral ministry. Clothed in Mary, the simple and humble sign of the scapular reminds us of the need to return to the beauty, freshness, and boldness of our first love. Mary rekindles in each of us the pilgrimage of hope in a world facing the growing uncertainty of tomorrow. Clothed in Mary, we accept the challenge of moving toward tomorrow with the confident assurance of the Mother and Sister who will not abandon us and will always be at our side.

For several years now, we have been committed to this endeavor, inviting every Carmelite, both Religious and Lay, to nurture the Marian dimension—intimacy with Mary, and dialogue with her—as a school of renewal for our friendship with Jesus and a revitalization of our life of prayer. The time has come to ask ourselves once again about our actual life of prayer and about the growth of our friendship with Jesus. Everything related to Mary leads us to the experience of being children in the Son. Mary forms us in the image of the Son of her womb and invites us to be one with Him. All of this is brought to mind by the scapular, which is a summary of this Covenant with Jesus.

From the General House, we have launched some suggestions and initiatives: we have created a Marian life group; we meet periodically to reflect on this aspect of our charism; we have conducted a survey of the entire Order with the aim of gaining a clearer picture of the state of our Marianism in its charismatic, theological, devotional, and pastoral dimensions; the creation of a Marian blog, <https://maristellacarmel.com>—which I invite you to visit—where we post all the most significant content we receive within the Carmelite community; the letters I have sent on the occasion of recent celebrations of the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel; the repeated invitation extended during pastoral and fraternal visits around the world... in addition to the numerous initiatives I have observed in so many communities and circumscriptions of the Order: courses on Mariology and Marianism, study weeks, publications, pilgrimages to Marian shrines, celebrations... I have had the impression that this Marian momentum has been received by many as a timely and necessary call for the times we are living in. We always feel that Mary is the driving force behind a new Pentecost for the Church and for Carmel. This is how I experience it in every corner of the world that I am fortunate enough to visit.

There are other initiatives, aspirations, and projects being fostered by the group dedicated to Marian life that we have established with the brothers from our house in Fatima: a gathering of Carmelite Mariologists, and the organization of a theological conference on the Order's Marian spirituality. We have consulted theologians regarding the perspectives and Mariological themes we need to explore and study. A gathering of Carmelite friars who work at Marian shrines is in the planning stages to discuss pastoral ministry and Marian devotion, the development of fundamental formation topics related to our charism, and their relationship to Mary...

As I reflect on the steps we have taken in recent years and those we intend to take, I also wish to express my gratitude for the appreciation that the provincial chapters have shown for this movement of renewal. We entrust the entire journey we have traveled—and the one that lies ahead—to Mary, Queen and Beauty of Carmel, so that we may reach the summit of the Mountain that is Christ, clothed in Mary's scapular.

2. The Virgin Mary and St. John of the Cross

2.1. A Deep and Intimate Relationship

In addition to the celebrations marking the 775th anniversary of the bestowal of the Brown Scapular, in 2026 we are celebrating the jubilee year of St. John of the Cross: the 300th anniversary of his canonization and the 100th anniversary of his proclamation as a Doctor of the Church. There are not many references to Mary in the writings and life of St. John of the Cross; nevertheless, we can say that her presence is intense and profound. We have some passages from him that are of the highest doctrinal and theological richness.

Some biographies suggest that his preference for the Carmelites at the outset of his vocation was due to the Order's eminently Marian and contemplative character. Just as he was preparing to join the Carthusians, Teresa of Ávila won him over to her founding project, inviting him to collaborate on the reform of the men's branch. He accepted the challenge of continuing to wear the scapular, within the Order of Mary, in the spirit of fellowship and renewal championed by Saint Teresa. Other details regarding the relationship and presence of Mary in the Saint's life have come down to us shrouded in legend and are less significant than what his writings reveal about his Marian thought and experience.

2.2. Substantive Doctrine

The Sanjuanist writings concerning Mary are of great theological and spiritual depth. Among these passages, I would like to highlight, as one of the most valuable, the one he left us in the third book of *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*: "Such was the prayer and work of our Lady, the most glorious Virgin. Raised from the beginning to this high state, she never had the form of any creature impressed in her soul, nor was she moved by any, for she was always moved by the Holy Spirit" (3S 2:10). I recall that Father Otilio Rodríguez, of blessed memory, used to say that this quotation is worth an entire treatise on Mariology (quoted by Ismael Bengoechea in *Ephemerides Mariologicae* 31 (1981), p. 54).

This docility to the Holy Spirit—this, if you'll allow me the expression, dancing like Mary to the music of the Spirit, to the rhythm of the Spirit—constitutes the intimate practice that we would ask her to teach and foster in us: not wanting to dance to anyone's tune, nor to be moved by any other ambition or desire to please, or by fear of not being what other people expect of us. Let us ask Mary for this fidelity and sensitivity of heart. The Virgin Mary was raised from the very beginning to "this exalted state" of loving union with God; that we, with our entire history—our past, our record of successes and shortcomings, of failures and achievements, in times of hardship and in times of prosperity—do not remain trapped in negativity or confined by the limitations of our smallness; we always open our hearts, at the entrance to the cave, like Elijah, to the gentle breeze that moved Mary's whole life and made her a garden, the Garden of His delight. We invoke Mary to make us faithful to this love, rooted in the Spirit's desire to transform our lives and our communities into the image of Jesus—truly spiritual, Marian, and truly Carmelite.

2.3. Current Issues of Great Contemporary Relevance

We are living in a challenging and unstable era; we are experiencing decline in many parts of the Order, and growth in some others, but amid great uncertainty. We are called to rethink structures and what was once considered immutable. The text of the Declaration on the Charism expresses this beautifully in number 3: “We must not be so concerned with the future as with the hidden source from which our hope springs and is nourished”. Mary helps us discern what is important and what is secondary in this time. We ask her for the light to know how to choose and when to step forward or to step to the side.

We live in an age that asks of us neither self-sufficiency nor dwelling in nostalgia. St. John of the Cross, a seeker above all of union with God, tells us that she was always moved by the Holy Spirit. What moves us, personally and as a community, above all else? The disciples, too, kept their doors closed out of fear of the Jews. The temptation of the closed room is always present in the face of the new realities of each age. And we know that Carmel’s most fruitful times were those in which fragility, loss, persecution, or vulnerability were experienced most intensely. Our saints are masters at allowing themselves to be moved by the Spirit in the hours when the temptation to flee was at its strongest. The Holy Spirit and Mary ask of us attentive listening, courageous choices—not driven by fear or distrust—and the daring to put the boldness of faith, humility, and prudence into play, together with the wisdom to realize when the time has come to set out on a new path, to close a presence, or to begin a new experience with simplicity. What moves us, and from whom do we allow ourselves to be guided in discernment? Do we call our own desires the Holy Spirit? Mary, take us by the hand to place us before the breath of the Spirit, on the path that leads us to the future He desires and dreams for us.

In our time, the desire and longing for God are growing; a clear, undisguised search for God is strongly felt in many areas of society and among young people. Often, in their own way and outside institutional channels, many are drawn to Marian shrines, attracted by a certain “*no se qué*” How might we present the Virgin Mary to them as the one who is always a mother, who lived to the fullest what they seek, and who listens when they speak to her with simplicity and sincerity? How might we facilitate that encounter between so many unsatisfied seekers and the Virgin Mary in those places where they are so close to her, and encourage them to embark on a path of interiority, spirituality, and prayer?

Our tradition takes pride in saying that Carmel is wholly Marian. We want to belong entirely to Mary, and—as her brothers and children—to share the adventure, the experience of prayer and intimacy with Jesus that is being renewed at this moment in our history.

3. New Steps, with Mary

3.1. Letting Ourselves Be Guided by the Spirit

In the letter I addressed to the provincial chapters, I wrote: “We propose that the Provincial project of the Chapters includes a fundamental theme that we feel urgently needs to be revived: our experience of God, personal and communal mental prayer. The Carmelite is a mystagogue of a lived experience.” And I went on to specify: “How can we return to Teresian mental prayer and become mystagogues of this experience?”

This new challenge that we have posed to the entire Order touches on another fundamental dimension of our identity: we are preeminently prayers, missionary, and fraternal. When we look to Mount Carmel, to our first brothers and to those who followed in their footsteps in

Europe, beyond their Marian experience, we identify as a distinctive element the fact that they were men who experienced God. It fills me with hope to think that we are entering an era in which ideological debates are giving way to the need for a communion centered on restoring sufficient time, quality space, and theological depth to our prayer in Carmel—so that we may teach it, above all by making it contagious, because people see us practicing it and recognize us as authentic men of prayer.

Indeed, everyone who allows himself to be moved by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16a), as St. Paul says, enters into the mystery of the living and true God. It is the Holy Spirit who unites us to Jesus and, with Him, makes us exclaim: “Abba, Father” (cf. Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15–17). Formed especially by Teresa of Jesus, we are the custodians of a treasure of spiritual experience in our relationship with the One who we know loves us (cf. V 8:5). How can we keep such a precious gift only for ourselves when so many today long for it so urgently?

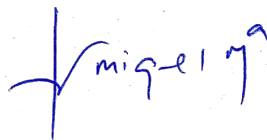
3.2. Remaining in Prayer, with Mary

To pass on this treasure that is prayer, it is not enough to offer courses on the art of praying. We must first and foremost be men and women of prayer, both personally and communally. A Carmelite constantly returns to the silence of the House of Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph have eyes only for Jesus: they love him, adore him, and contemplate him. From this home and from this Holy Family, we, the Carmelites of St. Teresa, have inherited the ideal of Nazareth, with Joseph and Mary as our teachers of intimacy with Jesus in ordinary life (cf. V 32,11). This is what Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection also taught us, whether in the kitchen or in any other task, there is a burning presence that captivates the heart. Together with Mary (Acts 1:14), we prepare for a new Pentecost in Carmel—the one she wishes to give us.

On Mount Carmel these past few days, I have felt a deep trust in Mary, an impulse to trust as she does in the face of the future, knowing that God will open the paths that lie ahead, with the simplicity and joy of one who knows they are sustained and moved by the Spirit. I invite you to accompany me—those who are poor yet courageous—in this trust, surrendered to Mary’s gaze, giving thanks for this Solemnity together with all of you, my brothers and sisters.

WISHING YOU A VERY HAPPY FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL!

Stella Maris, Haifa, 16 July 2026



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