

LETTER OF THE PRIOR GENERAL ON THE SOLEMN MEMORY OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL 2015



Dear brothers and sisters,

Another year gone by, and we are again looking forward to the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel. On account of that I would like to say a word to you all, first of all, to wish you a happy feast day and to express the wish that the novenas, liturgies, prayers and celebrations of the coming days may help all of us to give new life to our charism and make it more present and more alive in our hearts. There is no doubt that the Marian dimension is one of the constitutive elements of all Carmelite spirituality. Even though we give it many different forms and expressions, depending on the different places and cultures, it is something that unites us and indeed, fills us with joy. With this in mind, I offer you, this year as in others, the Novena that Fr. Joseph Hung Tran, O.Carm. has written based on the texts provided by the different Carmelites who very kindly support our web page.

This year I would like to highlight four topics that affect us as an Order and religious family and which we might keep in mind during our celebrations. Firstly, this year we are celebrating the 5th Centenary of the birth of St. Teresa of Jesus. Throughout the Order there have been numerous events, conferences, and publications, and we still have a few months left in which there will be more activities of different kinds. Teresa is a key figure in the history of Carmel and one of the high points of its spirituality. Woman, writer, pilgrim,

mystic ... and many things more, she invites us to return to her writings and to her example, and to find in them insights (inspirations, models, creativity) for our life as Carmelites today.

On more than one occasion, Teresa displays in her writings her devotion to the Blessed Virgin. As a child, in Avila, she entrusted herself to Our Lady of Charity asking her to be her mother. When she entered Carmel, she absorbed the spiritual traditions and deep devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which would remain with her for the rest of her life. Thus, when she began to write the *Way of Perfection* Teresa pointed out, with humility, “*If there should be anything good in this work, may it be for the glory and honor of God and the service of his most Blessed Mother, our Lady and Patroness, whose habit I wear, despite my being very unworthy to do so*”, (*Way of Perfection*, Introduction). Then, at the end of her round of foundations, Teresa cried out in joy, “*We were happy to be able to serve in some way our Mother, and Lady and Patroness*” (*Foundations*, 29,23)

These are texts that move us and at the same time invite us to serve “our Mother, Lady and Patroness” who leads us to the heart of the Gospel and of Christian life. May this saint from her place in heaven help us to live in joy and authenticity that Carmelite and Marian devotion and piety.

As a second point, it is worth remembering that we are in the middle of the celebration of the year of consecrated life in the Church. As you know, Pope Francis proclaimed this year and invited all religious to celebrate it as a time of grace, reflection, and discernment, indeed, a time for renewing our life in joy, generosity and creativity. At first sight, it might appear that this topic has to do only with religious (friars, cloistered nuns, religious women of the apostolic life), however, as Pope Francis has pointed out on various occasions, consecrated life is not intended to exist for itself, but for the entire Church. Therefore, as we now prepare to honour Mary as the Mother and Advocate of Carmel, we ask her to help us to renew our consecrated life and renew each one of us, in order to put our lives at the service of the Gospel, in communion with the whole Church.

A third point is that this year we celebrate the 750th anniversary of the death of St. Simon Stock. Of course it is true that the figure of Simon Stock is enveloped in the shadows of the Middle Ages, and historians have found plenty of material to study and debate. However, according to the tradition, and without getting into any controversy, Simon died in Bordeaux on the 16th of May, 1265. That is why this year we record the 750th anniversary of his death. Simon Stock is tied to the tradition and piety of the Carmelite scapular, and for that reason, it is not out of place to be reminded of this central element of our charism that unites us to Mary, Mother and Sister of all Carmelites. Please God, we, like Simon Stock, may turn to Mary, in our moments of sadness and discouragement, in our trials and disappointments, so that she, first teacher and first disciple of our Lord, may help us to journey as disciples and witnesses of the Good News of the Gospel, especially in our proximity to the poor and needy. The Carmelite scapular, in all its lowliness and simplicity (and perhaps, precisely for that reason) continues to be a reminder of our commitment to the values of the Gospel and is a seed of hope.

As a last point, I would like to share with you that on the 23rd of May just gone by, Bishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, assassinated in March 1980, was beatified. The reason for including Oscar Romero here is that during his ministry as a bishop, on at least three occasions, he spoke very beautifully about the Blessed Virgin of

Mount Carmel and about the July 16th celebrations. As you know, Romero had the habit of recording his sermons, that were then broadcast on the radio in order to reach as many people as possible. On the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in 1976, 1977 and 1978, the Archbishop praised this devotion and asked that it might become a platform for evangelisation and liberation. With a pastoral style that reminds us very much of the document of *Aparecida* and Pope Francis as well, Romero invites us to discover the evangelising power that lies behind popular devotion, which, even if in some instances it needs to be purified of certain risks, such as, its fleeting sentimentalism, its exterior folklorism, or the absence of commitment in the way people live, still contains an enormous wealth for the whole Church. In these devotions, the simple people very often find the form in which to express the great truths of faith, as well as their great trust in God through the Virgin Mary. Romero, who always wore the scapular, asked people to wear it, no matter what the consequences, with Christian authenticity, healthy devotion, and childlike affection for the Mother of Carmel.

Even though I cannot spend much time on it, I would like to share with you two expressions of Romero that fill us with a healthy pride and encourage us to continue to tirelessly promote this very popular devotion, so full of beauty in terms of its spirituality and its theology. He said: *“There is no preacher more attractive to our people than the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel”* (1977). *“Our people feel that Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, is the great missionary for the people. (...) We unite our reflection then to this affection of the people, of religious and of priests, for Our Lady of Mount Carmel”* (1978). Not long after, the Archbishop was shot while he was celebrating the Eucharist and he died not far from the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, in the “little” hospital.

I pray that Mary, our Mother and Sister, will always accompany us and guide us in the very complex and fascinating world in which we live, and may she help us to share with everyone the Good News of salvation.

Happy Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel,

Fraternally,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Fernando M.O.C.", written in a cursive style.

Fernando Millán Romeral O.Carm.

Prior General