

# INTO THE LAND OF CARMEL

## A LETTER OF THE PRIOR GENERAL TO THE CARMELITE FAMILY

### Introduction

1. In this year, 2002, the Carmelite Family celebrates the 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the letter from the Pope entitled, “Cum Nulla”. It was granted by Pope Nicholas V and addressed to Blessed John Soreth the Prior General at the time (7<sup>th</sup> October 1452).
2. The immediate motive for the Papal Bull was a response to a request by the Order to the Pope to recognise the privileges of the Prior of the Carmelite house in Florence to aggregate lay people to the Order. The response from the Pope opened the way throughout the Order for the official recognition of something that had been happening unofficially for at least one hundred years.
3. The origins of lay association with religious orders go back to 11<sup>th</sup> century monasticism. Lay people who wished to live a religious lifestyle but who were not monks or nuns were called, “conversi” (males) or “conversae” (females). These lay people took three vows and lived in community. There is evidence of female solitaries being aggregated to the Order from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The oldest group of “sorores” (sisters) known in the Order is found in 1300 when the Prior General, Gerard of Bologna, aggregated a group to the Order in Venice. The oldest group of “lay Carmelites” is found in Lucca, also in Italy, in 1284.
4. Before the Bull “Cum Nulla”, there were men and women associated with the Order in various ways. These individuals and groups were considered to be completely part of the Order, irrespective of the canonical status they enjoyed. The Order was always rather creative and shared the charism with others who also felt inspired by it. Official recognition came later. This is the normal way things happen. In certain parts of the Order today there are new things happening. New ventures are always a risk but we can learn from the past that God can shape wonderful things from very small beginnings.
5. The Bull “Cum Nulla” opened the door for the eventual entry into the Order of active sisters who work for the spread of the Reign of God throughout the world. These Carmelite women bear witness to the Good News which Jesus Christ brought principally to the poor. The anniversary of the Bull is an opportunity for all Carmelites to reflect on the different ways of living the fundamental Carmelite values. In this letter I want to concentrate particularly on the importance to the Carmelite Family of our nuns and lay Carmelites.

### Carmelite nuns

6. The Constitutions of the Carmelite nuns state, “Since its arrival in Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Order had some women united to its spirit in a particular way and who soon committed their lives with the same religious vows as the men of the Order were then doing. The papal document ‘Cum Nulla’ of Nicholas V (1452), while it approved a situation already

in existence, laid the basis for an orderly development of the feminine branch of Carmel so that the ‘Blessed Mother of God might be venerated by the women religious, as she was by the men of the Order’ (Const.19 quoting a letter of the nuns of Ten Elsen to Bl. John Soreth, Oct.14, 1453 in AOC, 11 (1940-42),41). From small beginnings there has arisen a worldwide movement of women dedicated to the service of God and their neighbour by living joyful lives of prayer and penance. This way of life has produced many saintly women, most of whom remain unknown except to God. However, the most famous daughter of the cloistered Carmelite movement is the great St. Teresa of Jesus, who took the traditional elements and with great ingenuity reworked them for her many foundations. Living in an age of great ferment and upheaval, she incorporated the best of the past in a fresh and creative vision of the contemplative life, a vision which now influences all Carmelite nuns. Indeed all Carmelites look to St. Teresa as an unparalleled source of inspiration and guide for the spiritual life. In the Constitutions of the nuns, the words of St. Teresa are used to express the call which they have received from God, “we feel ourselves ‘called to prayer and contemplation. This call explains our origin; we are the descendents of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers on Mount Carmel who in such great solitude and contempt for the world sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation’. (St. Teresa of Jesus, *The Interior Castle*, V,1,2.)” (Const.61).

7. Cloistered Carmelite nuns remind the whole Church of the absolute demands of God’s love. They give a radical response to the call of God by giving their lives entirely to prayer. The goal of this way of life is contemplation and so the cloistered nuns are often called “contemplative nuns”. Contemplation lies at the heart of the Carmelite charism. By living in this radical way, they bear witness to the centrality of contemplation for all Carmelites and their silent lives bear witness to the world that God alone suffices to respond to the infinite desires of the human heart.

8. Throughout the ages we find many ways of understanding contemplation. At times it has been confused with certain ecstatic and emotional experiences in prayer. Contemplation may or may not include such experiences but often it seems to develop within an ambience of darkness and dryness. A contemplative has a mature and intimate relationship with God. Human relationships that arrive at true intimacy have been through various stages and both parties have matured. Of course in the human-divine relationship, God never changes but we do and indeed we must. Human relationships can teach us a great deal about the relationship with God but they do have their limits. It is God who seeks us and courts us in order to lead us on the journey of transformation towards the goal of human life, which is union with God, in which we become like God. Life in a Carmelite enclosure is totally focused on responding to God’s call to grow in this relationship.

9. Our Lady was a true contemplative in the sense that she was always on the same wavelength as God, even if she did not always understand what was happening. She “kept all these things in her heart”(Lk.2,51) and she sought the will of God in the events of her life. She is the model for the contemplative life.

10. The Church has often stressed the importance of the example of the Mother of God for contemplatives, e.g. ,“Nuns relive and perpetuate in the Church the presence and the work of Mary. Welcoming the Word in faith and adoring silence, they put themselves at the service of the Incarnation, and united to Christ Jesus in his offering of himself to the Father, they become co-workers in the mystery of Redemption. Just as in the Upper Room, Mary in her heart, with her prayerful presence, watched over the origins of the Church, so too now the

Church's journey is entrusted to the loving heart and praying hands of cloistered nuns." (Verbi Sponsa, 4).

11. In every part of her life, the Carmelite nun stands before God praying for our world, which has so many needs. Mary, in the Gospel scene at the marriage feast in Cana (Jn2, 1-11), is a wonderful model for the prayer of the Carmelite nun. Our Lady said to Jesus very simply, "they have no wine" and then left everything with complete confidence in his hands. Her words to the stewards of the feast, "Do whatever he tells you", reverberate around the cloisters of the nuns and beyond into the world. Perhaps the moment in Our Lady's life that most perfectly represents the vocation of the Carmelite nun is when she stood silently at the foot of the cross. Her silence was more eloquent than many words.

12. For the Carmelite, the Prophet Elijah is also a powerful model of the contemplative life. The Word of God first of all transformed him and with burning zeal, he proclaimed this Word to his contemporaries. He stood in God's presence, ready to serve and obey no matter the personal cost. Elijah challenged the people to stop hobbling first on one foot and then on another (cf. I Kings 18,21) in the sense of serving two Gods. Each human being has to make a choice. The contemplative is aware of the subtle temptation to avoid the full implications of responding to God's call and substituting our own will for God's. The one who has been burned by the Word of God refuses to accept placidly any attempt to manipulate the name of God for human purposes. Elijah was open on Mount Horeb to meet God in new and unexpected ways and to understand that God is present even when all appearances are to the contrary. (cf. I Kings 19, 9-13). The Carmelite nun has a contemplative and prophetic vocation, or rather her contemplative vocation includes and inspires her prophetic vocation. She is not called upon to preach in public but the witness of her life reminds all of us of the importance of listening for the voice of God in the gentle breeze or in the sound of sheer silence (I Kings 19, 12). Once we hear this voice, we will be changed forever.

13. The goal of the cloistered life and of all the regulations that surround it is to provide the ideal preparations to receive contemplation, the sublime gift of God. By means of the gift of contemplation, the human being is united with God and therefore purified and transformed. A contemplative looks upon all created things as if with the eyes of God and loves as if with God's own heart. This is not an exact science and so the mystics tend to prefer poetry to prose when trying to describe their experience. Contemplation is not a gift only for the individual but is for the world. It transforms the person, who can then see from God's perspective. This involves a profound conversion of the heart as the contemplative sees clearly the injustice and lack of unity in our world and strives all the more that the values of the Reign of God become a reality.

14. The adventure of human life is a process of growing in love and an essential part of this process is the purification of the heart. Without undergoing this painful process, we cannot love in truth. The purification is painful because through this dark night all our pretensions and illusions must fall. We come to realise in the depths of our being that it is only by the grace of God that we live. It is easy to say this but quite another thing to understand it. First we must pass through the dark night. The dark night is not a punishment but is a sign of God's love for us and a sign that God is setting us free to become what we were created to be. The darkness is more intense when the love of God reaches to the most intimate parts of our being, but the darker the night, the closer we are to the dawn.

15. The Pope has praised the contemplative lifestyle and has declared its great value for the Church and for the world. The value of this way of life is that those called to it consciously enter into this process of purification and transformation. St. John of the Cross tells us, “.....it is more precious in the sight of the Lord and for the soul and of greater profit for the Church a single drop of pure love than all the other works put together.” (Spir. Canticle B, 29,2). A human being who has been completely purified and from whom the presence of Christ shines forth, can do much more than we can possibly imagine. In this way, the Carmelite monastery reflects God’s love and presence in the world.

16. The Constitutions of the Carmelite nuns take up this point when they state, “The Carmelite nun, faithful to the rich tradition of the Order, is of inestimable service to the people of God by living in the presence of God, by ardent prayer and by apostolic zeal. In imitation of Elijah, from whom Carmel receives its inspiration, she follows the prophetic way as a characteristic belonging to a life oriented toward interior listening to the Word of God; she is a special witness to the living God and the supreme demands of His Kingdom. In intimate union with Mary, the book where our Rule is written because in her the Word is written, she proposes to live the mystery of her interior life and her intrinsic union with God in Christ Jesus.” (Const.22). They go on to say, “In fact, an authentic contemplative life is necessarily apostolic. For this reason the apostolic spirit permeates the whole of our life in such a way that prayer and sacrifice are animated by ecclesial and missionary zeal, according to the example of our Father Saint Elijah: ‘I have been most zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts.’”. (Const.92).

17. The enclosed life could appear to be a very small world, and it is a constant temptation for those who live this way of life to reduce it to this. However, it is intended to enlarge the heart of the person called to this way of life so that she can embrace the whole world. St. Therese of Lisieux exclaimed with joy, “I discovered where it is that I belong in the Church, the place God has appointed for me. To be nothing else than love, deep in the heart of Mother Church; that is to be everything at the same time.” (Man.B, 3v). She discovered her personal vocation and I would suggest that it is the vocation of all Carmelite nuns. Everything they do, say and think in the small world of the monastery has an eternal and worldwide significance. In the past I have encouraged greater contact between the friars and the nuns in order to foment a greater sense of family among us since we are sisters and brothers. We have a sacred duty to help each other in practical ways but above all so that we can all live our vocation to the full. The most important way in which the nuns can assist the other members of the Carmelite Family is by means of their prayer and daily sacrifice. From their contemplative outlook, they can remind us all of our common prophetic vocation to bear witness to God’s love for the poor.

18. We do not have the means to judge the value of prayer and how it helps others. It is a matter of faith and we know from the Gospels how much Jesus valued faith. St. Therese’s prayer and sacrifice for others is well known. She believed that it was love alone that made it possible for the apostles to preach and for the martyrs to shed their blood. (Man. B, 3v). The whole Carmelite Family is united in and through prayer, opening us, as it does, to the presence and action of God in our lives.

### Models of the Cloistered Life

19. The Carmelite cloister has produced very many holy women, most of whom are known only to God. However, the Church has beatified and canonised several as models for

the whole Church. These have an appeal far beyond the cloister, and they bear witness to the fact that God alone suffices to respond to the infinite desires of the human heart. It is not the purpose of this letter to describe all these saintly women but I want to briefly touch on a few outstanding figures, who are models for the cloistered life.

Blessed Frances d'Amboise (1427-1485)

20. The foundress of the Carmelite nuns in France is recognised as Blessed Frances d'Amboise. With her husband, who became the Duke of Brittany in 1450, she reigned as Duchess for seven years until his death. After several discussions with Blessed John Soreth, she decided to become a Carmelite nun and provided the funds for the foundation of the first monastery in France. This was at Bondon, near Vannes in 1463, with nuns from Liege. Bl. Frances herself joined in 1468. In 1477 she founded a second monastery in Nantes. She also had a profound influence on the legislation for Carmelite nuns, insisting on strict enclosure, thus anticipating by a century the legislation of the Council of Trent.

Bl. Joan Scopelli (1428-1491)

21. Bl. Joan was born in Reggio Emilia in Italy and sought from an early age to live a life dedicated to God. She belongs to the pre-history of the Carmelite nuns and is a principal figure in the foundation of the Second Order in Italy. She received mystical graces from God but had to suffer a lengthy period of inner purification. Her Carmelite heart can be seen especially in her profound relationship with Our Lady. The monastery, which she founded in 1485, had as its principal goal prayer for the Church. Bl. Joan, with twenty-two young women companions, placed themselves under the Mantuan Congregation of the Order. She was the Prioress of the monastery as well as the spiritual guide. She had no tradition of Carmelite female monasteries in Italy to look to for inspiration but her genius was to adapt the fundamental Carmelite values to a new situation. Similar developments were occurring in France, as noted above, in Belgium and in Spain about the same time.

Bl. Arcangela Giralani (c.1460-1495)

22. Another famous figure in the establishment of the Carmelite nuns in Italy is Bl Arcangela, who entered the monastery of Parma along with her two sisters in 1477. On entering Carmel, she took the name of Arcangela because she desired to spend her life in the praise of God just like the angels in heaven. She became prioress not long after her profession and very shortly her sanctity became widely known throughout the area. She was requested to make a new foundation in Mantua. It is reported that the citizens of Parma were devastated to lose their "saint" but the people of Mantua were ecstatic. This medieval excitement may not happen in our days but it does give some indication that a contemplative monastery is not just for the sanctification of the nuns themselves but bears witness to the love that God has for all men and women.

St. Teresa of Jesus (1515-1582)

23. From time to time God raises up people who are specially gifted in order to do some particular work. The main lines of the life of St. Teresa of Jesus are well known. She became a Carmelite nun in the monastery of the Incarnation in Avila in 1536. It was in this

monastery that Teresa received her early formation as a Carmelite and it was there she returned as prioress.

24. In 1554 she underwent a profound conversion experience in this monastery and she vowed never again to give up the practice of personal prayer. In 1562 Teresa made her first foundation in St. Joseph's, Avila. Although the foundation met with various difficulties of a local political nature, it had the approval of the Provincial of the Castille Province, Fray Angel de Salazar. It is well known that Fr. Rossi (or Rubeo), the Prior General of the Order, during his visitation to Spain in 1568 to oversee the implementation of the reforms of the Council of Trent, thought very highly of Teresa and told her to found "as many monasteries as you have hairs on your head." He realised that her desire to found a new style of monastery was not a rejection of Carmel but a desire to live the Carmelite ideal profoundly in an original and creative way. Within the monastery she found many nuns with the same desire.

25. St. Teresa received great gifts in prayer and most importantly received the gift of being able to describe her experiences in order to help very many people on their journey towards God. Teresa is very practical when she states what is necessary for a life of prayer in the monastery, and indeed anywhere: "love for each other, detachment from all created things and true humility – the last is the most important of these three and embraces all the rest." (Way of Perfection, 4,4). These three virtues refer to our fundamental relationships – to people, to the world around us and to God. She writes often of the need for our love to be purified so that it will truly do good to those to whom it is directed and will assist our growth. Detachment means to have a right relationship with people and with things, which also involves a process of purification.

26. By the time Teresa wrote her works she was a great mystic. She had been through the good times and the bad times that everyone experiences in prayer and she had come through to the other side. From this perspective she was able to look back and help others who were struggling with prayer. She taught with great authority and with a profound understanding of the human condition. She herself had given up personal prayer for about twenty years, in the sense of an intimate conversation with God. When she took up prayer again, she vowed never to give it up for any reason whatever. Her whole focus, when she writes on prayer, is on opening oneself to receive the gift of contemplation. She stresses the importance of self-knowledge for this whole journey (Int. Castle 1,8). In contemplation we no longer dialogue with the mystery of God; we are brought into the mystery of God. We prepare ourselves to receive this gift if and when God chooses to give it by means of fidelity in prayer and in daily life. If an individual receives the gift of contemplation, she will be changed. The authenticating sign of growth in prayer is that the person is becoming simpler, humbler, more loving and so on. It is vital that the individual continue to seek God and not herself. St. Teresa always remains very practical. She warns against self-absorption in prayer. The road to union with God does not depend on how one feels in prayer but how one responds to God in daily life.

#### St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi (1566-1607)

27. She entered the Carmelite monastery of St. Mary of the Angels at the age of sixteen in 1582, the year of St. Teresa's death. This was a vibrant monastery with about eighty nuns. The first five years of Mary Magdalen's religious life were marked by visions, ecstasies and

other phenomena. Members of the community wrote down her ecstatic utterances and to them we owe our knowledge of St. Mary Magdalen.

28. One of the marks of St. Mary Magdalen's spirituality was a great love for the Church, a passion for its reform and for the reform of the consecrated life. She is an eminent witness of the apostolic zeal and the ecclesial dimension that is the fruit of true contemplation.

29. The Carmelite monastery is a vibrant part of the local Church and is not a refugee from the world. The Carmelite nun, like St. Mary Magdalen, plunges even more deeply into the heart of the Church and its mission to spread the Good News of the Reign of God. The enclosure is a physical separation from the world in order to give the greatest freedom to the Carmelite nun to be spiritually united with every human being. "Their life thus becomes a mysterious source of apostolic fruitfulness and blessing for the Christian community and for the whole world." (Verbi Sponsa, 7).

30. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi had a profound devotion to the passion of Christ and saw in it the way in which the human being was recreated. Her spirituality was christocentric and at the same time marian. She understood the human being's return to God as the struggle between two loves: self love and love of God. Pride destroys the union between God and the human being and between human beings. Humility re-establishes the union. It is love that is the key to the human-divine relationship. The spiritual life for the nun from Florence is circular; it has its beginning and its end in God. The transformed person lives the life of God and is of great benefit to the whole Church.

31. The liturgy was the setting for many of the ecstasies of St. Mary Magdalen. Often after receiving Holy Communion, which she perceived as the sacrament of love, she would enter into profound prayer. The liturgy is an essential element of the life of the Carmelite nun. Like the hermits on Mount Carmel, the Carmelite nun goes from the solitude of her cell to the chapel at the heart of the monastery and then returns to her cell. She brings to the prayer of the community, which is the Prayer of Christ, head and members, a heart that has been purified by her communion with God in the solitude of the cell. She is strengthened by the prayer of the community to continue her search for God.

32. The faithful celebration of the Divine Liturgy is an integral part of the mission of the cloistered community. The daily celebration of the Eucharist and the divine office is a share in the continuous prayer of Christ to the Father. The whole being of the Carmelite nun is enlarged through her life of union with God and she opens herself to all the needs of the Church and the world and presents them through Christ to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

#### St. Therese of the Child Jesus

33. The best known daughter of St. Theresa of Jesus is of course the saint from Lisieux. While she was a member of the Discalced Carmelites, her teaching and example are valid not only for all Carmelite nuns but also for all Christians. She went against the spirituality of her day, which tended to see God as a very hard taskmaster and the spiritual life as a series of mountains to climb. Therese understood that God was her Father who loved her infinitely and who desired to make her a saint. She knew that she did not have the strength to climb these impossibly high spiritual mountains but that Jesus himself would lift her up. She taught that all that was necessary was a great trust in God. With this trust, Therese became a great

saint and Doctor of the Church. She always wanted to be a missionary and it seems that her wish is being literally granted in our days as her relics are greeted by millions of people in many countries.

34. Life in an enclosed monastery may appear to be very restricted but St. Therese taught by her example and her “Little Way” that we can show our love for God in very small ways and God will use this love for the salvation of all. St. Therese brought to a new level what St. Teresa first taught: “God does not look so much at the magnitude of anything we do as at the love with which we do it.” (Interior Castle, 7,4,15). The Carmelite nun is called to live entirely for God for the salvation of the world. By doing every little thing with great love she will become what she has been created to be and will become a powerful apostle of God’s love to the ends of the earth.

### The Future

35. In line with the general trend in Europe and North America, the cloistered life is suffering from a lack of vocations. However in other parts of the world there has been a surge of vocations and recently two new monasteries have been founded in The Philippines. The Order has also made a foundation in Africa (Machakos, Kenya) in recent years. The General Council has committed itself to help the nuns prepare a Ratio for the formation, initial and ongoing, of all who enter and live the cloistered Carmelite life. This process has begun and an initial meeting of assistants to the nuns with some representatives of the monasteries and members of the General Council will be held in February 2003. All the nuns will be involved in the process before the publication of the Ratio, which I hope will take place by the end of 2005.

36. In most people’s minds, Carmel is inextricably connected with the life of prayer. The witness of lives dedicated entirely to God is needed more and more in our world, which is lacerated by hatred and wars. St. Edith Stein, co-patron of Europe, was a victim of racial and religious hatred but triumphed through her embracing of the cross of Christ. The enclosed life bears witness to the love of God, which is more powerful than hatred and which will one day conquer every human heart. The post-Synodal document, Vita Consecrata puts it this way: “Even in the simplicity of their life, cloistered communities, set like cities on a hilltop or lights on a lampstand (cf. Mt.5,14-15) visibly represent the goal toward which the entire community of the Church travels. Eager to act yet devoted to contemplation, the Church advances down the paths of time with her eyes fixed on the future restoration of all things in Christ, when she will appear in glory with her Spouse (cf. Col.3,1-4), and Christ will deliver ‘the Kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power ... that God may be everything to everyone’ (1 Cor.15,24,28).” (VC 59).

### Lay Carmelites

37. On this 550<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bull Cum Nulla, we also celebrate the incorporation of lay people into the Carmelite Family. The vast majority of lay Carmelites belong to what is still usually called the “Third Order”. The terms “First”, “Second” and “Third” are taken from the Servite Order from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were never intended to refer to a hierarchy but simply reflected the historical reality that some groups were founded officially earlier than others.



38. In some Provinces, members of the Third Order are called by the generic name of “lay Carmelites”, although the latter also covers many other realities and groups. In several countries there exist many ancient Carmelite Fraternities and Confraternities. There are also many new groups springing up in various parts of the world. These new groups bear witness to the creative energy that exists within the Order. Not to be forgotten of course are the countless millions who wear the scapular of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The Carmelite way has inspired many lay people throughout the world to live the Gospel in a profound, and at times, heroic way.

39. I want to focus in this letter particularly on the members of the Third Order, whatever may be the term used in different countries. I believe strongly that lay Carmelites in the sense of members of the Third Order, have a true vocation and are bearers of the Carmelite charism for others just as much as the friars, nuns and sisters.

40. The main elements of the Carmelite charism are well known: prayer, fraternity and service. These three elements are bound together by contemplation. Above all, Carmelites are called to follow Jesus Christ and live the Gospel in daily life. In our following of Christ, we are inspired by two biblical figures: Our Lady and the Prophet Elijah. Every Carmelite, whether religious or lay, is called to live this charism. The way in which we put these elements together will differ according to our state in life. Lay people must live the Carmelite charism precisely as lay people. Jesus said that he was not asking the Father to take his friends out of the world but to protect them from the evil one (Jn 17,15). All Carmelites are in the world in some way but the vocation of lay people is precisely to transform the secular world.

### The Rule and lay Carmelites

41. The Rule of St. Albert is the charismatic document that stands at the beginning of all forms of Carmelite life. In this brief text are the essential elements of the Carmelite charism in embryo. These elements have been worked out more fully through the years that followed and the Carmelite tradition has been enriched by the lives of countless individuals and especially by our saints. Every person who is called to live according to the Carmelite way has some effect upon the tradition and passes it on to others.

42. Carmelite religious have Constitutions by means of which the Rule of St. Albert is applied to the conditions of the present day. In the same way, the Third Order have a rule, the first of which we know anything is that published in 1675 by Philip of the Visitation. It was said to have been originally by Bl. John Soreth in 1455 but this is unlikely. The present Third Order rule like the Constitutions of the religious, seeks to make the connection between the Carmelite ideal and the present reality of those who pledge themselves to live by it. For a number of years, there has been discussion and study at national and international levels aimed at updating the Third Order rule. I hope that we will soon be in a position to present a suitable text to the Holy See for approval and publication.

43. Throughout the world there are many diocesan priests and permanent deacons who are members of the Third Order. Their vocation is different from the majority who are lay people. However for all the members, Carmelite spirituality is the inspiration in their living of the Gospel message in daily life.

44. The Third Order rule focuses on the mission of lay Carmelites, which is rooted in baptism, and through which each Christian shares in the common priesthood of Christ, his regal dignity and his prophetic ministry. Lay people exercise these functions by taking a full part in the life of the Church and extending the benefits of the liturgy to daily life. They are to contribute to the sanctification of the world.

45. Within this common baptismal vocation, some lay people are called to participate in the charism of a particular religious family. Profession as a member of the lay Carmelites is an intensified repetition of our baptismal promises. By entering the Order they take upon themselves the Carmelite charism, which is profoundly marked by prayer. Therefore prayer, both liturgical and personal, is a vital and integral part of the life of the lay Carmelite. Participation, daily if possible, in the celebration of the Eucharist, is the source of the spiritual life and apostolic fruitfulness. The divine office, as a share in the prayer of Christ, is encouraged for the lay Carmelite and is also a source of great help on the spiritual journey. Personal prayer is vital for the life of lay Carmelites and the traditional ways, found in Carmelite spirituality, are particularly stressed, above all *lectio divina*, the prayerful listening to the Word of God, which is intended to open us to an intimate relationship with God in and through Jesus Christ. Devotion to Our Lady will be a mark of the lay Carmelite because she is the Mother of Carmel.

46. Like all Carmelites, the lay Carmelite is called to some form of service, which is an integral part of the charism given to the Order by God. Lay people have the mission of transforming secular society. They can do this in many different ways according to their possibilities. The great example for prophetic action is Elijah, whose activity had its source in a profound experience of God.

47. Fraternity is also an essential element of the Carmelite charism. Lay Carmelites can create community in various ways: in their own families, where the domestic church is to be found; in their local parish, where they worship God with their fellow parishioners and take a full part in the community activities; in their lay Carmelite community in which they find support for the spiritual journey; in their workplace and where they live. The latter need the witness of those who are committed to love their neighbour as Christ taught and so contribute to the transformation of the world according to the plan of God.

48. Contemplation is what binds the other elements of the charism together. Like all members of the Carmelite Family, lay Carmelites are called to grow in their relationship with Christ until they become his intimate friends and as such will be a powerful transformative influence on the world. The traditional helps for the development of contemplation are often absent from our world, which is marked by frenetic activity. Therefore lay Carmelites must seek out times when they can lay aside the cares of daily life for a while and allow God to speak to their hearts in silence. Strengthened by this food, they can continue their journey and look at the world with new eyes. Contemplatives can see the presence of God in unlikely situations; God always precedes us and is present in every situation before we arrive. It is our duty to discover the presence of God in the midst of what is around us and proclaim this presence to our world.

#### The Challenge

49. Being a lay Carmelite is not just a devotion added to life; it is a way of life; it is a vocation. For this reason a sound formation is essential just as for the friars, nuns and sisters.

The main challenge facing lay Carmelites is to translate the essential elements of the Carmelite charism into daily life. Let us take as an example devotion to Our Lady. This is an intimate part of the Carmelite tradition. What does this devotion mean at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In the year 2001, the Order celebrated the 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the scapular. The Pope pointed out in his letter for the Carmelite marian year that the scapular was essentially the habit of the Order and so the wearer must have some connection with the Order and its spirituality. The scapular is a powerful symbol of the presence of Our Lady not only in this life but also at the transition from this life to the eternal life with God. The scapular also implies a double-sided commitment. Our Lady is the Patroness, Sister and Mother of Carmelites and as such takes care of us. On the other hand, we must seek to put her virtues into practice in daily life. Therefore a Carmelite's devotion to Our Lady is not fulfilled simply by the recitation of some prayers, whether they be few or many.

50. In recent years as an Order, we have rediscovered *Lectio Divina* as a powerful way of prayer and indeed a way of life. *Lectio Divina* is the prayerful listening to the Word of God which, like all prayer, is intended to open us to contemplation. Our Lady is the model of one who listened to the Word of God. Clearly it is not sufficient merely to listen to the Word; Mary put it into practice and so must we (cf. Lk 8,21). In the traditional movement of *Lectio Divina*, there is a time for meditation on the Word that has been heard, and this pondering must lead to prayer which in turn leads to silence, a profound silence open to contemplation. St. John of the Cross wrote, "Seek in reading and you will find in meditation. Knock in prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation." (Maxims & Counsels, 79).

51. Mary, the Mother of Carmel, listened to the Word and lived it. She listened to this Word and meditated on it in whatever way it came to her in the events of her life. At the Annunciation, she accepted and cooperated with the will of God that came to her through the message of the angel; at the foot of the cross she accepted and cooperated with the will of God in sorrow. In the words of the Magnificat we meet Mary the contemplative, who looked at the world through the eyes of faith and glorified God for the fulfilment of the divine plan.

52. All Carmelites have a particular relationship with Mary; lay Carmelites have to live this relationship, imitating her virtues, listening to the Word of God in and through daily life. The world in which we live faces us all with many challenges. The social structures that supported faith have disappeared in many areas and the option to follow Christ needs courage. The vocation of lay Christians, above all, is to be a leaven at the heart of the secular world. Lay Carmelites live this vocation, inspired by the Carmelite tradition. In the Magnificat, Our Lady gives glory to God because she is aware that God is at work transforming the whole of reality even though appearances might suggest otherwise. Lay Carmelites also stand with Mary at the foot of the cross, cooperating with the mysterious will of God who desires to save all men and women. By living the Gospel in daily life, like Mary, our Patroness, Sister and Mother, lay Carmelites play their part in the transformation of the world.

## Conclusion

53. In recent years the concept of the "Carmelite Family" has become part of our normal way of thinking. All Carmelites, religious and lay, are members of the same family and live the same vocation in different ways according to our differing states in life. We are inheritors

of a great tradition and we have the sacred duty of passing this tradition on to others. We do so in ways consonant with our particular vocations.

54. As members of the same Family, we are united with each other through our prayer for each other and our mutual assistance. In this way we are a powerful witness in the Church and in the world that the Carmelite charism is alive and continually inspiring people to live the message of Jesus Christ. Throughout the centuries of the Order's existence, there have been many ways in which individuals have found inspiration in the Carmelite charism. The Church has officially approved some of these ways while other people prefer a looser connection with the Family. Some of the new ways of being Carmelite, which are emerging in our own days in various parts of the world, may be the beginning of a new work of the Spirit. Let us remain open to the inspiration of the Spirit and, with discernment, read the signs of the times. The charism of our Order contains great creativity. We give thanks to God for having been called to Carmel and we thank God for all our brothers and sisters.

55. May God bless our Family and bring us all to our heavenly homeland. May Our Lady of Mount Carmel teach us how to listen to the Word of God and put it into practice in daily life.

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Prior General  
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