



The Holy See

***LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
TO THE PRIOR GENERAL OF THE ORDER
OF THE FRIARS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN
OF MOUNT CARMEL ON THE OCCASION
OF THE EIGHTH CENTENARY OF THE "FORMULA VITÆ"***

*To the Very Reverend
Father Joseph Chalmers
Prior General
of the Order of Carmelite*

Fathers and Brothers I am pleased to learn that this ancient and illustrious Order is preparing to celebrate its General Chapter this September, on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the presentation by St Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1205-1214), of the formula vitae which inspired the Latin-rite hermits who settled "near the spring on Mount Carmel" (Carmelite Rule, 1). This was the first recognition by the Church of this group of men who left everything to live worshipping Jesus Christ, imitating the sublime examples of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Prophet Elijah. The canonical process ended with several amendments, followed in 1247 by the approval of the Rule by my Predecessor, Pope Innocent IV.

This year, through a happy coincidence, the Order of Carmel is also celebrating other events perceived as moments of grace, such as the seventh centenary of the devout death of St Albert of Trapani, known as the *Pater Ordinis*, and the fourth centenary of the entry into eternal life of St Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, the Seraph of Carmel. It is therefore a cause of deep joy for me to be able to express my participation in the intense spiritual experience which the Carmelite Family will be living on the occasion of the Chapter.

The first Carmelites went to Mount Carmel because they believed in the love of God, who so loved the world that he gave his Only-Begotten Son (cf. *Jn* 3: 16). Welcoming into their lives the Lordship of Christ, they made themselves available to being transformed by his love. This is the

basic choice that faces every Christian. I pointed it out in my first Encyclical: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas Est*, n. 1). If this concern challenges the Christian, how much more must the Carmelite feel challenged by it, since his vocation is to scale the mountain of perfection!

We know well, however, that it is far from easy to live this call faithfully. In a certain sense, we need to wear armour to guard ourselves from the snares of the world. This is also specified in the Carmelite Rule: "Your loins are to be girt with chastity, your breast fortified by holy meditations, for, as Scripture has it, "holy meditation will save you". Justice must be "your breastplate and it will enable you to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength, and your neighbour as yourself. Faith must be your shield on all occasions, and with it you will be able to quench all the flaming missiles of the wicked one" (n. 19). And, further: "The sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, must abound in your mouths and hearts. Do all that you have to do in the Name of the Lord" (ibid.). Many women and men have attained holiness by living with creative fidelity the values of the Carmelite Rule. Looking to them, as to all the other disciples who have faithfully followed Christ, "we are seeking with a new reason the city which is to come..., while at the same time we are taught to know a most safe path by which, despite the vicissitudes of the world, and in keeping with the state of life and condition proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, holiness" (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 50).

The theme of your Chapter Meeting - Worshipping Jesus Christ: A praying, prophetic community in a changing world - clearly highlights the special style in which the Order of Carmel seeks to respond to God's love by means of a life steeped in prayer, brotherhood and a prophetic spirit. At the heart of your Rule is the precept of coming together every morning to celebrate the Eucharist. In fact, "The Eucharist reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history.... God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us" (Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 8). Daily Mass: God is all in all The first Carmelites, who pursued their personal sanctification through daily participation in the Eucharistic Banquet, were already fully aware of this: in fact, the daily celebration of the Eucharist introduces "a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. I Cor 15: 28)" (ibid., n. 11).

With his gaze fixed on Christ and trusting in the help of the Saints who in the course of these eight centuries have embodied the dictates of the Carmelite Rule, each member of the Order of Carmelite Fathers and Brothers should feel called to be a credible witness of the spiritual dimension proper to every human being. The lay faithful will thus be able to discover that Carmelite communities are "genuine 'schools' of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly "falls in love" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 33). May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and ornament of Carmel, help Carmelite

men and women, the members of the Third Order and all who in various capacities participate in the Great Family of Carmel, and teach them to obey the Word of God, cherishing it in their hearts and meditating upon it daily. May the Prophet Elijah make them assiduous heralds of the Living God and guide them to the holy mountain where they were granted to perceive the light breeze of the Divine Presence.

With these sentiments, as I invoke upon the entire Carmelite Family an abundance of gifts of a renewed Pentecost that will increase zeal for the Lord, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all, with a special thought for the Capitulars.

Castel Gandolfo, 14 August 2007

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