



CURIA GENERALIZIA DEI CARMELITANI

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**MESSAGE OF THE PRIOR GENERAL
TO THE CARMELITE FAMILY
FOR THE SOLEMNITY OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL
16 JULY 2023**

The 16th of July unites people all around the world in celebration and thanksgiving for the gift of our love for Mary, the Mother of God, under the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

In our tradition we recognise Mary as both Mother and Sister. Under both of these titles I would like to reflect with you this year on the world in which we live, that world which God so loves and has always loved that he sent his only into it to be its Saviour.

Now that world is in pain, the very earth itself is in pain, and people in all parts of the world live each day without any security or hope in the future. Their conditions are determined, not by good or bad fortune, not by their own willingness or lack of willingness to work and be responsible, but by conditions that are determined by the social and economic policies of those who hold power and the greed and avarice of those who have used their talents to gain more and more for themselves and their immediate circles without any consideration for the people outside those circles.

That is our world as it is today, or rather, that is but one dimension of the world as it is today. The other dimension is the one in which we see how individuals and organisations work hard to build a world of justice and equality. These people are many and they come from different schools of formation, from different religions and no religions, people who have a sense of equality and who act with justice in their own lives and seek justice from our institutions and governments. We Carmelites are there. We are there because of our Carmelite calling that teach us the values for which Jesus gave his life, and which Mary and Elijah and our Carmelite saints exemplified in their openness to God and their love for their brothers and sisters living in the world.

My Soul Glories the Lord Lk 1,46

Our life is made up of relationships. No one lives alone, and we live in a common home that has to be fully a home for all. All that we try to do is aimed at building and maintaining a good relationship with God, with neighbour, with family, with all other human beings and with the earth itself. Good relationships are those in which the participants grow to maturity. Even God "grows" if we believe that the glory of God is the human person fully mature. The

earth too grows to maturity, when it is able to fulfil the plan made for it by the Creator. Right and good relationship is a good way of understanding justice. It is what we have to build all the time in order to live in a way that respects the dignity of every human person as a child of God created in God's image and likeness.

In Carmel, we honour our Lady as the Lady of the Place. We have understood Carmel to be a place of beauty, a garden full of beautiful flowers, pleasant odours, glorious colours and constant growth and harmony. Mary is the Lady of that place, made holy and beautiful by the lives of people who live in that place under the mantle of Mary. Just as Carmelites are called to a life of prayer, they are called to dedicate their lives also to the cultivation of the place that belongs to Mary.

If I take a look at the world I will see where people are fulfilling that calling. It is there in all that we do. It is there in the lives of our cloistered sisters, in their monasteries, in the lives of Carmelite sisters working with the sick, or in schools, or in parish ministry, it is there in the lives of lay people who live good lives and do their best to create environments in which people can live in dignity and friendship, it is there in the lives of friars in their communities, their parishes, schools, prison chaplaincy, care for the sick, spiritual accompaniment and the list continues. It is true that sometimes we keep working without a great consciousness of the good we are doing and the difference that exists between our world and the world of the greedy and ruthless and uncaring. But the difference is there and it is motivated by our prayer and by our life in community.

This quest for justice is also to be seen in the work of people on the margins. In many instances Carmelites around the world have reached out in a particular way, to people who are homeless, people caught up in the tyranny of chemical dependence or in the web of human trafficking, to people who have no access to education or to healthcare and need the help of those who know how to love with a gospel love. Our history speaks to us of a constant commitment to the poor. In that place that Mary watches over, the poor have pride of place. In that place the poor teach us how to hold on to hope when there is very little sign of hope other than our trust in God and our trust in people. It is remarkable that having been so badly treated by people the poor continue to hope in people. The world of the poor, the place that belongs to Mary, is a welcoming place, the gates, security cameras, guard dogs have been removed, there is nothing to defend. That is our poverty too, that we have nothing to defend, because God is the one who defends us and all we are called to do is defend the name of God so that it is not used to justify selfish interests, and to defend the image of God on the face and in the lives of every one of our brothers and sisters.

If for some reason there are Carmelites who live in a world that is built around themselves and their own needs and ideas, a selfish world that purports to be a religious world, then the celebration of the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel may be a moment to reflect, and to move out of the pursuit of our own selfish interests. Mary's Yes is an example for everybody of the person who listens to the voice of God. That voice today comes to us through the Word, the Church and the world, where the cry of the poor is as strong as ever, awaiting a response from people consecrated to living in allegiance to Jesus Christ. Today Mary, our sister, makes that cry her own. She weeps for her sons and daughters who find it difficult to say no to all forms of war, to the pursuit of selfish ends no matter what the cost to others. She weeps to see so much disregard for the elderly, the offering of so many unhealthy values to the young and so many arbitrary decisions about the lives of the unborn.

We cannot any longer be indifferent to the reckless use of weapons, expensive weapons, around the world. There has to be a way of recognising that a gun has no other purpose than to injure or destroy the life of a living organism, more often than not a human person.

We cannot see the talents of so many young people go to waste while they live on the streets and find their way into gangs who out of cruelty and desperation destroy the lives of their members and of others who get in their way. We cannot close our hearts to the children who are forced to grow up in refugee camps or on the banks of dried up rivers, with nothing to eat and nothing to drink and lives that only last a few days. For all who have the kind of commitment and sensitivity that will build a just and peaceful world, *Laudato si*. Let God be praised! Let him be praised in our lives and all our actions aimed at building the world that God has prepared for us. To achieve that God will continue to put forth his arm in strength, to scatter the proud hearted, to cast the mighty from their thrones and raise up the lowly, to fill the starving with God things and send the rich away empty.

May these days of celebration be for all of us an inspiration to do all that we can, knowing that if we do more the Lord will reward us on his return.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, pray for us.



Fraternally,
Míceál O'Neill, O.Carm
Prior General

