



CURIA GENERALIZIA DEI CARMELITANI

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A LETTER TO THE CARMELITE FAMILY FOR THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL 2022

Brothers and sisters in the Carmelite Family,

as the solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel approaches, we find ourselves in festive mood. We want to celebrate and give thanks to God for everything that Our Lady of Mount Carmel represents for us. In a particular way, we want to give thanks to God and to Our Lady because the fear we had of Covid 19 this time last year has lessened and life for many is returning to some kind of normality. At the same time we continue to pray for Our Lady's protection for us and for the world.

This year for us has been blessed by the canonization of Saint Titus Brandsma. Who will ever forget those days of joy and happiness in Rome, and that moment in St. Peter's Square when along with nine other disciples of Christ our brother Titus was declared a saint?

Sadly, this year has also been marked by the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, to add to the many other ills that cause so much suffering to innocent people around the world. We think of the many displaced persons, without shelter, living in refugee camps, many of them women and children. Meanwhile the men continue to be drawn into unwanted armed combat.

The celebration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and the example and inspiration of Saint Titus Brandsma, invite us this year to ponder, the gift of Carmel, seen through the experience of our new saint. We can see what Carmel offers us as the deepest motivation for the work of peace. We can contemplate and make our own God's desire for peace and for the fullest dignity of the human person.

As Mary stood at the foot of the cross, along with John the beloved disciple and the other women, Jesus in that moment created a new kind of human family, built not on the bonds of blood, but on the reality of people caring for one another. Now it is the son who takes the mother into his home. Things are changed around. The dream and the project is that sons and daughters come into the world and as they grow up, they grow into the ability to care for all that is there before them in order to hand it on to the sons and daughters who will come after them.

Both the Corona virus and the welcome given to refugees from the conflict in Ukraine have given us in many instances new examples of how people care for one another, especially in times of deep suffering. As we observed the precautions around the Corona virus we knew that we were protecting ourselves and others also. As we accepted the restrictions on social contact, we did so in order to help stop the spread of the virus, something that now, thank God, seems to be within our grasp. Then the flow of refugees from the conflict in Ukraine arrived on our doorstep. Throughout Europe there has been a quality of welcome that has surprised even ourselves. Governments and private citizens have opened their offices and family homes to welcome people who in an instant found themselves having to leave their homes and their livelihoods in order to seek refuge from violent attack coming from the skies.

Mount Carmel represents for us the place both of mystical and fraternal encounter, where the members came to a deeper knowledge of God and of one another through all that they did by their life of solitude and by their coming together, pondering day and night on the law of the Lord. This is our way too. Under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in allegiance to Jesus Christ, through our solitude and our coming together we build a culture of peace among ourselves and thus bring forth and give birth to a Word of Peace for the world.

Each week in the Liturgy of the Hours we repeat the canticle of Isaiah, that speaks of the mountain of peace.

It shall come to pass in the latter days
that the mountain of the house of the Lord
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,
and shall be lifted up above the hills;

The highest mountain is the one that is worthiest of honour. If it had a voice, its voice would be the one that we would listen to most. Amid the many voices that tell us what should happen in the world, we pay prayerful attention to the voice that speaks of truth, transparency and love, a voice and a vision that stand above every other vision, particularly the visions that are based on the preservation of the vested interests of the few, while millions of people go hungry, are homeless, have been displaced.

and all the nations shall flow to it,
and many peoples shall come, and say:
“Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways
and that we may walk in his paths.”

The mountain is there for all, but it needs people to lead the way. Here we get the sense of how we help and invite one another to seek the ways of the Lord, the highest way, the way that respects the full dignity of the human person, and that hears the cry of each child of God.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law,
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

Mount Zion and Jerusalem the city built on a height, to which the people go up, singing their songs, today has become a place of conflict. They remain for those who believe, the representation of God's commitment and closeness to his people, through a chosen people and a chosen place. It is in Jerusalem that God will establish peace for his people. "On Jerusalem peace". (Ps 122)

He shall judge between the nations,
and shall decide disputes for many peoples;

Where are the leaders today who speak of right judgement, who look to the higher wisdom of God, in order to find the wisdom that will resolve conflict and mark out the path that leads to peace and wellbeing for all? Judgement, must be based on truth, and wisdom. Our wisdom comes from the Word of Wisdom. We find it in Mary, and in the saints of Carmel. It is the wisdom by which we are able to judge all that we see happening around us, and in that judgement see the workings of salvation, and add our yes and our collaboration to the work of God.

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
neither shall they learn war anymore.

Isn't that what we would all love to see. In my years in Peru, I used to see the children parade in the town square on Independence Day, with imitation rifles and imitation machine guns in their hands. At that early age they were being taught to think that a weapon of destruction was more important than an instrument of honest labour, a pen, a shovel, knitting needles, a crucifix, as a way of defending the nation. The picture we have of Titus Brandsma is that of a peace maker, in the midst of his books, or pen or pipe in hand, in deep conversation with colleagues, fellow Carmelites, students. For him a newspaper was a way of defending the truth and the freedom of every human person.

Titus Brandsma looked for the deepest motivation for all that we do and hope for. He saw Carmelites as people who are bearers of the Word, just as Mary was a bearer of the Word. That Word is peace. Those who have received that Word, and cherish it, are people who can bear that Word for the world and give birth to it in the world. In his retreat notes Titus suggested that "From Mary we must learn how to remove from our hearts all that does not belong to God. From her we can learn how to open our hearts to God in a way that will make them full of his grace. Then Jesus will enter, and be born again in us and grow in us. He will become visible in the things that we do, and he will live within us. The less we are full of God, the poorer our lives will be. With Mary, full of grace, we will live the life of God and find in our union with the Lord our own glory and salvation".

Our founders on Mount Carmel devised a way of life that was a formula of peace, as their response to the armed forces that prevented them from entering the Holy City, Jerusalem. Mary was at the heart of that plan of peace. They would not resort to armed conflict, but rather, they would put on the armour of God.

Just as St. Titus prayed that one day Germany and the Netherlands would walk together in the way of peace, my prayer for all of us as we approach the Solemnity of Our Lady of

Mount Carmel is that we will truly learn the ways of peace from earliest childhood to the end of our days, and along with the prophet, I say, O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord. Let Carmelites everywhere fulfill their vocation to be bearers of the Word, and let that Word truly be the Word that is Peace.



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