

CARMELITE IDENTITY

by Leinfar Lee Ah Yen, ocds, member of Markham Community of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel

One would think that after four hundred years, anyone, anywhere, could recognize a Secular Order Carmelite. Not so! Our life style is ordinary, our habit concealed, our prayer life is hidden.

We have all read, studied and listened to talks given by our OCD fathers, the O.C.D.S. Secretariat and from our own community, that there is a CARMELITE IDENTITY. It is what motivates and attracts us to seek out a distant life style, to be part of an Order, to belong to a community.

Although attraction and motivation will lead us to Carmel, they need to be fortified with other elements to transform us from who we are to whom we hope to become.

Fr. Aloysius Deeney noted six distinct elements when combined would provide motivation for someone to seek a CARMELITE IDENTITY with the Order.

1. Practicing member of the Catholic Church
2. Under the protection of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
3. Inspired by St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross
4. Who makes a commitment to the Order
5. To seek the face of God
6. For the sake of the Church and the world.

The fortifying elements should be:

1. Love of God, of Mary, of the Order
2. Sacrifice giving up, denial, detachment, poverty of spirit, sharing, caring
3. Attitude humility, an open mind, a generous heart
4. Focus on changes evolving from self-knowledge, self-evaluation, obedience
5. Determination to stay on course despite frustration and obstacles
6. Commitment whole-hearted, free and zealous
7. Appreciation of the gift of vocation we have received.

Membership in any association follows set procedure. There are entrance requirements; rules to follow; probationary period; an evaluation and selection process; dues to be paid. Carmel is similar in some respects. Participants are interviewed, we follow the Rule of St. Albert, undergo a formation period and an evaluation and selection process before admission to the Order of the Teresian Carmel and we pay dues.

Similarity is completely erased after an initial Community meeting.

1. Our meeting is obligatory;
2. Prayer and education are the essentials;
3. It is convened for our Christian and Carmelite growth according to the Teresian charism;
4. Although the meeting is fraternal, it is not a social gathering.

The Community as a whole, fashions and shapes each candidate through prayer, support, interaction, guidance and encouragement. It is also during this initial stage that the Community is scrutinized and judged

by the Candidates and we cannot be found wanting.

We must also face the reality that even with the best intentions on both sides, we may have different expectations and there could be a parting of ways, eventually.

The fortifying elements can strengthen our resolve for the reasons listed below.

Love of God, of Mary, of the Order. St. Therese of the Child Jesus said in one of her letters that love can do all things, and the most difficult things do not appear difficult to it. Jesus does not look so much at the grandeur of actions or even their difficulty as at the love that goes to make up the actions.

Keeping love alive in a relationship is hard work, really hard work. It takes constant effort, input, honesty, trust, communication, and above all, charity to foster growth. We are busy, we seem to have more to do at work every day, less time to eat, no time to visit family and friends. Technology helps. The telephone, e-mail, and cell phones are substitutes for the lack of face-to-face meetings. Is there even time for courtship these days?

Carmel beckons and if the spark of love is there, respond like Mary with a humble YES, then let your soul magnify the Lord and He will do great things for you. God is love and the Father of time. Co-operate with the Lord, tell his mother of your difficulties and if Carmel is for you, it will all work out.

Sacrifice is the reflection of love, so love too, self-denial, detachment, poverty of spirit, sharing, caring; all characteristics of Jesus, the one whom we love and desire. Are we ready to imitate him? St. Therese in the Story of A Soul said that love is nourished only by sacrifices and the more a soul refuses natural satisfactions the stronger and more disinterested becomes her tenderness.

The Oh my gosh! **Attitudes** will thwart the best intentions.

Oh my gosh! Is the Carmelite meeting tonight?

O my gosh! I have to read or make a note on chapter ten.

Oh my gosh! Another trip to London for a retreat?

Oh my gosh! Shouldn't you be somewhere else!

At times when we feel overwhelmed by all the requirements and obligations of Carmel, **Stop, Assess** the Situation, and **Focus** on what is important. **Act** on what has to be done and remember that obedience is part of the Promise a Carmelite makes.

Determination Our Holy Mother, St. Teresa of Jesus tells the sisters in chapter 21 of the Way of Perfection that, in order to reach the end of the journey along this way of prayer, they need a very determined determination. They must have a great and very resolute determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don't have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses!!

Commitment Another dimension of love and sacrifice. Are we heroes or cowards? Do we trust in God or rely on our feeble efforts? The following is from the Ways of Perfection by Simon Tugwell, O.P. from the chapters Two spirit fathers in the East Barsanuphius and John.

Holding to the now is the way to be faithful to the continual novelty of God's deeds; failing to do so goes with lack of faith and hardness of heart and leads to seeking guarantees, just as the Pharisees asked for a sign.

Appreciation A token of gratitude, a card of appreciation; a note to say thank you, social obligations, courtesy, good manners, etiquette, however you call it, these gestures are expected in a polite society.

God has given us Carmel for our holiness and peace. Let us remember to thank Him for this gift with grateful hearts.

Thanks be to you, my joy and my glory and my confidence, my God, thanks be to You for Your gifts, but please

preserve them for me. For by doing so you will preserve me and those things which you have given me will be enlarged and perfected, and I myself will be with you, since my very being you have given me. (From the Confessions of St. Augustine 1,XX,31).

This closing quote is from our Holy Father St. John of the Cross. "In the evening of this life, you will be judged on love!"

Carmelite Identity Formation and Self Evaluation.

There are a number of ways you become a member of a family: (a) by birth; (b) by adoption; (c) by marriage; and (d) by choice.

We can safely dispense with the first three methods and concentrate on choice. Whether you were called; whether you followed, or whether you chose, you are here now, present at this meeting of the family of Carmel, which means you want to be identified and be called a Carmelite.

Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters all have expectations, obligations and responsibilities. They interact with each other, depend on one another, and work together for the common good. A sound family structure is built on love, loyalty, obedience and service and all the other characteristics that are the fruits of those principles.

Family ties are strengthened by frequent gatherings, attending traditional celebrations, offering advice, encouragement and consolation in times of trial, guarding the reputation and the family's honour and good name. Life within any family is a constant challenge if you want to maintain peace and harmony. In a most positive way, a family like that could mold you, shape you and inspire you to be the person God wants you to be. Who would not want to belong to such a family?

In no small measure the Order of Carmel does the same for her own family. Whereas, a family abides by unwritten rules, Carmel has the Rule of Life and the Constitutions to help their members live a certain way in an organized manner in the spirit of the Gospel according to the Teresian charism.

<<quotes removed for publication on the internet>>

Carmelite formation is an on-going, life-long process. There is no graduation day. Instead, progress is rewarded with increased responsibility and more active involvement in the welfare of the community. Spiritual formation in conjunction with active involvement in the community ensures stability, continuity, conformity and growth.

Returning to the subject of choosing the family of Carmel, commitment is not an option. It demands love, sacrifice and determination and the most essential ingredient of all TIME.

There is something in our life that we can use only once. We each receive a different length, but it measures the same wherever we go. It is everywhere but we cannot find it and no one can afford to buy it. Although you need it, you spend all of it so you never have any of it for yourself or anything or anyone else.

You hear it everywhere. I have no time! I cannot find time! There is no time! ... Yes there is time. Something so important must be accounted for. What do you do with it? How do you spend it?

1. Study your present and personal life-style.
2. Include family obligations.
3. When is your wake-up time?
4. How long is your prayer time?
5. How long is the distance and travel time every day?
6. Work schedule, in and out time, overtime, time spent on work related study.
7. Meal time.
8. Recreational time.

9. After work activities. Frequency per week/per month.
10. Time spent on above.
11. Level of involvement.
12. Level of responsibility.
13. How much time is allotted to Carmel every day? Prayer /meditation /reading /study /formation study program.
14. Arrival time at the monthly meeting.
15. Departure time at the monthly meeting.
16. Specific task you did for or at the meeting.

One last word, you are responsible for who you are. It is your goal, your fulfillment, your particular way of life, your formation, your allegiance, your Promise, your commitment.

The measure you give is the measure you will receive, and the free choice is yours.