

The Charism of the Teresian Carmel

by The Very Reverend, Fr. General, Luis Arostegui Gamboa, ocd

In the history of what is called Carmel (taken from the mount of this name in former Palestine) there has flowed over the years personalities whom, we can say, had an influence beyond Carmel. There is in Carmel a theological and biblical path to the depths of theology, represented by St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross, and other Carmelite figures, such as Therese of Lisieux or Edith Stein (and, of course, Jerome Gracian, and others, including those who have not been canonized). Their authentic spirituality in and for the Church shows us that our charism has not been fixed for ever, set in concrete, so to speak, for all time, only to be reproduced in the same way. But these Carmelite men and women have forged a path to the centre and origin of Christianity, "to the deepest centre", "we enter more into the inner depths". Without ever intending to be, they became the criteria of a charism and a source of inspiration.

This Carmel always keeps safe in its heart the jewel of solitude and silence, but above all contemplation, that loving gaze into the depths of the human condition, into the light of God (in which consists the depths). But this Carmel is also itinerant, it lives in the midst of people, in towns and cities. It is in sharing the knowledge of the theological desert that is the world, that the desert has become, above all, something spiritual, and the pain of this knowledge is converted into prayer. This spiritual desert is also called "night" in the experience of Carmel which has gone to the centre of this night, which was what it wanted and for which it searched. Our Holy Parents discovered, in this solitude with nature, the transparency of the divine beauty, footprints and reminders of He who, "pouring out a thousand graces, he passed these groves in haste". Teresa of Jesus underlined how we are descended "from these our holy Fathers, who in the profoundest solitude searched for "this treasure, this pearl beyond price". Having praised these men she, in fact, founded her Carmels in such a way that there was great togetherness and recreation, in simplicity, with common sense, joy and naturalness. She asked the Friars to be well educated and work fervently in serving the Church, according to its needs. But in their togetherness and community life and joy etc., they were to transport in their hearts the desert or the "night", "longed for more than the dawn", searching for the "pearl beyond price" of contemplation (that finally, for Teresa of Jesus, found its truth in the love of God and ones' neighbour; a love manifested by deeds).

The Carmel of Teresa of Jesus was the basis of her spirituality, (as it was for other true witnesses who followed her), in other words, it was a living intimate friendship, trusting in Jesus. Her Carmel existed only for the Church and for humanity. All the striving, hopes and sufferings of this humanity were embraced (contemplation) as hers, in an active and committed way, without limitations.

It is true to say that this Carmel can be reborn again today, because it does not depend so much on its past as on its "deepest centre" of what is human and evangelical.

Luis Arostegui Gamboa, ocd, Superior General

On June 26th, Fr. General Luis Arostegui Gamboa, OCD, came to Canada to Celebrate Mass with, and to meet the Secular Order Members in English Speaking Canada. There were over one hundred and fifty members present. Fr. General concelebrated Mass with the Definitor Fr. Robert Paul OCD, Fr. Jorge Zurek, OCD and Fr. Dominic Borg, OCD.

The Very Rev. Fr. General Luis Arostegui delivered the following Homily during Mass.

My dear brothers and sisters, I can speak with feeling spontaneously in Spanish, but I cannot speak it in English. So first of all, I thank you very much for your coming here, some of you from afar. You know that the Mission of the Father General is to maintain, promote and foster a life, a vitality, a spirituality, especially in the communion, a living union for other brothers and sisters of the Order. In fact, one of the most beautiful experiences in my mission is to meet my brothers and sisters, because the main reason for this Mission of the Father General is to visit the Provinces, the Regions, to maintain a contact with the Provinces, communities

and persons. It is impossible for me to visit directly, personally, all the members in communities and provinces of the Order because we are many. Many are the brothers, friars, many the sisters, cloistered sisters and many, much more the Secular Carmelites. So my Councillors and Definitors are visiting in the name of the Father General, the Definitory, these regions. But, it is a great pleasure for me to visit, because it is enriching very much my experience of the Order. I myself am enriched by my visits, by the personal contact with the brothers and sisters. So, at this moment it is a pleasure and a joy for me to greet you and to thank you.

I would like also to comment on the Gospel of today - not all of it, but on the first words we heard. Jesus says; "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for me, for my sake will find it." Apparently, it seems that these words of Christ are especially hard because "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.". Apparently it is hard. I would like to be able to explain to you what I feel about this. I am convinced that they are "apparently only' hard, but in reality they are sweet, very sweet, because for Jesus the relations of the family were sacred. It was natural, it was accepted, and there is the fourth commandment we are told to love and respect the family, so it is only natural and sacred for Jesus. Therefore the question is not about this acceptance but the acceptance of the following of Jesus himself. The question is "who is Jesus Christ?" Who, who is this man who speaks this way? There is a comparison. I say, it is important the love and respect of the family. There is here someone who is more important still. So, this text is suggesting to us "who is Jesus Christ". He alone can speak this way, for others to say these words is hard, but they are sweet, they are sweet for us, because I am suggesting who is Jesus Christ. He is telling me to love God above things, but he is not denying the family. There is no positions. He says who is he, the Son of God, our Brother, our Saviour. For that is most important to believe what we believe. But understand well this love relationship - an allegiance to Jesus Christ.

He is suggesting "Who is here?" The Son of God, Jesus Christ, our Saviour. You know that the Spirituality of Carmel the deepening of the relationship of God, of Christ is a trait, a characteristic most important to the spirituality of Carmel. All other spirituality, according to Holy Mother St. Teresa of Avila, has this bases, friendship with God-Friendship. And God appeals for us, according to Holy Mother Teresa, according to the Master, but especially, thanks to the Spirituality of Carmel, the Church has deepened the experience of the humanity of God, in Christ. God is human, thanks to the experience of Christ the man. So wrote Holy Mother. Holy Mother Teresa after years of mysticism, experienced profoundly, deeply this humanity of God in Christ. This is the basis of our spirituality, this personal relationship of Christ, Son of God, our friend, our brother, our hope, our trust and confidence. For us even better, the Words of Christ are not hard but sweet, a revelation of who is Jesus for us. So you, as Carmelites, I encourage you to deepen personally, this personal relation of God in Christ, friend, brother for us and to put your life at the service of this Saviour, at the service of the Gospel, because this is important, most important work for love says Jesus Christ, "he who leaves father and mother for my sake, for my Gospel, at the service of mankind and humanity is a relationship of service for humanity is important, most important.

I encourage you to live personally the prayer of friendship with God in Christ. God appeared in the human face of Christ, to whom your life of service for the sake of Christ, for his Gospel, his salvation --- hope for humanity. I want to remember the words of Pope Paul VI, "Christ is a man of sorrows and hope. He knows us and loves us. As our friend, he stays by us throughout our lives, our shepherd, our leader, our ideal, our comforter and our hope." Do you remember the words of Pope John Paul II "Have no fear of Christ. Open the doors to Christ."? And now Pope Benedict also says, "Have no fear of Christ, he does not take off anything, and gives all.". And the last word of the Lord Jesus in today's Gospel he says, "Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple-truly I tell you, none no one will lose their reward." This is the Gospel of Christ. Not even a cup of cold water given to one of these little ones, will remain without a reward. The Gospel of Christ is a Gospel of fraternity, justice and peace among us.