

## **THE GENTLE PRESENCE OF MARY**

*by Fr. Pius Sammut, O.C.D.*

The Cathedral in Saipan is dedicated to her. Agat has this woman as her patroness. In Tamuning there is a small community of Discalced Carmelite Sisters who regard her as their mother, sister, patroness and model. Her name is Mary, she is also known as Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Tomorrow is her feast day.

A round brilliant cut diamond has fifty eight facets and they all reflect the inner sparkling beauty of this precious stone. The Carmelites underline one particular facet when they look at Mary - her tenderness. In their anthem the Flos Carmeli, known within Carmel at least from the late 14th century, they sing "Mother most tender, whom no man didst know". When he wrote to the Carmelites, Pope John Paul II, in March 2001 he spoke of the "tender and maternal presence of Mary" which we seek by wearing the Brown Scapular. She is loving, she is tender, she is affectionate. She is gentle.

There is a tribe in East Africa where the art of intimacy is fostered even before birth. When a woman desires a child, she goes off and sits alone under a tree and listens until she can hear the song of the child she hopes to conceive. Once she hears it, she returns to the village and teaches it to the father so that they can sing it together. When the child is conceived, she sings it constantly to the baby in her womb.

She even teaches it to the midwives who will accompany her in the delivery. This song accompanies the child in his growth, in his initiation, in his marriage, in his death. I am sure that Mary's song that accompanied Jesus in his earthly life spoke of compassion and tenderness.

There is a saying "Never enough about Mary". And this is true. But perhaps what we need today is more awareness of her devoted being-there in our lives.

St Teresa of Avila chose Mary to be her mother when at the age of twelve she lost her natural mother: "When I began to understand what I had lost, I went, afflicted, before an image of Our Lady and besought her with many tears to be my mother. It seems to me that although I did this in simplicity it helped me. For I have found favor with this sovereign Virgin in everything I have asked of her, and in the end she has drawn me to herself."

The Carmelite Father Michael of St Augustine (1684) wrote: "the one who loves Mary by constant exercise acquires the habit or practice of having her as loving Mother present in his mind, so that all his thoughts and affections come to end both in her and in God, and he can forget neither the loving Mother nor God!"

Mary can be such a healing presence in our hectic and many times restless lives. One day she kissed Jesus. "You bore Him in your arms, took care of Him, kissed Him with your pure mouth, nursed Him at your bosom and put Him on your knees". Today she wants to kiss us!

'Sweet kissing' the Greek Orthodox Church calls it. As she caressed Jesus, she can and she wants to caress us! She enjoys hugging us! There is only one proviso. We need to let ourselves be consciously her sons or her daughters. Many Catholics are like those teenagers who would not want to be caught dead around their mother! It is just not cool!

But the truth is the opposite. There is something with this woman that is remarkable. In a world with so much distress and ugliness it would benefit us if look upwards and relax in her. She will beautify us all the time. She will remain always besides us, singing the song that she conceived in her mind and in her

heart when we were thought of by God!

This is after all what the scapular all about. It is a constant and tangible reminder of her protection. "The humble brother of Carmel can exult and sing with joy: 'See! The Queen of Heaven is my sister; I can act with confidence and without fear'".

"For a very long time I too have worn the Carmelite Scapular! Because of the love which I have for our heavenly Mother, whose protection I experience constantly" echoed Pope John Paul II before he died. I too echo the same sentiments, having been called to be a Discalced Carmelite since the early age of sixteen! Thanks, Mary!