

The Concept of Prayer in the Constitutions of the Secular Order by Fr. A. Deeney, OCD

At the OCDS Congress 2008

What I would like to do this morning is basically an exercise - an exercise on how I think the Constitutions can be read and studied. I have a great respect for the words that have been placed in the Constitutions, because words communicate ideas. Words are very important. If I miss-say a word, I would communicate the wrong thing. If I don't understand what a word means and I use it without understanding its meaning, I can communicate to someone who understands that word something I don't mean.

There are seven Chapters in the Constitutions. The seventh chapter is on government and organization and the sixth chapter is on the Process of Formation. Leaving those two chapters aside, the beginning five chapters are on the value that you bring to the Church and the world because of God's calling you. Not because it was your idea, but it was something you wanted to do. All of us who have been called by God to do something, have been called to do what He wanted us to do, not what we wanted to do for Him. Correct? We understand that, I mean St. John of the Cross' famous saying "What good does it do for you to offer God what you want to offer Him when He wants something else from you?" So all of us have been called to offer God something, and this is why we have a vocation.

The first chapter is on the identity, the value, and the commitment. The second chapter is about following Jesus in the Teresian Secular Carmel, the Promises, the commitment that you make. The third chapter is on witnesses to the experience of God, which is the chapter on Prayer in the life of a Carmelite. The fourth chapter is on serving God's plan. And the fifth chapter is on Mary, the mother of Jesus. We are the Marian Order of the Church. We wear her habit. But in the five chapters that discuss your purpose, and the purpose of your vocation, the centre of those five chapters, is the chapter on prayer. I want to look at what prayer is in the life of a Carmelite Secular as presented by the Constitutions.

I am not talking about saying prayers. We know about saying prayers, because all of us can say prayers somewhat like this "Hail Mary full of grace ... Hail Mary full of grace ..." but thinking "oh I wonder if I took that" ... "I have to make an appointment ..." ... yes, all of us can say prayers, and we have to admit, we do say prayers ... saying prayers is of value, but that's not what this chapter is talking about. That is not what "prayer" is for a Carmelite. All Christians, Catholics especially, are called to pray. The Gospel that talks about the life of Jesus in prayer is, which Gospel? It is the Gospel of St. Luke. St. Luke is constantly referring to Jesus praying. He refers to Jesus praying in two different ways. He refers to Jesus going up to the temple to pray. The Jews went to the temple seven times a day to pray. So whenever you hear the Gospels placing Jesus in the temple, precincts or walking around or going into the temple, or the Apostles in the Acts of the Apostles, going in, going out, going in, going out they are going to pray, to say the ritual, the liturgical prayers. Jesus prayed liturgically the liturgy of His people.

He said those liturgical prayers. You have seen pictures, you may even have neighbours who are Muslims and you see them going to the Mosques to pray ... you see pictures of

them praying ... and the Jewish people have the same thing, in fact the Muslims got it from the Jews. So that seven times a day, faithful Jewish people went to pray. St Luke's Gospel also presents Jesus as praying in a different way than ritually, as a matter of fact the apostles noticed Jesus praying. The apostles knew how to pray, they learned as little children how to pray. They learned how to make the right kind of movements and when to move and what to say when they were praying. They learned that. They all knew that. Every Jewish child knew that, especially the boys. But in St. Luke's Gospel, I think it's in chapter 10, the apostles see Jesus praying and they say to Him "teach us how to pray". What were they asking? They weren't asking for Jesus to teach them movements or to help them memorize. They already knew those things. What they were asking Him, they must have seen something in His prayer to the Father that they didn't get, that they had not captured or didn't understand in the liturgical prayer, in the recitation of prayers. What they saw was the relationship that Jesus had with the Father. They saw something ... and they said "teach us to pray" and Jesus taught them because the Gospel says that Jesus said "when you pray, say 'Our Father'". Now we have been saying the Our Father since the time we were babies almost, so we know, and it is so familiar to us that we do not realize how shocking it was for Jesus to present to the apostles the fact that they had a relationship with God where they could call Him Abba, call Him Father.

We all take it for granted that we have a relationship with God, but it is shocking. The saints were shocked. St Teresa, our Mother was shocked by the fact that she had a relationship with God, and so much so that at the beginning of the book *The Interior Castle*, in the first castle, she says that the saddest thing about being a human being is they do not realize that they are capable of conversations with no less than God. With no less than God, we are capable of conversation. So, prayer in the Constitutions and prayer in Carmel, we can always practically substitute the word relationship for the word prayer. St Teresa is famous for the definition of prayer, "mental prayer in my opinion is the dealing in friendship, taking time very frequently to be alone with the One whom we know loves us", that is the definition of mental prayer, the definition of the relationship with God. The relationship with God is, in my opinion, a dealing in friendship, taking time frequently to be alone with the One whom we know loves us.

Every place in the writings of St Teresa where St Teresa uses the word prayer, try substituting the words "relationship with God", and then you will understand the importance of prayer in the life of us Carmelites, in our lives that it is a relationship with God. We perform duties in our relationship with God, and we say certain prayers, liturgically, the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours, and we perform them according to the Rite of the Church and we do it in order to unite ourselves with the whole Church in celebrating the presence of Jesus among us and in praising God.

But, prayer as the Constitutions present especially in Chapter 3 is a different prayer. It is the prayer the apostles saw in a relation with God. First step - the title of the chapter. Witnesses to the experience of God. It does not say "witnesses to the experiences of God". That is a big difference. If we are going to be witnesses to the experiences of God, then what interests us are visions and apparitions and locutions and experiences that people, saints, good saints, have of God. But that is not what we are called to be. We are not called to be witnesses to apparitions and visions and locutions and experiences, phenomenal experiences. We are called to be witnesses to the fact that GOD IS. That our lives, the entire breath and length of our lives is an experience of the relationship with God. Some people might be called for some particular reason to have some exceptional experiences of God, but all of us are called to live in relationship with God.

But people are missing the ordinary, not the extraordinary. People are missing the ordinary relationship with God that takes place through living the Sacraments, through praying every day, even through just saying prayers every day. So God needs witnesses.

When I get up in front of you or in a sermon in church and I talk about the value of sacrifice in Christian life, you can all look and say "isn't that a beautiful sermon". But in the back of your mind there is this little voice that says "What does he know about having 5 kids?" "What does he know about having a wife or a husband that blah, blah, blah?" So I can give a good sermon on sacrifice, and what I say will be true, but my sister can get up and talk about the value of sacrifice - and you can't escape by saying "but what does she know about having 5 children?", because she has 5 children. What the world needs is not more preachers, which is what Father said this morning in Mass. What the world needs is witnesses. People who are witnesses to the value of prayer, to the fact that God is, that God lives.

So this is what your vocation is, to be witness. Last week I was talking about this chapter in Romania and some of it I was talking about it in Italian, and somebody was translating it for me into Romanian. The word in Romanian for witnesses is "marteri", which is the exact word that marteri is in the Greek language. It is the word for witnesses. We need martyrs. We do not need martyrs who shed their blood, because they only last for a certain time. We need martyrs who last our whole lives in our society and in our culture that has so many things out of place. So many values distorted. We need martyrs, witnesses to the value of God, witnesses to the experience of God.

The first sentence in Paragraph 17 is "The vocation to the Teresian Carmel is a commitment to live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ." Now let me point out what I think is the operative word. There are a few words of course, it's a vocation, it's a calling, a calling that requires a commitment. You have to dedicate yourself to it. Your response has to be "Ok, my free time of..." ... we don't need your free time, we need your time. God needs your time, because you have to dedicate yourself to live a life. It is a call to live a life. It's not a call to pray ... you're not called to pray, you're not called to wear brown, you're not called to do external things. You are called to live a life. You are called to LIVE something. Live the relationship with God. You do that when you go to work. You do that when you are in your family. You do that when you're making dinner. You do that when you are praying. You do that when you are going to a Secular Order meeting. You live whatever you do that you live, that's when you are being a Carmelite. You don't have to go and do something special to be a Carmelite. You don't have to go away from what you are doing, you have to live what you are doing as a life in allegiance, loyalty, to Jesus Christ. You have to live a life. It is a commitment to live a life in allegiance to Jesus Christ, pondering the Lord's law day and night, and keeping watch with Him.

So here is where Prayer first comes in as something that Carmelites do. What is described as prayer is: Pondering the law of the Lord day and night. Where is the law of the Lord? Is it in the code of Canon Law? No, that is the law of the Church. Where is the Law of the Lord? Scripture ... the first thing that the Constitutions put in your hand for your relationship with God in prayer is the Scripture. You have noticed I am sure that in every Mass when we read the Gospel, we stand. In the Morning Prayer or in Evening Prayer when we read the Magnificat and the Benedictus, we stand. Why do we stand? Why do we stand for the Gospel? The Magnificat and the Benedictus are from the Gospel, and that is why we stand. We stand because this is what witnesses do. When

you stand in the Liturgy of the Eucharist during Mass when the Gospel is being read, you are standing because you are witnesses to the truth of this Gospel. When you read the Magnificat and you read the Benedictus, you stand in witness. It is a symbol of what your life is, to be a witness to Jesus.

Pondering the law of the Lord day and night. The law of the Lord is given to us in our hand in the Scriptures, and that's the first fruit of information which produces in us the formation of our minds and our hearts. Do you want to know God thinks? Read the Scriptures. Do you want to know how God feels about what's happening in His creation? Read the Scriptures. It is the only prayer book written by the Holy Spirit. Every other prayer book has been put together by somebody else, but the Scriptures are the relationship with God inspired by the Holy Spirit. I am sure all of you are just like me. If I go into a church where I have never been before, one of the first things I look for, if not the first thing, is the sanctuary light, to find out where is the Eucharist so that I can acknowledge the Presence, the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God in your home. Your Bible is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of inspired words. When you go into your home, perhaps you already have your Bible in a certain place in your home as the Word of God ... it is the law of the Lord which is the first thing the Order says is given to you for your relationship with God. Acknowledge the presence - you don't have to genuflect, you don't have to put on a light, but recognize that it is the presence of the Holy Spirit, you are not alone. You are not abandoned. God is present through His Word in your home.

So, the relationship with God is communicated to us. God does not come to us in silence, says the Scriptures, He comes to us in His Word. So we look to the Scriptures, we look to the presence of God, of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, and we look to that as what gives us nourishment and sustenance in our relationship with Him. He is communicating to us. We can touch His Word. If you are alone, read the Word out loud, then your mouth is saying it, your eyes are seeing it, your ears are hearing it. It is coming into you, the Word of God, God's thoughts. You are not alone. St Teresa says "Faithful to this principle of the Rule", St Teresa placed prayer as the foundation of basic exercise of her religious value. The foundation is not saying prayers. The foundation of Carmelite life, of Teresian Carmelite life, is the relationship of God that is communicated to us in His Word, and that's what we live, that relationship with God through the Scriptures that comes to us. It feeds us. It nourishes us. Next sentence: "For this reason Carmelite Seculars are called to strive to make prayer penetrate their whole existence." A very important word in that sentence is the word "strive". What does strive mean? Strive means try hard. It doesn't mean to be successful. It means you try hard. So, faithful to the principles ... for this reason Secular Carmelites are called to "try hard" to make prayer penetrate their whole existence." You are not called to be perfect. You are called to go on the way to perfection, because you cannot be perfect for God. So you will not do this perfect thing for God. You can be perfect with God, but not for Him. Because it takes God's grace to respond, it takes God's energy to move us along, so we have to be in relationship with God in order to grow in the life of prayer.

So, we are called to strive, we are called to make ourselves open to try every day. If I strive today, and don't strive tomorrow, what is the point of striving today? But I strive every day, I work hard. I try. This is in order to walk in the presence of the Living God, the presence of God. What we proclaim is the presence of God, that we are in His presence.

When I was in Catholic School in Philadelphia, and in Catholic School at the Sisters of St. Joseph, the boys were all in one room and girls were all in the other room and so the first boy in the class, the first grade was given a little bell and then when the clock reached 9:00 o'clock, no matter what sister was teaching, the boy had to ring the bell and say "excuse me sister, excuse me class, it is time to bless the hour", and sister would say "let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God" and all the children would say "let us adore His Divine Majesty", and sister would say the first part of the Our Father and the children would say the second part of the Our Father and then she would turn right around and start teaching again. Then the boy passed the bell to the boy behind him. Then 10:00 o'clock came and he was watching and giggling "excuse me sister, excuse me class, it is time to bless the hour", and sister would say "let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God" and the children would say "let us ...", then Our Father (quickly) .. 11:00, 12:00 , and so on, every day for eight years we stopped at every hour and we remembered the presence of God.

How many of you have cell phones? How many of you ever send messages on your cell phone? Well, maybe you should. Maybe you should start sending messages to each other to say "Let us remember that we are in the presence of God." You could be interrupting someone who is having a terrible day, healthwise, workwise, family wise. And you just send that message "presence of God", and they might remember - wouldn't that be wonderful. We are called to live in the presence of God. We quote Elijah that Elijah stands in the presence of the living God, proclaimed that he is His servant. We are His servant. We have to proclaim it to each other. So use this text message. Send it to each other. Not to the same person, ok, just send it to someone different every couple of days. "Let us remember that we are in the presence of God." Let us adore His Divine Majesty". If we ever remember that we are in the presence of God, we are going to live like we are in the presence of God. If we forget that we are in the presence of God, we are not going to live like we are in the presence of God. So remind each other, in order to remind yourselves.

So, "for this reason, Secular Carmelites are called to strive to make prayer penetrate their whole existence in order to walk in the presence of the living God through the constant exercise of faith, hope and love". The three theological virtues which have been communicated to us in baptism when we were infused with the Holy Spirit Whose hope we hold in our hand to reinforce our lives lived in faith, hope and love.

"It is such a way that the whole of their life is a prayer a search for the union with God. The goal will be to achieve the integration of experience of God with the experience of life, that we, in living our lives experience the presence of God." He is not interrupting us with visions, or we might not be hearing His voice through our ears, but we will know His presence. We will know that HE IS and our lives will be witnesses to it, because we will live differently.

All of us know, if something goes wrong, for a few seconds, we might forget about God, and we feel desperate, we start crying, we start to get confused, we don't know what is going to happen, and we all know the moment we remember God everything gets better. We feel stronger. We feel that there is something we can do. We don't know what it is, but we are filled with hope. We remember God. When we remember God, and when we turn to Him, our lives proclaim the presence of God, and the goal will be able to achieve the integration and the experience of God, experience of life to be contemplatives in

prayer and the fulfillment of their own mission.

"Contemplatives in prayer and the fulfillment of their own mission." We are called to be contemplatives. We are not called to be cloistered prayer - there is a difference between being a contemplative and being a cloistered person. Cloistered persons may or may not be a contemplative, and most contemplatives are not cloistered. People confuse the two that we think that in order to be a contemplative person, we have to look like this (). For a lot of people who look like this () are still wanting to be contemplative.

The nuns have their vocation and that vocation is to be contemplatives in the context of a cloister. I am a Carmelite, but I am not a nun. I don't live in a cloister. We have cloisters in our Monasteries, or our houses which are reserved in order to have a community life because our buildings can become public buildings sometimes, everyone just moves in and we have no space unless we protect the space. This is where the community lives. I am not a cloistered person, but I am 100% Carmelite, you are 100% Carmelite, but you do not live in Monasteries. Your life does not take place in a Monastery. Your vocation does not develop in a Monastery, it develops in a home. It develops in a family. It develops in a workplace. And it develops in a local parish and it develops in a diocese. That is the context where you integrate the experience of God with your life, and you become contemplative because in order to become contemplative, just like the nuns, just like us, you also must fulfill your mission in the Church, but not as we do, or not as the nuns do. The world really needs you. As contemplatives in the world, who live in the world who don't look like nuns, who don't look like friars, but look like people who know the value of God in their lives.

Paragraph 18. Prayer, a dialogue of friendship with God, so there is another definition of prayer. "dialogue of friendship with God". Prayer is not, although a lot of it can be, trying to talk God into, even trying to bribe Him a little .. saying "if you do this, I will do this for the next three thousand days", or something like that. We do it, we enter into a dialogue with God, and those dialogues are very important even when we are trying to bribe God. He will not be bought, but He will change our minds.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that the purpose of this intercessory prayer is for us to change our minds, not to try to change God's mind. So we do enter into a dialogue of friendship with God. There is probably no married couple, there is no happily married couple who has not had an argument, who has not fought, maybe there is, but probably not in this room.

In a dialogue of friendship, you say what you think, and you hear what the other person has to say, even if you don't agree with it, and then you work through the not-agreeing in order to arrive at the friendship. The friendship is more valuable than even the dialogue, but the dialogue cannot be realized without the friendship, and the friendship is only on paper until it is real. So we enter into a dialogue of friendship with God. No-one could speak more honestly with God than prophets. I love Jeremiah, and he could really get annoyed with God. He really could. "You seduced me Lord" You tricked me, and I let You do it, I am so stupid. The dialogue with God is not 'O Lord, you are so wonderful ...". When, you are feeling like "what are you doing?" So you enter into a dialogue of friendship. You speak to God from your heart. You don't do it out loud like I just did. You do it in your heart. You communicate..

So prayer, a dialogue of friendship with God ought to be nourished by His Word. Again,

Scripture, the foundation book of our prayer is not anything written by any other saint, or by another person, the foundation book of our prayer is the Scriptures. Most especially the Gospel. This year we recognize it in the place of St Paul in the revelation of who JESUS IS. So the New Testament, but the whole of Scripture, serves as the basis for the dialogue of friendship with God. This is important in reading the prophets and seeing how angry they could get, how frustrated they become in living the relationship with God, in doing God's will. St Teresa also. You remember her famous saying "If this is the way you treat your friends, it's no wonder you have so many enemies." Their relationship with God is a dialogue of friendship which is not fake, it is not pretence, it is real, and some days that reality can make us very honest with God, He can take it, and we need to give Him that honesty or we are not giving Him ourselves, we are still acting before Him, but not being ourselves with Him.

So we honestly present ourselves to God, doing it using especially through the words of Scripture. One thing I like, and I started it many, many, many years ago - for mental prayer, during the time in the Monastery - we have two hours of mental prayer, we give an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening. That is very nice, we don't have children, we don't have a family, we don't have to go out to work, that's why we have extra time. You don't have two hours a day. But you have some time each day, maybe 30 minutes is what you are supposed to do according to your statutes, but if you cannot do 30 minutes, maybe you can do 10 minutes and 10 minutes, 5 minutes and 5 minutes. Maybe you have to divide the time up in order for it to be realizable. What do you use for those 10 minutes? If you go and set your timer for 10 minutes and you try and you say, I will turn the radio off, nobody's home yet, I am alone, I will just listen Snore ... and; you fall back asleep. But if you take those 10 minutes and you take the reading for the Gospel of the next day, and you look at the reading of the next day, and you ask the Lord to show you something from the Gospel. Don't pick up the Bible and look for something that you want to read, let the liturgy form you. Use the Scriptures. For the Mass each day there are two readings provided each day, and three on Sunday, so the first reading and second reading and you can go one year and use all the first readings, the next year the readings change and you can use that, and third year you can use the Gospels. There are different ways that you can do it, but to use the Liturgy for your Scripture input, in a way that you are praying the Gospel. If you do that every day, you may know more than the priest who is saying the Mass the next morning, because you have meditated and the Holy Spirit has opened up your eyes, and opened the eyes of your heart and filled your mind with His communication to you. You may not hear voices, but He is communicating. Because it says "ought to be nourished by His words so that this dialogue becomes time that we speak to Him when we pray, we hear Him when we read His Divine Word." I love that expression "We hear Him when we read His Divine Word." We do not hear God with our ears. We hear God with our eyes, because He is revealing Himself most certainly through the Scriptures. So we see those words and we hear what He has to say. We hear Him.

One thing I am sure of that in the dioceses in your parishes, especially during Lent, there might be a Bible study program, or scripture program, or reflection of one of the Gospels or something. If you can, if you have time, assist at those things. Participate in those things, because you want to understand Scripture. You want to be able to see "what is the Word of God saying?" . Because if you understand it more clearly, you will know ... the other day we had the Feast of St. Jerome one of the most wonderful people in the history of the Scriptures in the Catholic Church who translated the Scriptures into Latin. On the Feast of St Jerome we read a reading in the Office of Readings that said

"Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ." And so knowledge of the Scriptures brings knowledge of Christ. So we participate in anything that can help us to understand the Word of God in Scripture. So that when we read, we can hear what He has to say.

The next sentence: "God's word will nourish the contemplative experience of Carmelite Seculars and their mission in the world." God's word will nourish, it will be augmentation, it will be food, it will give energy and strength. Very few of us eat without planning to eat. We plan to eat. If you have a family, you have to plan to eat. It has to be planned. So, we also have to plan the reading of the Word of God. It does not just happen, unless we plan, so we plan to have regular nourishment on the Word of God, and that's what the Constitutions say is the place of Scripture. It is the regular nourishment that we need in order to feed our experience of God, so that we become contemplatives. It doesn't happen by just putting time in. It happens by opening our eyes to the Word of God.

Besides, personal contemplation. This is very a very important sentence and it touches upon the purpose of meetings. Besides personal contemplation listening to the Word of God ought to encourage a contemplation that needs to share in the experience of God in the Secular Order community. It is not just a personal experience. You are not called to be Carmelites just so you can be some sort of personal Carmelite. You are called for part of a community, even those who are in some sort of long distance relationship with a community are part of a community.

Community is a very important symbol. St. Teresa's idea of hermit was never someone who lived alone. Her hermitages were inside monastery grounds. We live a relationship with God that is within us, the hermitage of our hearts, the desert of our souls, but we live in a relationship with other people and that the Word of God ought to nourish the experience of contemplation as a community. So, symbolically it might be a good idea in the centre of your community table, or whatever it is that you meet, that at the beginning of your celebration you enthrone the Word of God, and you light a candle next to the Word of God for the time of the meeting to remind yourselves of the presence of God through His Word. You cannot study St Teresa or St John of the Cross ... you can hardly study a paragraph of St John of the Cross without at least one quote from Scripture. So it is not possible to study Carmelite spirituality without studying Scripture. So the place of Scripture then, in our formation as Carmelites and the formation of our prayer is primary. So, as a symbol of that primary relationship with God that comes through His revelation of Himself to us, the Word of God ought to be placed in a place that it can be seen and understood as the centre of this meeting. Because it ought to be, ... it says that "listening to the Word ought to encourage a contemplating that leads to sharing the experience of God in the Secular Order Community".

We do not come together to just chit-chat. That is not the purpose of meetings. Fellowship is part of the meeting, and we chit-chat when we have fellowship. But there is a very important aspect of coming together in a meeting, and that is to build up the experience of God in each other. So I already made reference to the fact that maybe sending a message on the text message to somebody to remind them of the presence of God. The reason why we go to meetings is to remind each other that there are other people who are trying to do what we are trying to do, and it re-enforces, it strengthens us. It re-enforces our vocation because if you are trying to do it, and I am trying to do it, we can remind ourselves that it is difficult to pray every day. That it is difficult to put that time apart and pray, every day. But we do it because we know that other people are trying to do it.

One time in the city of Boston, I was giving a talk to the Secular Order and a lady came up to me and told me that one of the things that she does that there was a woman who was a Secular Order member who used to attend meetings all the time, but was now very old and bed-ridden, and could no longer attend meetings. So, every morning, at 8:00 o'clock in the morning this lady calls up the lady in bed, and they say morning prayer together over the phone. "Oh God come to my assistance" "O Lord make haste to help me" ...when they finish, they hang up. Then she calls again at six o'clock and says let's pray together.

You are called to be together so that you can share the experience of your relationship with God, not just so that you can chit-chat. Chit-chatting is very important, that why we have fellowship, that's why we have all this time during Congresses to be able just to talk and get to know each other, and to be able to express our affection for each other. But, if we miss the cement of the community, which is the relationship with God which holds us together, we are missing something very valuable, and that is equally part of our life of prayer. By this means the community together seeks to discern God's ways, maintain a permanent energy of conversion and live with renewed hope. It is easy to be converted for one day. It is not easy to be converted every day. So we need a permanent energy of conversion. And the reason you go to meetings is for that reason, to main a permanent energy of conversion. To return home for the rest of the month doing what you are supposed to do. And then, even if after two weeks, or two and a half or three weeks it might get a little bit harder, you might make a few more exceptions of not doing what you are supposed to do, by the time the meeting begins and everything is stronger. We need each other. God calls us together for this reason of calling us together, not because we like each other, and we might, or we might not, but that's secondary. We love each other. God called us together for this reason, so we can strengthen each other in our vocation.

Paragraph 19. Occupying a privileged place in nourishing the prayer life of the Carmelite Secular will be the study and spiritual reading of Scripture. The first three articles of the paragraph on prayer talk about the place of Scripture. I wonder what the point is? Scripture, the Bible, the Word of God centre, but the study and spiritual reading of Scripture and the writings of our saints, particularly those who are Doctors of the Church St. Teresa, St. John of the Cross and St. Therese, the Church's documents are also food and inspiration for commitment to follow Jesus. Our most basic library for our pray life then is the Bible, the works of Carmelite saints and the Catechism of the Catholic Church, plus the documents of the Church. If you have that library, you have a lot to read. If you do not read any of that you do not have a vocation to be a Carmelite. But if you do read that then your identity is constantly reaffirmed. Who you are and why you are here on earth, why you are called is constantly in front of you. You are not confused about who you are, if you read that. Each of us should have, and I think most of us do have the basic elements of that library in our homes and our houses. But above all, the place of Sacred Scripture is most important.

Paragraph 20. The Carmelite Seculars will make sure to have special times set apart for prayer, as times of greater awareness of the Lord's presence and an interior space for a personal and intimate meeting with Him. And again, if you do not plan it, it will not happen. You must plan to pray. It has to become almost a part of your schedule. You can put it as I said. You create a design of how to organize your time. Many of you have lots of commitments every day. I would like to add up the amount of time it takes you to

do your spiritual responsibilities as a Secular Carmelite. The first thing is, let us say meditation. It is primarily the most important thing and something that you can do every day. You do not have to go someplace to do it. You can do it at home. According to your Statutes it is about thirty minutes a day. So there is thirty minutes. Then according to the Constitutions you are supposed to say Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. A moderate reciting of Morning Prayer when you are by yourself might be seven minutes. About seven minutes...wait, wait, I said, 'a moderate' if you want to make it longer let us add up the time. You have Morning Prayer and then you have Evening Prayer so that is thirty minutes, then fifteen more minutes that's forty-five minutes. Wait a second you do not have that much time. Forty-five minutes and then you are going to go to Mass. When I go to Mass, I role out of bed and role into the sacristy and I am ready for Mass. When you want to go to Mass you have to get up, go out of the house and get into the automobile, then drive someplace. Sometimes depending on the day and the time let us say it takes ten minutes to get there to your parish. Then there is Mass. Mass on a weekday, depends on the priest. Some priests are really supper duper and can say Mass in twenty minutes and others to say Mass takes half an hour. Anyway let us say average Mass thirty minutes. But going and coming is another ten--twenty minutes. So there we have forty-five minutes plus forty-five minutes already. Mental prayer, Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer that is forty-five minutes plus Mass forty-five minutes--an hour and a half. Oh, then we are supposed to have devotion to Mary every day, so let us add another ten minutes to say the rosary. How much time does it take for you every day to be faithful to your obligations? If you make these obligations exaggerated you are going to have to start skipping them if you have family or work. So you must be reasonable in your expectations. If you say to yourself--'Oh if I take less than twenty minutes to say Morning Prayer it is offensive'. No it might be offensive to take twenty minutes to say Morning Prayer. Maybe your obligation is just to simply let those words flow into you and later on during the day have the Holy Spirit work in you. You do not have to look up each word and try to drag out of each word the meaning. You recite Morning Prayer, not as something personal, but you recite it as an obligation, a liturgical prayer because it is the prayer of the Church. It is not you prayer. It is not my prayer. So we recite it as it says to recite it. So then when Holy Father wakes up and six hours later we wake up...when he says Morning Prayer in Rome he says the same prayer that we will say. And the people in other parts of the world...the other Secular Carmelites when they wake up and say Morning Prayer wherever it is...we are all saying the same prayer.

As busy people, you have an hour and forty-five minutes to two hours every day of responsibility to fulfill. You don't have that much time. So do what you are suppose to do is the best that you can. Not every day can you make Mass because of different reasons. You might not have the automobile because of other obligations. Or you might be sick. You might be ill. If you are sick and ill you may not even be able to say Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. You can meditate. You can take time to be alone with God in your heart, in your mind. But you may not be able to do that for thirty minutes. So in your relationship of prayer you take time to do what you can do so that it fulfills your obligations, so that you in fulfilling your obligations are living the relationship with God.

Now in about an hour's time I just went through a few numbers of the Constitutions to look at what it says. I suggest that this is how you should read the Constitutions. What do the words say? What do the words mean? And from those words you will see what the value of your vocation is for the Church. You might be clear about what is for you. But you will never understand its real value if you do not understand what your vocation

means for the Church and for the Order. Because understanding what your vocation is, understanding what your responsibility is, to be men and women of prayer, makes you noble in the eyes of God. And understanding the nobility that God has given you in calling you to this vocation makes it a task happy to be borne, an easy yoke, a light burden. But not understanding that nobility, it will only be something to do. So what the Constitutions are trying to communicate to you is the value that you have in your vocation. Thank you.