
Prayers for Priests : The Carmelites

THE CARMELITE VOCATION

by a Carmelite Nun

A young lady who feels she is called by God to the Carmel might be forgiven for a certain apprehension. She might imagine, perhaps, that life in the Carmel is austere and is reserved to an elite who are drawn to a life of prayer and self-sacrifice. If such is the case, she need not fear.

The Carmel is, above all, a vocation to the prayer of contemplation; it is a calling to a life of union with God. Generally, a young lady who feels attracted to the Carmelite life has had some experience of the love of God, she desires solitude, separation from the world so that she may enjoy the intimate company of her Beloved.



The community gathers for the procession to the choir to chant the Divine Office.



The chapel of the Carmel du Sacre Coeur. The sisters' choir is behind the high altar separated by a grill.



A novice crowned with lilies on the day of her vesture.

“ O Eternal Word, Word of my God, I wish to spend my life listening to Thee. Make all things teachable to me, so that I may learn everything about Thee. ” This famous passage of Blessed Elisabeth of the Trinity captures the essence of the Carmelite ideal. It is, therefore, the thirst for God that leads a soul to the Carmel, the desire to love Him more and more, to give one’s life to Him alone, an unceasing adoration, to render “love for love.”

Love of God

The love of God, no matter how ardent it is, must always grow less it flickers and dies. Thus a profound faith and a fidelity to God in all that He demands, whether through superiors or decreed by the rule, is absolutely necessary.

The mind and the heart of the Carmelite desires to see God, to contemplate Him and to repose in Him. Faith lifts, a little at least, the veil that hides Him. The more God reveals Himself to the interior

eye of a soul, the more His perfections appear and the more passionately He is loved. Divine charity is the beneficiary of faith, and hope has no other goal than to make union with Him more desirable. A life of living the theological virtues is, again, the essence of the Carmelite ideal.

For a young lady who feels called to the Carmel, it is the desire for Divine intimacy that is predominant, so much so that, when she presents herself, she often knows little or nothing of the Carmelite Rule. The cadre matters little to her - all she wants is to serve her Beloved – sure that she will be accorded all the necessary graces for her vocation. Such a disposition of soul demands great generosity, constancy and a confident and absolute abandonment of self into the hands of Him by Whom she knows herself loved.

Missionary Apostolate

Our father, St. John of the Cross, teaches that “compassion for one’s

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neighbour grows in the measure that a soul is united to God in love, because the more one loves God, the more one wishes that God be loved and honoured by all.” If the apostolic life is part of the life of every Christian soul, it is especially so for the Carmelite.

Our holy mother, St. Theresa of Jesus, has given us a clear instructions in this regard. It was the terrible trials of Christi-

anity that excited in her heart the desire to do all she could to save souls from the fires of hell. But how can a Carmelite, hidden and cut off from the world, have a real influence on souls? Prayer is not limited by physical boundaries or distance; within the communion of saints its effect is universal. It is by personal sanctification and continual prayer that the Carmelite intercedes for souls. “As Our Lord dwells in our souls, His prayer is ours too,” wrote Blessed Elisabeth of the Trinity, “... to be to Him an extension of His humanity by which He can adore, make reparation and save...”

The Carmelite apostolate is above all directed towards priests and the protectors of Holy Mother the Church. St. Theresa of the Child Jesus said that she became a Carmelite above all to pray for priests; St. Pius X made her the patron of the missions.

Daily Life

It is not unusual that a young lady who feels herself drawn to the Carmel asks herself how she might cope with solitude and silence, imagining that the only time a Carmelite left her cell was for the silent prayer of contemplation in the chapel! It is true that a Carmelite lives alone for part of her day, but she also shares in the life of the community which is an important



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The inner courtyard of the Carmel du Sacre Coeur, Quievrain, Belgium.

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support – material as well as moral and spiritual – and an occasion to practice virtue, to grow in love of God and one’s neighbour.

As there are no longer working sisters (*soeurs converses* who did not participate in the choir of the community, but sanctified themselves more through manual labour) - which corresponds to the wishes of our holy mother St. Theresa – the Carmelites find themselves obliged to undertake a considerable amount of manual labour such as washing clothes, mending, cooking, gardening and cleaning. The rule of work combined with the profession of poverty is considered an important aspect of the Carmelite life. The Carmelite, therefore, might also find herself engaged in the making of liturgical vestments, altar linens, mantillas, scapulars and other artistic work.

The recitation of the entire Divine Office, together with two hours of mental prayer and half an hour of scripture reading every day reduces the time available to manual labour to four or five hours per day, which, executed with diligence, requires a continual gift of self.

Finally, in her wisdom, our holy mother St. Theresa, prescribed two recreations every day, during which all the sisters come together to “to speak together and to recreate.” Ω



The refectory. As in most religious houses, meals are accompanied by spiritual readings from the saints or recordings of conferences and sermons.



Repairing and re-painting statues.



Making and repairing liturgical vestments.



Novices wear white veils, professed sisters wear black.



The vegetable patch—a garden of the soul.



Our Holy Mother, St. Theresa of Avila.

TRADITIONAL CARMELS

Postulants are accepted usually between the ages of 18 to 30 years old. Please write to one of the Mother Superiors for further information concerning vocations.

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