



**THE ORDER OF CARMELITES**  
North American Province of St. Elias

# CHARIOT *of* FIRE

*Living the Life of Prayer and Contemplation*



**OFFICE OF THE VOCATION DIRECTOR**

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## From the Desk of the Vocation Director



Dear friends in Christ,

Welcome to our Carmelite Vocation Office's newsletter, where we reflect on the theme of prayer with the title of "Living a Life of Prayer and Contemplation."

Since the founding of the Order in the 13th century, the Carmelites have embraced a contemplative life dedicated to constant prayer, solitude, and detachment, following the example of the prophet Elijah and guided by devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Through her inspiration and intercession, the Carmelites are led ever closer to her Son, Jesus Christ.

Across the centuries, Carmelite saints have illuminated the path of the contemplative life with their spiritual wisdom and persevering faith. From the reforming spirit of St. Teresa of Avila to the mystical poetry of St. John of the Cross and the childlike trust of St. Thérèse's "Little Way," these important figures serve as guides for our prayer life and discernment.

At the heart of the Carmelite charism is a total commitment to contemplative prayer, mysticism, and poverty of spirit. Through silence, solitude, and penance, Carmelites seek intimate union with God, fostering an atmosphere where His presence fills their being.

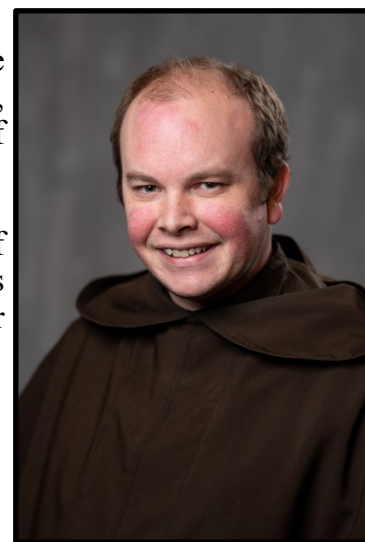
Drawing from St. Teresa's teachings, we are reminded of the transformative power of meditative prayer to encounter Christ in our interior life. St. Thérèse's "Little Way" of humility and abandonment reminds us to surrender completely to God's mercy, relying on Him to lift us beyond our human weakness.

In this Year of Prayer, Pope Francis invites us to reflect deeply on the role of prayer in our vocations and daily living. As we open our hearts to God, may we come to share the mystical life of love expressed by centuries of Carmelite saints.

May this newsletter provide inspiration and guidance on our journey of life. Through immersion in the spiritual wisdom of the Carmelite saints and commitment to daily contemplative prayer, we will grow ever closer to Christ through the intercession of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

In Jesus Christ,

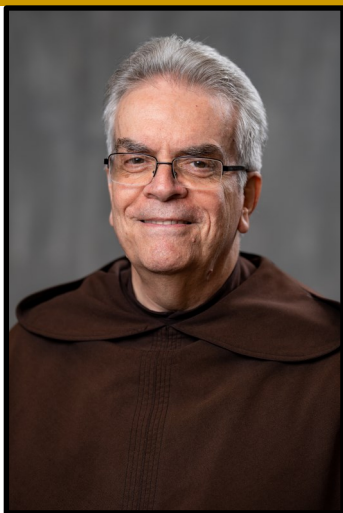
**Fr. Anthony Trung Nguyen, O.Carm.**  
Director of Vocations



Rev. Paul Richmond, O.Carm.  
*Associate Vocation Director*

# Prayer and Life

By Very Rev. Mario Esposito, O.Carm.



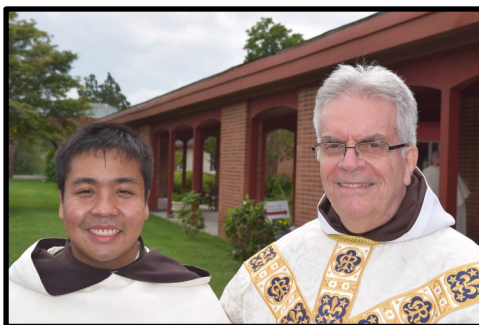
+ Maria

I am honored to be invited to contribute a few words to this edition of the **Chariot of Fire**, a publication of the Carmelite Friars, Province of St. Elias Vocation Office, with the particular theme of “Prayer”. This theme, more so, the reality and life of prayer, is absolutely entwined into the charism of the Order of Carmel, an Order dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary with the singular purpose of living a deep life of prayer, fraternity, and service in the midst of the people within the Church. There is simply no Carmel without prayer, whether it is private prayer, contemplative, or liturgical prayer.

From the very foundations of the Order on Mount Carmel in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, the hermits, who gradually evolved into being friars, gave themselves over to the work and life of prayer – in the cell, in the refectory, in the chapel. Nourished by the word of God, the early Carmelites saw themselves walking in the spirit of the Prophet Elijah, the man of contemplation and action. They saw themselves as the Brothers of Mary, pondering the meaning of God’s words and actions, and seeking to imitate her great “yes” to the will of God. Even after leaving Mount Carmel for Europe, the Carmelites never lost these traditions, and remain men of prayer. Each branch of the Order, the Friars, the cloistered Nuns, active Sisters and Lay Carmelites all retain this dedication to prayer, without which we cannot say honestly that we are Carmelites.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, our recently canonized Saint Titus Brandsma, martyr of Dachau, wrote so beautifully, “Prayer is not an oasis in the desert of life; it is all of life.” Many Carmelite authors have quoted this expression of St. Titus as a magnificent summation of the ideal of Carmel. The contemplative life of prayer is not something reserved for a half an hour, or an hour of prayer in the chapel. Prayer encompasses all of life, and under the banner of contemplation, our life becomes a unity where we are always in the presence of the Living God and always ready to respond to and serve Him, whether in the chapel or in the street.

As the Church prepares for the 2025 Year of Jubilee under the theme of *Pilgrims of Hope* by keeping a Year of Prayer, we Carmelites profess that every year, every day, every hour, and every minute are, in fact, times of prayer. Prayer is life. May Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the virgin of contemplation and prayer, guide us in the pathways of prayer each day.





# Here and There About Prayer

By Rev. Maurice Cummings, O.Carm.



Prayer is the first, purest, and simplest act of faith.

It is conversation with God. When we speak, we believe Someone is listening to us; when we listen, we believe Someone is speaking to us. That this is so is a self-evident fact, not something we argue to or about. It is either true or false, and we either affirm it or deny it. In both cases, it is a question of belief, involving both reason and will.

But how can we know this Someone? One philosopher suggested adopting the empirical method of modern science. Set a hypothesis, predicting the results or effects that will follow if the hypothesis is true. Then test for the effects. If we turn to the scriptures, beginning with the Gospels, we find that Jesus makes many promises in

the form of “If you do thus, thus will follow.”

Generally, if you believe in Him and follow Him, your life will be fuller and your joy complete.

Jesus is quite specific in inviting us to take an empirical approach to prayer: “Ask, and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.” Entering the dialogue of prayer

is more than a test of whether it “works” in getting us exactly what we asked for. Rather it is like an offer to substitute something of equal or greater value, and often in addition to what we requested. For we get a greater knowledge of God and of ourselves and a deepening of our relationship with Him. And this relationship gives us access to the Creator of all good things, Who is more than anxious to share with us everything that is best for us.

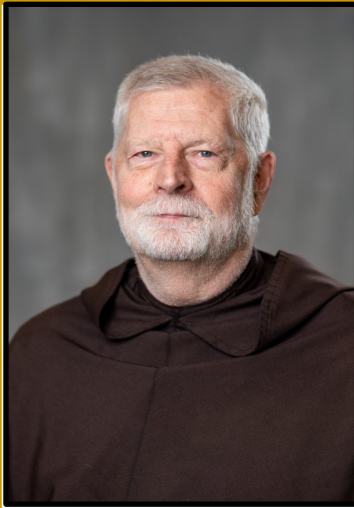
And the best of all is Himself.





# Prayer and Contemplation in Carmelite Life

By Rev. James Hess, O.Carm.



Many years ago, Fr. Thomas McGinnis, O.Carm. stated, "We begin to pray by saying prayers." In other words, let's start with the basics. These words of Fr. Thomas have guided me in the school of learning to pray and pursue contemplation.

My first question is: What prayers should I say? Keith J. Egan, in Carmelite Prayer, states, "Carmelite prayer is quite simply the many ways that Carmelites have prayed since those original lay hermits sought solitude on Mount Carmel. According to their Formula of Life, these hermits were to 'meditate day and night on the law of the Lord (Psalm 1) unless engaged in some just undertaking,' a practice rooted in Jewish tradition and the prayer of the Christian desert." Egan states: "The prayer book of these early hermits was simply the psalter. The Carmelites have always prayed the psalms, which has taught them how to pray and has given them a language of prayer."

My second question: why the Psalms? As a Carmelite, I am called to live a life in allegiance to Jesus Christ. So what does the New Testament demonstrate regarding the influence of the Psalms on the New Testament? The New Testament quotes the Psalms seventy-seven times, and Jesus quotes the Psalms on eleven occasions. Jesus outwits the Pharisees with the Psalms on several occasions. He cites the twenty-second Psalm while dying on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He then fulfills the thirty-first Psalm by committing his spirit to the Father. Jesus is hated without cause, which he says the Psalms foretold (Psalm 35:19). He quotes the Psalms about his betrayal (Psalm 41:9). Jesus recalls the manna in the wilderness after feeding a multitude. When His enemies want to stone Jesus for claiming to be God, he responds with a line in Psalms (Psalm 78:24). Jesus quotes Psalm 110 when Pilate asks if he is the son of God. He quotes Psalms to the chief priests and elders, calling himself the chief cornerstone. Jesus references Psalms when foretelling Jerusalem's destruction (Psalm 118:26). The New Testament clarifies that Jesus prayed the Psalms. So, the Psalms have become the prayers I say.

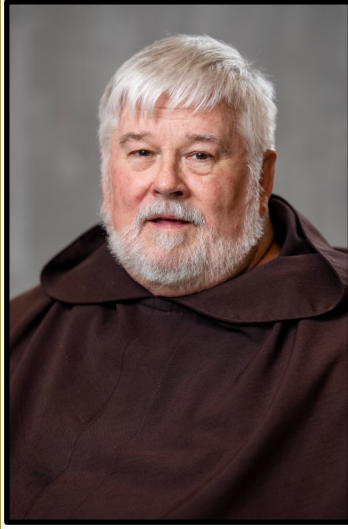
My third question: has saying the Psalms taught me how to pray? I'll never forget the day I was late for the Divine Office, and as I took my place in the choir, I didn't need the book to say the Psalms; they had been internalized over the years by saying the words of the Psalms over many years. Now, the Psalms, the prayers of the Bible, and Jesus have become part of my life. The Psalms bring me to places I like and places where I struggle. The 2019 Constitutions state: "In those places, we are invited to contemplate. Contemplation begins when we entrust ourselves to God in whatever way God approaches us; it is an attitude of openness to God, whose presence we discover in all things. Thus, contemplation is the inner journey of Carmelites, arising out of the free initiative of God, who touches and transforms us, leading us towards the unity of love with God, raising us so that we may enjoy this gratuitous love and live in that loving presence. This overwhelming love of God leads us to a transforming experience: it empties us of our limited and imperfect human ways of thinking, loving, and behaving, transforming them into divine ways. Carmelites commit themselves in all their human frailty to gradually make the crucified Christ - stripped and emptied - the very center of their lives; they thus channel their energies entirely towards him in faith, tearing down any obstacles that may stand in the way of total dependence on him or impede perfect charity towards God and towards others".

I am grateful to Fr. Thomas and the lived experience of Carmelites in helping me to a place of prayer and contemplation.





**“O give thanks to the Lord for He is good;  
For His love endures for ever.”  
(Psalm 107: Office of Readings Saturday Week 111  
By Rev. Frank Dixon, O. Carm.**



As I look back on my life, I see all of the gifts that God has given to me. Like the psalmist I am grateful and always strive to give God thanks for all that He has done for me. On those occasions when I take his love for granted, I turn back to this reflection from my annual retreat in 2011 to remind myself of all that God has given to me and to give thanks to Him. I share this with you in the hope that it will remind you of all the gifts that God has given to you.

### **Regift Anyone?**

Often when we think of re-gifting our thoughts go to items that we do not really want. This doesn't fit right. It does not match my wardrobe. I don't have room for it. I just don't like it. It's not me. What if instead we made a re-gift of something that we really like or something that we truly valued? I wonder what that would feel like? I bet the experience would be life changing.

- Life is a gift - accept it
- Life is a surprise gift - open it.
- Life is a personal and unique gift - own it.
- Life is a priceless gift - treasure it.
- Life is a precious gift- reverence it.
- Life is a delicate gift - nurture it.
- Life is a fragile gift - handle it with care
- Life is an awesome gift- be inspired by it
- Life is a time-limited gift-don't waste any of it
- Life is an exciting gift - be thrilled by it.
- Life is a mysterious gift - get caught up in the wonder of it.
- Life is a challenging gift - rise to face it.
- Life is a scary gift - risk it.
- Life is a paradoxical gift - dwell in it.
- Life is a anxiety-filled gift - be patient with it.
- Life is an unpredictable gift - live with it.
- Life is a generous gift - share it.
- Life is a gracious gift - be thankful for it.
- Life is a joyful gift - rejoice in it.
- Life is a once-in-a- lifetime gift - don't miss out on it.
- Life is a beautiful gift - appreciate it.
- Life is a powerful and magnificent gift -respect it.
- Life is a selfless gift - on't cling to it.
- Life is a thoughtful gift - reflect on it.
- Life is a love-filled gift - love it.
- Life is a strong, durable and dependable gift - trust it.
- Life is a dynamic gift - live it.
- Life is your very special gift- discover it.

**“The gift you have received, give as a gift.” (Matt 10:8)**

**“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.” (John 13:15)**

**“For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Matt 16:25)**

Our Life is the most precious gift that we have been entrusted with -- freely give it as a gift for others.

**Your Life is a gift -- love it enough to give it away. It is the re-gift that keeps on giving!!**

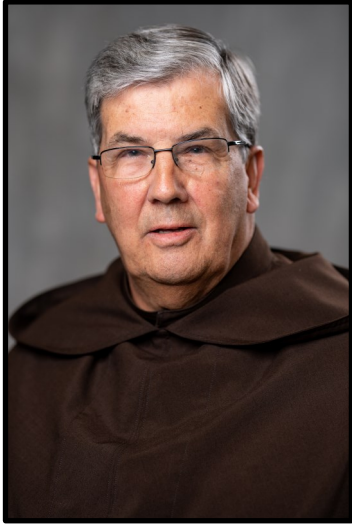
***Lord give us the courage to live our lives for you. Amen.***

***(Retreat Reflection 2011)***



# Reflection on Prayer

By Rev. John Horan, O.Carm.

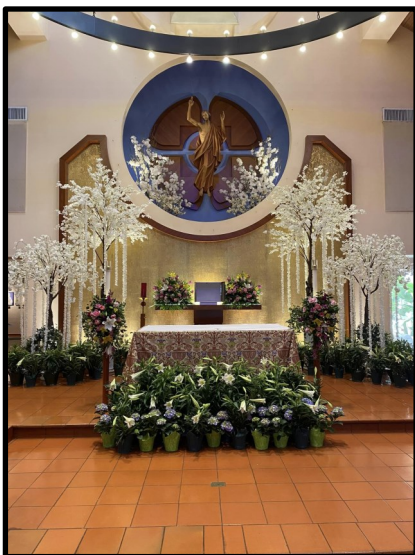


People often ask me why I joined the Carmelite Order. To answer honestly I have to say that there were two things that attracted me to the Carmelite Friars. During my first discernment visit to Saint Joseph Priory (our then formation house in Washington, DC) I was very impressed with the liturgical prayer I experienced and the friendliness of the friars I met. I found the friars to be down to earth, observed camaraderie among the men and found them to be very prayerful. In looking back, I believe it was really the feeling I had when praying with the community that told me that this is where I would find what I was looking for.

From the time I was very young, thanks to the example of my maternal grandfather and the witness and instruction of the Felician Sisters who taught me in elementary school, prayer was always important to me. As an altar boy I used to wait to hear the cantor sing “as the deer longs for running water, so I long for You, O God” from Psalm 42 and “one thing I ask of the Lord, this I seek, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord all my days” from Psalm 27 at the funeral Masses I would serve. These psalms seemed to articulate what I felt but could not put into words.

Once I was asked to describe a Carmelite heart. For me, a Carmelite heart is one that desires union with God. I believe that prayer is an important tool, or key, to that union. In prayer that thirst for God is expressed and satisfied. In prayer one can gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and experience His gaze on you. A Carmelite heart is a praying heart. As so many of our Carmelite saints tell us, prayer is a conversation with the one we know hears us, sees us, loves us and acts on our behalf.

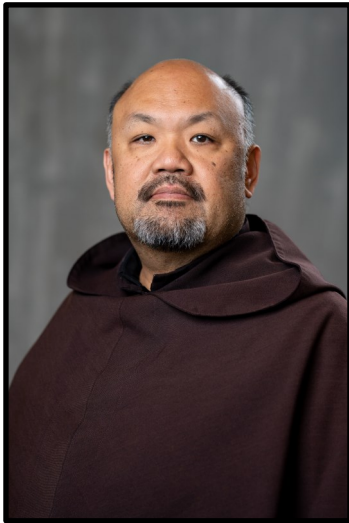
An aim of our Carmelite life is to be conformed to Christ. For me prayer is what transforms one and forms the mind, heart and attitude of Jesus in the one who prays.





# GOD IN THE PROFOUND AND THE MUNDANE

by Rev. Emiel Abalahin, O. Carm.



From time to time, I have to travel along the New Jersey Turnpike, a drive that I often find boring and dull. I prefer travelling in the evening because the traffic is pretty light and, apart from ensuring that I drive safely, I can allow my mind to wander. While in one of these mindless moments during a recent trip, I was suddenly swept up in a wave of awareness and gratitude of how God blesses me in my life, as people, events, and realities appeared in my consciousness, and I was shown how all of these things were interconnected.

Spiritual theologians have debated whether such experiences come about solely through divine grace, or if there is some kind of work that precedes them. The conclusion is that both are true. God has the freedom to bestow His gifts on anyone He wishes. At the same time, someone can prepare themselves to be open to and engage in these experiences through establishing a prayerful relationship with God. In the praxis of prayer, we allow God to develop within us a sensitivity to His action and presence in

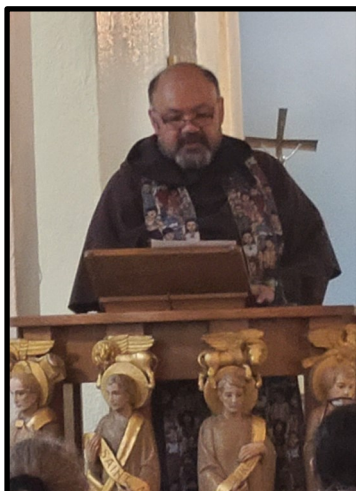
our lives, including during intense moments of contemplation, such as the wave of gratitude that I experienced.

So what is contemplation? Traditional mystical theology defines it as a degree of prayer, usually preceded by other stages of prayer, such as in *lectio divina*. It involves engaging in a progressively deeper process of prayer that allow us to eventually turn to God in simple, affective prayer, as God reveals Himself and the way He manifests Himself in our lives, such as in the awareness of simple eternal truths. In Teresa of Avila's magnum opus, *The Interior Castle*, she teaches that the more internal mansions of union, betrothal, and spiritual marriage are stages of gradually developing contemplation.

Ultimately, we discover as we study her writings, as well as those of other people of prayer, that contemplation can be fostered –not manufactured or controlled by us– in such a way that it can also be recognized and experienced in the events and realities of daily life, whether while washing the dishes, enjoying the beauty of nature, dealing with challenging personal issues, or even taking a mundane trip along the New Jersey Turnpike.



pexels-Marieke-Schonfeld  
Photographer



# Who can practice contemplative prayer?

By Rev. Paul Therese Hung Tran, O. Carm.



When the term “contemplation” comes to mind, one might be inclined to think that it would be peculiarly set apart for some few “extraordinary” people, and, accordingly, the “ordinary” people would be estranged from it. If so, there arises a practical question: who can approach contemplation and practice contemplative prayer? In order to find an answer to this question, it is instructive to refer to St. John of the Cross, the master of contemplation whose teachings are officially recognized by the Church as orthodox and trustworthy.

Practically, we might have a common experience of prayer which seemed very natural that our prayer should grow more and more simple, and we experienced an intimacy with God to some extent. But then there emerged a crisis in our prayer life with a heavy sense of weariness and distaste for mental prayer when prayer became so simple that it almost disappeared, during which there was no clarity of thought, distinctness of image, nor sensible fervor. Nevertheless, what John says to us is that this experience is entirely natural - following the usual way of simplification of prayer. And this is good news: the crisis we were experiencing in our prayer life was not a dead end but a way

forward. At this point, we might wonder what happened to our satisfying prayer, why our prayer is so dark, what were we doing wrong? John wants us to know that nothing is wrong, everything is developing naturally, and the darkness is actually a sign of progress (cf. *Ascent*, II,1,3). On the contrary, John tells us that in this stage of prayer it is wrong for us to try to return to sensible thoughts, images, affections and reasonings of meditation (*Ascent*, II, 12, 6). “Perhaps the greatest debt that Christianity owes to John of the Cross is for the clarity with which he showed that the *Dark Night of the Soul* was not a dead loss in the spiritual life...but was an integral part of the development of prayer.”<sup>2</sup>

This is the key to John’s teaching about the beginning of contemplation. Contemplation is approached not by greater clarity of natural powers of understanding, but by slowly opening oneself to the obscure, new kind of knowledge of God; not by struggling harder to pray but by calmly remaining quiet before God. Metaphorically, prayer is not crashing into a wall but of confidently waiting for a door to open. “The surest sign [for knowing that it is time for us to leave discursive meditation and begin to practice this simple prayer of faith] is that a person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and repose...in a general, loving awareness and knowledge” (*Ascent*, II, 13, 4).

To come to this stage of contemplative prayer, there comes along a necessary virtue: total trust in God, a fundamental stance before God with poverty of spirit. This is a virtue that can be acquired by anybody: we cannot depend on anything of our efforts, merits, or good works; we are simply nothing, empty, dependent before God. Once the soul does its part by becoming poor in spirit, God will certainly do his part by infusing his grace of contemplation (*Living Flame*, III, 46). This poverty of spirit, identified by John with detachment, means accepting the emptiness and darkness of all our faculties in prayer, so that we can only wait for God’s action and his gift of infused prayer (*Ascent*, II, 24, 8).

In conclusion, contemplative prayer is for everybody, even if he or she is humbly at the beginning level of contemplation and not proficient yet. Since for John, there are different progressive stages of contemplation at which different sorts of person might find themselves in: the beginners, the proficient, and the perfect. So, even at the very beginning of contemplation, it is still contemplation. In other words, contemplative prayer is accessible for whoever wishes to engage themselves into the path of spiritual growth, with poverty of spirit. Also, here is an attention so significant to be paid to: concerning contemplative prayer, the first and foremost thing we need to do is to pray, take time to practice and pray right now. We might tell ourselves that doing ministries is a way to experience God each day, and our life is so filled with masses, sacraments, and pastoral services that there is no need for prayer. What benefit is it, if one acquires answers to prayer, even comprehends thoroughly methods and principles of prayer, but hardly puts it into practice?

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<sup>1</sup> With a reference from James W. Kinn, *The Practice of Contemplation According to John of the Cross* (Washington DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Leonard Boase, S.J., *The Prayer of Faith* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1985), p. 78.



# What is Prayer?

By Rev. Stephan Tuu Le, O.Carm.



As a Carmelite, I have often been asked about praying. The question is very important to all Catholics, particularly to religious, but not easy to have a quick answer. Normally, I would tell people a simple definition of prayer, the image of a butterfly of St. Teresa of Avila, and my personal prayer life. As St. Teresa of Avila defined praying is to have conversations with God. And she used the image of a butterfly to compare to a soul.

However, there are all kinds of conversations with God. For me, the main purpose here is to remain and be committed in communication with God, who is our loving Father, to let him know us and to know him in a very personal relationship. In my experience, none of us would know about praying until we start to pray. As long as we pray, we would be taught how to pray and in love with prayer life. So, you just start! God would teach each one another wonderful way to communicate with Him. There could be a lot of words at the beginning, but eventually, the silence would come and gradually replace the words.

The more we pray and are in communication with the loving Father, the more we know of our sin and imperfection. One's daily communication with God would help to realize that a fuller and fuller communication and understanding with God happens only when one is purified more and more. As Saint Teresa mentioned in the Ways of Perfection: "The great good that lies in detaching oneself inwardly and outwardly from all created things." [1]

The life of a butterfly comes out from a silkworm. The worm nourishes itself on mulberry leaves until they grow to the full size. The worms "themselves go about spinning the silk and making some very thick little cocoons in which they enclose themselves. The silkworm, which is fat and ugly, then dies, and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes forth from the cocoon." [2] As a little silkworm, in prayer life, one must not stop eating, which is being nourished in the Eucharist, in the Word of God, in liturgy and sacraments. One must not stop producing silk threads, which are small good things to be one's virtues later. One silk thread can be thin and very small, but the silk threads that overlap each other, the more it will create a layer of armor to protect the silkworm inside.

These days, I pray verse 12 of Psalm 90, "Teach us to count our days aright, that we may gain wisdom of heart." This teaches me to contemplate the time of my life. Days of my life would be full of my actions, but also much more of God's actions. I can count by words, but I can count by my attitude of gratefulness because I come to acknowledge all that I had and have, all that I was and am, are because of God's loving mercy. May God's actions replace all my actions in life, and I always give thanks to the great mercy of God.

[1] *The collected works of Saint Teresa of Avila (ICS Publications Washington DC, 2012), 334.*

[2] *The collected works of Saint Teresa of Avila (ICS Publications, Washington DC, 2012), 334.*



# Prayer and Contemplation

By Rev. Nicholas Blackwell, O.Carm.



If someone had told me 15 years ago that I would be a Carmelite Friar, Catholic Priest, and Canon Lawyer, I would have laughed, yet now I am all three. One of my favorite canons in the 1983 Code of Canon Law is Canon 574, where the Church states that the status of a person who professes evangelical counsels belongs to the life and holiness of the Church. Here, status denotes a type of stability of existence in the Church. Through that stability of my vocation, I now play a role in the holiness of the Church.

However, that vocational stability is only possible to a Carmelite through the gift of prayer, which leads to contemplation. A gift that is both received and cultivated. St. John of the Cross best summarizes this vocation to prayer in his *Sayings of Light and*

*Love #158: "Seek in reading, and you will find in meditation; knock in prayer, and it will be opened to you in contemplation."* As a

professed Carmelite, living the vows, I must commit myself to meditate upon the word of God every day through which by the Spirit I may knock on the very pierced heart of Christ in prayer, so I may, by the will of God, rest in his own inner room through the blessing of contemplation. Thus, this movement, marked by prayer with the Word of God, which gives stability to my vocation, provides for the growth of the fruit of the Spirit, fruit which is meant not merely for me but for the Church so that all her members may be nourished from His sanctified fruit.





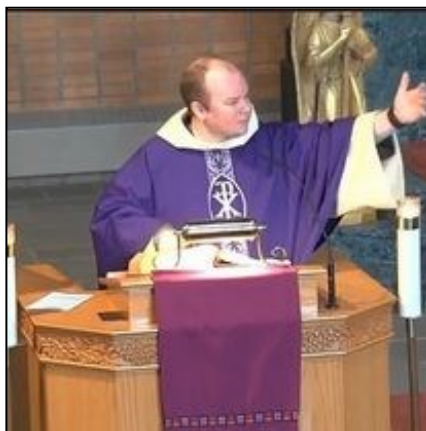
# Prayer

By Rev. Paul Richmond, O.Carm.



St. Teresa of Avila said prayer is " A conversation with a Best Friend." Our Carmelite Sister was expressing that words did not need to be expressed, but only the presence of the best friend, who is God. The presence is a very powerful expression of a relationship with God. As Carmelites, we are all called to express our relationship with God and be vulnerable with God. Vulnerability is a stepping stone to deepening a relationship with someone we love. We are showing all of our fears, doubts, and struggles with this person. In many times of struggle, God can be the last option. As we teach people to pray, we must show that prayer is life-giving and, before all else, we should stop and pray. Prayer is not easy; it is very difficult. There are a lot of distractions that can move us away from the center of God.

Prayer is more than a conversation with God; it is a love story constantly being played out in the present moment. As the faithful, we must be vulnerable enough to express ourselves to the Creator who has given us life in this world. We must show to all humanity and work for peace and justice in communities that have been plagued with violence and discrimination. Only through the work of prayer can we unite ourselves with the people of God and the Holy Trinity.



# We Survive Through Contemporary Spirituality

By Rev. Joseph Dat Duc Cao, O.Carm.



People would not know what the Carmelite Order is without our saints and the writings they left behind. People are impressed with the Carmelite saints because they followed and practiced the Rule of the Order.

In fact, the Rule is probably something that many Carmelites are afraid of when following our vocation in the Carmelite Order. We humans, especially in today's era, want to enjoy rather than sacrifice, prefer to hear noise rather than a quiet atmosphere, and want to surf the internet rather than pray according to the Rule. We are in danger of lacking profound examples of prayer in community life if each Carmelite does not find a path for himself to return to the spirituality of prayer according to the Rule of the Order.

In today's world, people are easily confused between dedicating their lives to serving God or for their own importance. When we live out our contemplative identity according to the Rule, we will find the true meaning of serving others.

In short, the Rule requires perseverance in daily prayer, requiring us as Carmelite brothers to be like strong fish with the ability to swim against the current of society. We must be people who are more occupied with contemplative prayer than with any other occupation.





# Prayer Changes Me

By Rev. Marlon Beharry, O.Carm.



I am fortunate to have experienced or, at least, witnessed many different prayer types in my life. I have relatives and friends of many different religious backgrounds, including Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, and various Protestant communities. So all my life I have been surrounded by people who pray in many different ways according to their beliefs. Looking back on this has helped me to zone in on what I most appreciate about Carmelite prayer.

To me, the specific appeal about Carmelite prayer is that it changes *me*. So often we pray asking God to change things. And rightly so, because there is a lot in our world that needs to change! But Carmelite prayer changes the one praying. My first encounter with the Carmelite saints was when I stumbled upon the writings of Saints Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross about three years after becoming Catholic. At that time, my initial fascination and excitement with all things Catholic – adoration, rosary, divine mercy chaplet, liturgy of the hours and others – was fading. I was confused. Was my prayer life up to that point just a passing fad?



I was comforted by the wisdom of Saint John of the Cross, who said that such initial zeal must pass. It is when that initial fervor dies, like the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, that a deeper, contemplative form of prayer emerges. What a blessing to know that the Lord works in us, through prayer, in such a wonderful way to change us and draw us into closer relationship with him! This, in my opinion, is the beautiful thing about Carmelite prayer.



# Prayer Unites Us

By Rev. Brother Jonathan Steele, O.Carm.



“Lord, let me see with Your eyes, let me love with Your heart, and do all things according to Your will.” From time to time, this prayer stirs in my heart. Generally, it begins with a movement of love for Jesus, usually on the cross. As I am moved toward Him, I pray this prayer and as though in immediate response to this prayer my heart begins to move outward, towards the world, and I am filled with love for the suffering. Sometimes, I even imagine specific people or scenarios. I want to rush to their aid, to embrace them, to let them know of the Father’s love.

I have often reflected on this prayer, on my experience of praying it, on this desire to share in Christ’s ministry, on God’s love for us, among other things. Here, my reflection is this: prayer connects us to one another. In this prayer, I understand St. Paul just a little better when, speaking of the body of Christ, he says, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy (1 Cor. 12:26).” In this prayer, I ‘know’ that “Our struggle is not with flesh and blood (Eph. 6:12) ...” for our neighbors are our brothers and sisters... yes, even those who attack us. In this prayer, I see that God indeed loves the *world*; so much so that He gives us His Son (Jn. 3:16), and this is His Son’s prayer, “That they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us (Jn. 17:21).” Prayer connects us; it unites us in Christ! This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit in which we pray, “Our Father...”





# Living Conversion In Prayer

By Rev. Brother Paul Tuan Dang, O.Carm.



I am starting from the opportunity to reflect on prayer and contemplation towards the 2025 Jubilee. To help us get closer to God and arouse inspiration for the Carmelite vocation, I would like to share with you some experiences about the importance of prayer life in the process of conversion, change, and growth as we inherit precious treasures from the charism and spirituality of the Order.

In the historical flow of the Carmelite Order, we are extremely happy to be immersed in the spiritual treasures of the prayer and contemplation lives of divine figures such as John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila. Interesting and unique in their life of prayer and contemplation was the beholding of God in their own unworthiness. The closer they are to God in fervent

prayer, the more their hearts desire conversion to become pure creatures in relationship with God.

I deeply appreciate and always apply to my spiritual life the dimension of conversion in prayer. Whenever I encounter difficulty, weakness, sin, loneliness, and lack of peace, I quickly seek to place myself in the presence of God. I place myself before God's presence in prayer, silence, reading and meditating on God's Word, contemplating the Cross and worshiping the Eucharist with the desire to have God change my thoughts, understanding and attitude of life in relationship with God and with brothers. Such periods of fervent prayer and contemplation help me reflect, look back at myself, and change my weakness to live better and be faithful to the calling that God is waiting for.



Thus, praying is going on the path of conversion, placing myself before God, and facing myself, looking back at my relationship with God, myself, and my brothers and sisters to renew my soul and my attitude to life. Therefore, conversion begins with the heart's desire to seek God, change one's attitude in God's presence, and sincerely live the brotherhood of the community. This experience helps me find balance in my vocational life. Hopefully, this experience of mine will make a small contribution to inspiring you about the importance of a life of prayer and contemplation in your vocation.





On Thursday, March 14th, 2024, at the Church of Tan Dinh Parish, the Most Reverend Joseph Nang Nguyen, Archbishop of Saigon, Vietnam, conferred the sacrament of Holy Orders upon four Carmelite friars. Let us extend our sincere congratulations to:

*Diaconate Ordination:*

- Rev. Br. Anthony Thanh Nguyen, O.Carm.
- Rev. Br. John Baptist The Hoang, O.Carm.
- Rev. Br. Paul Tuan Dang, O.Carm.

*Priesthood Ordination:*

- Rev. Peter Trong Pham, O.Carm.

Let us continue to support these newly ordained ministers by our thoughts and prayers as they embrace their new roles in the Church. May God bless them and their ministry in the Order of Carmelites. May the Holy Spirit guide them and strengthen their commitment to serve God's people faithfully through the intercession of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

Pictures credited by the Media of the Archdiocese of Saigon.



From left to right:

Rev. Br. Anthony Thanh Nguyen, O.Carm, Rev. Br. John Baptist The Hoang, O.Carm., Rev. Peter Trong Pham, O.Carm. Most Rev. Joseph Nang, O.Carm., Rev. Br. Paul Tuan Dang, O.Carm., Very Rev. Mario Esposito, O.Carm., and Rev. Joseph Hung Tran, O.Carm.



## Prayer Corner:

### *St. Therese's Prayer for Vocations to The Religious Life*



Dear Lord God, We thank you for the death and resurrection of your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, you inspired St. Therese, the Little Flower, to consecrate her life to you as a Carmelite.

As the beauty of each flower is determined by you, its Creator, please plant your seeds of vocations to the religious life and priesthood in some of our young people, shine your love upon them, shower them with your grace, and nourish them with the Eucharist to serve your church as good and holy religious and priests.

Beloved St. Therese promised: "I will send down a shower of roses from the heavens; I will spend my heaven doing good upon earth." Grant young people the grace to accept God's call and the strength to fulfill their vocation so that they may do great things for God and the salvation of the human family.

Call men and women to the Carmelite Family, both as religious and priesthood work – Help us in whatever way pleases you – to build up the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.

### *Prayer for Vocations to the Carmelite Order*



Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of Carmel.

We ask you to continue to call forth men and women of generous hearts to the Order of Carmel.

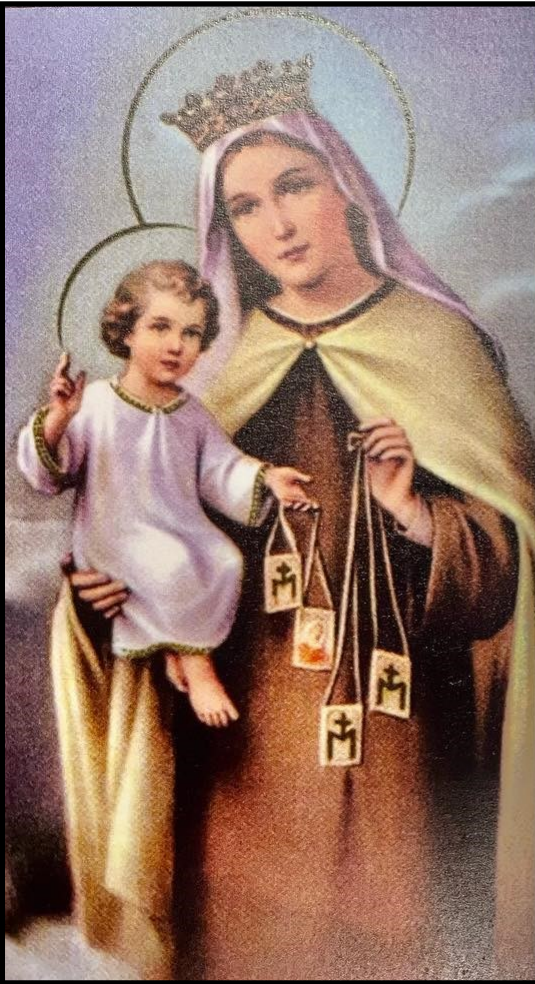
May they be like the prophet Elijah, full of enthusiasm and love for you.

May Mary be their inspiration, welcoming your invitation to serve the Church as disciples and bearers of the Word. Inspire them to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, prayerfully working to build your kingdom of justice and peace.

Faithful God, give us the grace and courage to discern and respond generously to your call.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Pray for us.

Holy Prophet Elijah. Pray for us.



## *Novena to Our Lady of Mount Carmel*

*O most beautiful flower of Mount Carmel,  
fruitful vine, splendor of Heaven, Blessed  
Mother of the Son of God, Immaculate Virgin,  
assist me in my necessity.*

*Oh Star of the Sea, help me and show me you  
are my Mother. Oh Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
Queen of Heaven and earth, I humbly beseech  
you from the bottom of my heart to help me in  
this necessity (make request).*

*There are none that can withstand your power.  
Oh Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us  
who have recourse to thee (say three times).*

*Holy Mary, I place this prayer in your  
hands (say three times).*

*Amen.*

## *St. Teresa of Avila*



Let nothing disturb you  
Let nothing frighten you  
All things are passing away  
*God never changes.*  
Patience obtains all things.  
Whoever has God lacks nothing;  
*God alone suffices.*



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