

THE BEATITUDES AS INTEGRAL PART OF THE PROMISE

Fr. Aloysius Deeney, OCD, General Delegate

I think that the promise is the most neglected part of formation programs that I have seen. There are many different religious orders. Right? There are Franciscans, Dominicans, Oblates, Missionaries of Mary Immaculate, and there Jesuits; there are all sorts of different religious traditions and religious families, but what makes the friars, or the priests, or the brothers, and the nuns and sisters and what makes us religious is that we make vows. I am a priest because I was ordained, not because I am a Carmelite. I was professed and the Church recognized in my profession my dedication of myself as a religious and as a Carmelite.

What makes you a member of the Secular Order is that you have made the promise

It is the promise that you make, that makes you members of the Secular Order. That distinguishes you from many, many, many other people who live and love Carmelite spirituality, but have not made any sort of commitment to the order and whose commitment has not been recognized by the Church. What makes you a member of Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites is not that you live Carmelite spirituality, because there are a lot of other people who may even live it better than all of us put together, who are not members of the order.

What makes you a member of the Secular Order is that you have made the promise. Your promise has been recognized by the Church. There are a lot of other people who are part of the Carmelite family who are not part of the order. There are a lot of people who know a lot of things about Carmelite spirituality and really are experts but are not members of the order.

How does this come up in a practical way?

Let me give an example, I bet in some of your communities you have the experience of people who got through the entire formation program, make definitive promises, may even make vows and then you never see them again. If you do see them...."well I say my office every day, I make mental prayer every day, I read St. Teresa, I read St. John of the Cross, I study them", but they have no idea of what it means to be a part of the order. I am asked that question. I know that is the truth because, no matter where I go in the world, somebody asks me about people who made the promises – the promise (it is singular, one promise) and then never come to meetings again. I have asked to look at many formation programs and most formation programs have zero in it about making or what the promise is, the content of the promise.

Why is there a promise?

What is the effect of making the promise?

It is almost like I want to say that there is too much formation in spirituality in the initial stages and not enough formation in what it means to become part of a community; because it is the promise that incorporates you into the order. So, I have a chance because I have been asked to talk about the Beatitudes, the Beatitudes in not just a Bible study program. It is incorporation, it is part of your commitment to incorporate yourself to become part of this family. The friars, the nuns, we live in community, it is our structure. Your structure is to make community. You don't live in community, you live in community of your families, you live in the community of your parishes; but you make a community of the people who share something very basic, about your Catholic Christian identity, namely, Carmel.

In order to put the Beatitudes in the context of the promise I want to read in the new Constitutions what it says about the following of Jesus in the Teresian Carmel, because that is where it talks about the promise. It does not talk about prayer. The third chapter talks about prayer. The second chapter talks about incorporation. It does not talk about spirituality and the formation for spirituality or rather the information for spirituality. That is the fourth chapter. The first chapter is identity, values, commitment, which leads to the second chapter which is following Jesus in the Teresian Secular Carmel and that has to do with the promise. It is how you follow Jesus. Let me read a few of the numbers in the constitution.

Constitution number 10 : Christ is the center of our lives and of Christian experience. Members of the Secular Order are called to live the demands of following Christ in union with Him, by accepting His teachings and devoting themselves to Him. To follow Jesus is to take part in His saving mission of proclaiming the Good News and the establishment of God's Kingdom. There are various ways of following Jesus: all Christians must follow Him, must make Him the law for their lives and be disposed to fulfill three fundamental demands: to place family ties beneath the interests of the Kingdom and Jesus himself; to live in detachment from wealth in order to show that the arrival of the Kingdom does not depend on human means but rather on God's strength and the willingness of the human person before Him; to carry the cross of accepting God's will revealed in the mission that He has confided to each person.

Constitution number 11 : Following Jesus as members of the Secular Order is expressed by the promise to strive for evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and through the beatitudes. By means of this promise the member's baptismal commitment is strengthened for the service of God's plan in the world. This promise is a pledge to pursue personal holiness, which necessarily carries with it a commitment to serving the Church in faithfulness to the Teresian Carmelite charism. The promise is taken before the members of the community, representing the whole Church and in the presence of the Delegate of the Superior of the Order. By the promise made to the community in the presence of the Superior of the Order or his Delegate, the person becomes a full member of the Secular Order.

So the promises, the promise, I keep saying promises, but the parts of the promise, that is the fact of the act of committing yourself. It is not just personal, as it says in other parts of the constitution, it is ecclesial. Your promise is an ecclesial act. You are more part of

the Church, because you are a member of the order. Those of you who may have read in the Clarion, or seen or heard the tape of a conference I gave in New Orleans a couple of years ago, about the Profile of a Discalced Carmelite Secular Order member, essential element, the element that distinguishes, as I have already said every other person who follows Carmelite spirituality is that you make a commitment to the order and the order makes a commitment to you.

That commitment is recognized by the Church. For that reason it is not just a club. See many people have a club mentality about the Secular Order, that's why they stop coming, or they come when it is convenient or they come when it is almost time for elections. I can always tell that there are some things that are universal truths. People generally admit that they know somebody that does that. Club membership can hardly be the correct mentality for forming a community with people. That mentality that says I come when I come when it convenient for me, that mentality that says I come so that I can learn all this and do it for myself. That I say the office, I read it myself; I say my prayers, I mediate every day, I might even meditate an hour and a half or two every hours every day. I might read and know all about St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross.

One of the things that is in the Constitutions when it talks about Provincial Councils and Provincial Statutes, the first thing that Provincial statutes are to do is to develop an adequate program of formation. Not just a program of information, most of the time when people say we need a program of formation they are talking about a program of information. We want to know what to teach in this period, in this period, this period, this period and this period. What books to use in this stage and this stage, and this stage. That is not formation, that is a program of information. Formation is much more than information. Good formation depends on good information, that's true. You get bad information you have bad formation. Formation is much more, than just information. Information is what Formation is how.

So a program of formation is: how do we train people, how do we educate people?

How do we inform people so that they make progress in the stages of formation they can commit themselves to us?

The promise is made to the community into which the person is incorporated. So the formation of the person is to be able to commit himself or herself to us, with the right information. I have seen so many programs of information for formation programs, a lot of spirituality but not a lot of corporality, you might say incorporation. Remember what St. Teresa says? That is useless or it is silly to think of ourselves as angels as long as we have these bodies. The Secular Order is an extension of the Church. It is a realization of the Church, which is, by nature, incarnate. It has a body and soul. The soul is the spirituality but it gives life to a body which is the incorporation of people with each other. Many times this is the reason why people have been satisfied with learning a lot about spirituality but not being able to incorporate it, and cease to participate, because they do not see the necessity.

The promise is as the Constitution is saying: to strive for evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience and through the Beatitudes. The evangelical counsels are traditional, are, of course, what the friars, the sisters, the nuns, what religious make, as their vows as they incorporate themselves into the community in which they are members. The evangelical counsels are time honored, long standing. It defines a way of living Christ's life. Poverty, chastity, obedience or whatever order you want to put them in, chastity, obedience, poverty, those vows, those counsels, they are evangelical counsel.

As you know there are many people, especially after the Second Vatican Council, there was in the Church and in the order also a movement to really make the Secular Order independent of the friars and nuns in the sense of having their own forms. Forms that are different from our forms.

There was a movement, after the Second Vatican Council, that wants to de-religiousize the religious, de-religiousize the Secular Order. They wanted take away even poverty, chastity, and obedience and say there has to be something else. In every group, in order for a group to function, to survive, to have history, and to continue in history, it is necessary to have three things: discernment of who is part of the group, formation of the people who are discerned to belong as part of the group, and the commitment for the purposes of the groups. Commitment is necessary.

Poverty, Chastity, And Obedience

As time went along and different people were trying to come up with different things, we realized that poverty, chastity, and obedience are evangelical counsels. They are not counsels to religious. They are evangelical counsels. They are ways of evaluating yourself in the light of Jesus. Because the vows we make as religious and the promise you make as seculars are not to live our poverty, our chastity, our obedience, but to live the poverty, and the chastity, and the obedience of Jesus. My chastity is not going to save anybody, but it is the poverty, and the chastity, and the obedience of Jesus that saves. So we live, Jesus that person, second person of the blessed Trinity, God and man, who lived his life on Earth and in that life saved all of humanity, whose life is found in the pages of the Gospel and in the experience of the tradition of the Church, and the sacraments and prayer and meditation. That person becomes the standard by which we evaluate ourselves, under those three rather radical categories of human life. Loving, possessing, and being in obedience, how we are. In a certain sense it is that poverty, that chastity, and that obedience of Jesus that in our promise, in my vows, in your promise that we make that become the standard for us to evaluate our lives. How we are living, how we are moving, how we are being, how we possess things. We possess things, but how do we possess them? We love, and we love deeply and humanly but with what clarity do we love. We are and we are incorporated with each other, we are parts of community, parts of family, parts of society, parts of the Church, but how?

At the time of The Rule of Life in 1974, when The Rule of Life was written, the commission that was set up to evaluate the Rule of Life wanted to add something,

inspired by basically the Vatican Council's document on the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* and added as an integral part of the promise to the personal evaluation of Jesus as standard of personal life, they wanted to add the Beatitudes. They wanted to add the Beatitudes for a very specific reason because the Beatitudes are not just a personal evaluation of one's own person, of one's own approach, attitude, living of life; but they are a measure of relationship to the world.

The Beatitudes

What does the catechism of the Catholic Church say about the Beatitudes? There are two numbers in the catechism, number 1716 and 1717.

1716 : The Beatitudes are at the heart of Jesus' preaching. They take up the promises made to the chosen people since Abraham. The Beatitudes fulfill the promises by ordering them no longer merely to the possession of a territory but to the kingdom of Heaven.

1717: The Beatitudes depict of the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray His charity. They express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of His passion and resurrection. They shed light on the actions and attitudes characteristic of the Christian life. They are paradoxical promises that sustain hope in the midst of tribulations. They proclaim the blessings and rewards already secured however dimly for Christ's disciples. They have begun in the lives of Virgin Mary and all the saints.

The Beatitudes depict of the countenance of Jesus Christ and portray His charity. They express the vocation of the faithful associated with the glory of His passion.

Remember this is a result of the Second Vatican Council document *Apostolicam Actuositatem* which then becomes even more highlighted and underlined, and enhanced in the document *Christifideles Laici* on the role of the apostolate of lay persons. It is essential, your role. It is not just because there are less vocations that your role is more important than before. It is because it is the time where the Holy Spirit wants this role. The Church doesn't need friars, the Church doesn't need nuns, and the Church doesn't need seculars.

The Church needs what we have to offer. The Church needs the witness of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. The Church needs that spirituality. The world needs that spirituality. The world needs what we have to offer, to the extent that we do not offer it, we are useless to God. We are useless to God to the extent that we do not offer what He has given us in our vocation. This commitment that we have made, you through the promise, I through the vows, is to be present in the Church, to minister to the Church, and this is the role specifically underlined, revealed most in the Second Vatican Council and after the Second Vatican Council through the different Synods about the role of lay persons in the Church. *Vita Apostolica* and *Vita Consecrata* are documents centered on the religious life. Paragraph 55 says that because of the new circumstances in the history of the world it has become apparent that lay people are called to share not only the

spirituality but the mission....not just spirituality but the mission of the religious family.

The Church needs to know what St. Teresa and St John of the Cross says and it's our job to tell them, to let them know. There are 40,000 of you. There are 4,000 of us. You are ten times more present than we are. We have to read the Beatitudes as a way to remind us of how our relationship to the world as communities is.

Beatitudes As A Way To Remind Us Of How Our Relationship To The World As Communities

We Americans have a big problem in that we are always tempted to be individualists. Right? (This also applies to Malaysian too, I believe. – S.Tai)

We are tempted to always think of what does this mean I have to do. Begin to think now as communities.

What does this mean for our community as a Secular Order community?

Not what does this mean for me. Nobody has to quit their job, leave their families to become a Carmelite Secular if we do things in thinking in terms of our community.

Let's read the Beatitudes. There are two sets of beatitudes. Not just Matthew, but also Luke. There are two sets of beatitudes. We are used to thinking of eight beatitudes, there is sort of a ninth one that some texts include in the eighth one in St. Matthew's Gospel. There are six or seven in St. Luke's Gospel.

(Matthew 5:1-12)

(1) Seeing the crowds he went on the mountain and when he was seated, his disciples came to him.

(2) Then he began to speak and this is what he taught them.

(3) How blessed

(There is always a problem is it blessed, or blessed. This is a point not just the word because it has to do also with the meaning. Other translations, I think the New American Bible first said, the one that we read at Mass or used to read at Mass in English, how happy. So it is happy or blessed or blessed. They have different shades of meaning.)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven, is theirs.

(4) Blessed are the gentle they shall have the earth as inheritance.

(5) Blessed are those who mourn they shall be comforted.

(6) Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness.

That's the New Jerusalem Bible translation. Most of us are familiar with Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, they shall have their fill.

(7) Blessed are the merciful, they shall have mercy shown them.

(8) Blessed are the pure in heart, they shall see God.

(9) Blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be recognized as children of God.

(10) Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of uprightness (justice) for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

(11) Blessed are you when people abuse you, persecute you, and speak all kinds calumny against you falsely on my account.

(12) Rejoice and be glad for your reward will be great in heaven for this is how they persecuted the prophets before you.

St. Luke's version. (Luke 6:20-26)

(20) Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said: "how blessed are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

(21) Blessed are you who are hungry now, you shall have your fill. Blessed are you who are weeping now, you shall laugh.

(22) Blessed are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal on account of the Son of Man.

(23) Rejoice when that day comes, and dance for joy, look your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

(24) But alas for you,

I like the other translation WOE, woe to you who are rich for you have your consolation now.

(25) Alas for you, woe to you who have plenty to eat now, for you shall go hungry. Alas for you, woe to those who are laughing now, you shall mourn and weep.

(26) Woe for you when everyone speaks well of you, this is the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.

Again as poverty, chastity, and obedience were the measuring, were the life of Jesus: Jesus as poor, chaste, and obedient in the Gospel, in his life, in the tradition of the Church, that person becomes then the measuring stick of our own relationship to the Father, especially. The Beatitudes become the measuring stick for where do we identify ourselves, as our communities. Because when we do this in communities, this is again part of that incorporation. When we do this in community, we support each other doing it.

We are not left to wondering how or all on our own; but where do we identify ourselves? With whom do we identify ourselves?

Because the Beatitudes, as everybody, you can read many things and commentaries of the Beatitudes to understand that they are the introduction to the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus and the Sermon on Plain in Luke. The Sermon on the Mount is very much about the relationship of one to another. Including of course to pray the Our Father.

How do we identify ourselves as persons who live a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ? This Carmelite life? The Rule of St. Albert?

A life of allegiance to Jesus Christ and that allegiance to Jesus Christ brings us to identify ourselves with certain people and to see in certain aspects, and certain virtues and certain approaches to living how we have to live in order to be in allegiance to Jesus Christ, in order to be loyal to Jesus. The structure of the eight Beatitudes that are more famous, form the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel and you see sometimes hanging on walls, you can see it when you go to religious gift shops and see a plaque that has the eight beatitudes. People look at them like they belong on a Hallmark card, you know, but they are really very demanding and they are not so cute. They are cute on the card, but they are not so cute in living them out because they are demanding an attitude of us. That doesn't come naturally to us in certain ways. I do not think that it comes naturally to us as Americans - to live the Beatitudes the way the Gospels teach the Beatitudes. And they certainly don't come naturally to us as an approach to us to living life.

The eight Beatitudes, you can almost divide them into two sections of four. How I am going to read the traditional ones that I remember from grade school.

1. blessed are the poor in spirit, the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
2. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted
3. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.
4. Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for justice, you shall have your fill.
5. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
6. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.
7. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.
8. Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

There are two sets. The fourth one and eighth one go together, almost as a refrain, the way we do sometimes in the Psalms Response. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst

for justice, for they shall have their fill. Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice, for they shall have their fill. The justice that exists in the Bible, is not the justice that you and I understood, when we say justice is going to be done. We mean justice as punishment. We mean justice as revenge. That is not at all evangelical. That is not at all scriptural. It is not at all the justice of God. I often wonder especially when I am read the Gospels, it sort of shocks me sometimes, as the day of the Lord is when we let everybody out of prison. We find so many reasons to keep people in prison, because justice has to be done.

We are very conditioned in our attitudes; we get a lot more information about how to live from the television, from the newspaper, the means of communication than we do from the Gospels. So, we have a tendency to skip over what these things say to us because they are conditioned by how we understand. Blessed are those that hunger and thirst for justice. It is almost like we might exaggeratingly say we understand these as vigilante groups who go out to punish people. They are doing justice. They are not seeking forgiveness.

- Justice is to look out for the poor.
- Justice is to make sure people eat.
- Justice is to make sure people are clothed.
- Justice is to make sure people have what they need to be human and to live humanly.
- Justice is to forgive. Sister said, “actions speak louder than words.” Sister said “God’s justice was God’s mercy.”

Through all of tradition so many things, all Christian tradition, in theology, in philosophy, so many other things have interrupted almost, or infused themselves, or inched their way into spirituality, into scripture, into following Christ that we almost get political in the way we interpret or understand our approach to life, to living. It comes from whom we identify with One of the things about in the American system of justice is that we have the death penalty. Yet the Holy Father so strongly speaks against the death penalty. And, at least according to surveys, a majority of Catholics are in favor of the death penalty.

So our American idea of justice is more important than Jesus’ idea of justice. Again, I’m trying to be practical in pointing out that this is not easy, to live an evangelical life. Yet it is what you promised to do, and that is so solemn that promise, that the Church says that’s how you become a member. You can quote St. Teresa up and down, St John of Cross left to right, St. Therese, everything, but if you do not follow Jesus, you are not a Carmelite.

Importance of Community Meetings.

This also point to the importance of meetings. The reason why meetings are so important is you can’t do this alone. You need to be in touch with, and be supported by and support others who are trying to do it too. It is for that reason a little bit why we have inched away from, some people have said maybe we have moved miles away from the idea of

isolate members. Long distance, members from a distance, maybe in others ways, but they have to be associated with other people. It's too difficult to do this, it is too inhuman. It is not practical to set up a spiritual life and a solemn life, all alone. If it is not practical, it's not Carmelite. Carmelite spirituality is supremely practical. It can be done and it can be practiced under certain conditions and in certain way and for this reason community life, whether it is for us who live in communities, or for you who make community, it is indispensable.

Does that make sense?

So you have the mistake that people make when they say :

“Oh, I don't need to go to meetings anymore.”

I am not talking about the sick. I am not talking about those who are reasonably, rationally excused or those that miss because their daughter is getting married, or their husband is sick. I am talking about people who don't come. They don't come and they say :

“Oh I say my Office everyday and I meditate everyday.”

There is more to it than that. It is not a training ground for individualists. Matter of fact, the one thing we loose is our individualism, not our individuality of course, but our individualism. What grows in a person who makes this promise, who tries to live these beatitudes as an apostolate, is the need to have others, to understand what is the right thing to do. And the people who need to know this don't come any more. So this is why we have to really re-look at the way we do things. We cannot continue to make the mistake of forming individualist.

I have a whole program of formation, in parenthesis, because it is actually a whole program of information, all written out, that I have sort of gleaned from looking at formation programs from around the world. What can be done at different stages, but it's too early to give it out, because we still are not clear about the formation. If we just continue giving information to people as they go through formation classes, almost as if, you've seen the mistakes, and the mistakes come at voting time, and the council “Well, she's so intelligent. She really loves St. Therese, she knows everything about her, or she really loves the Blessed Mother. She loves the scapular. Goodness sake she wears it night and day, all the time, but you know she is a little disagreeable in community, just a little disagreeable. You notice that every time she comes into the meeting. (Or he, the he(s) can be a lot worse than the shes.) Every time this person comes into the meeting everybody shuts up. They don't want to set her off. When it comes time to vote, she really does know what she is talking about.” It is not a matter of knowing what. It is a matter of knowing how. The how depends on a good what. It is knowing how to live this life.

Why do we make people parts of our community that we would never want to live with?

What does it do to the community?
How does it affect the community?

You've seen in the talk that I gave in New Orleans and you have seen it in other places where I have written where I talk about people who talk about Our Lady of Medjugorje hours and hours. It is obvious how that throws the community off. So everybody can really see how if you really have wrong things, things that aren't Carmelite things, you can see why that person doesn't belong.

This is a far more fundamental question about people who can live these evangelical counsels, the spirit of evangelical counsels and the Beatitudes. They have to have a certain human capacity for conversion. Human capacity not spiritual conversion. Not aversion from sin. Not practicing virtues heroically, but a human capacity. There has to be an ability to be part of other people. That is your responsibility as Council members when it comes to vote. You can give a written test on Carmelite spirituality, on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, on all the documents that have ever been written, and a person can get A, A, A, B+ and still invite someone to become part of your community who does not belong.

Number 36 in the Constitution talks about formation, and again the formation touches upon the promise. The gradual introduction. It's gradual. It's step by step, nobody starts out at the finish point. Everybody starts out at the beginning point. The gradual introduction to the life of the Secular Order is structured in the following manner: A sufficient period of contact with the community for no less than 6 months. The purpose of this stage is that the applicant might become more familiar with the community. More familiar with the community, with the people. The style of life and service to the Church proper to the Secular Order of the Teresian Carmel. This period also, you might want to say, the main reason, is to give the community the opportunity to make an adequate discernment of the candidate.

What are you looking at?

Not their intelligence, not their wisdom, not their knowledge, but their ability to relate to the people in the community. This is not a private school of spirituality. This is an organization of Christ's faithful people, part of the Discalced Carmelite Order. It is a community of people. You are looking at the capacity of this person to be part of the community.

After the initial period of contact, the council of the community may admit the applicant to a more serious period. Very important... the council of the community may, may, may - this is not a factory that produces Secular Order members. It's the council of the community may and may not. The council of the community may admit the applicant to a more serious period of formation that usually lasts for two years leading up to the first promises. There is a purpose for the formation. It's to get the person in a position; mentally, emotionally, psychologically, intellectually, spiritually to commit himself or herself to the community.

Is that what guides the period formation that is given in the first two years?

That this person is going to incorporate herself or himself with these people?

It's the promise that does that. So what is the formation for the promise?

At the end of this stage, with the approval of the Council of the Community, the applicant may, may be invited to make the first promises to follow the evangelical counsels and to live in the spirit of the beatitudes for a period of three years.

In the last three years of initial formation there is a deeper study of prayer, the Scriptures, the Documents of the Church, the Saints of the Order and formation in the apostolate of the Order. At the end of these three years the applicant may be invited by the Council to make the Definitive Promises. The period of formation has for its purpose of making the promise.

So you are looking at, who are these people who can form community with us?

How does this person help me live my commitment to evaluate myself through Jesus, poor, chaste, obedient, in relationship to the world that suffers?

How is this person going to help me do this? How can I help this person do this?

The rest, the soul, that's the body of being a member of the order. It is that body that receives its energy, its power, its light, its guide from the spirituality of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, St. Therese, St. Edith Stein, St. Teresa of the Andes, Elizabeth of the Trinity. That's the energy, that's the light, that's how we know what we are doing, and that's how we do it as members of our order. We have all of our lives to study that. One of the things I want to say is that in some programs of formation there is too much in the initial stages and not enough body, not enough that weighs us down. Because if we put too much spirit in the formation, this is too much to handle. It becomes too heavy. Am I making sense? Do you follow what I am saying?

This is what the Church needs of us. If this is what the Church needs of us, then guess what, it is what God wants of us. You might have heard me, I don't know if I said it on the tape and in the talk in New Orleans, but all of us come to Carmel for our reasons. That all of us stay for God's reasons. Our reasons grow and change. As you know I was a diocesan priest before I became a Carmelite, in Philadelphia. I knew the nuns in Philadelphia, basically. This was before all sorts of divisions that exist now among the nuns, it was before then. When I went to Carmel, I really thought I was going to be contemplative. I know, I really thought I was going to live in a monastery someplace and have a lot of time for reading. Now, here I am after twenty some years, I've put a hundred thousand miles in the air a year and it's your fault. We don't stay in Carmel for our reasons. If we do stay in Carmel for our reasons, we never grow up, we never mature. We stay in Carmel for God's reasons.

Some of us did not know that God was going to ask of us the commitment that he asks of us. As we read the documents of the Church, for that reason we are fortunate in the United States, we have all the footnotes, read the footnotes to the Constitution, they explain why in the words of the Holy Father, the Pope, in the words of our Holy Father, St. John of the Cross and the words of St. Teresa, in the words of laws of the Church, the canon law and explain why. The Beatitudes in the context of the promise, the promise in the context of your vocation is the pledge to do what God wants done.

In a nutshell, people, basically what is Carmelite spirituality?

Carmelite spirituality is to know God, so that God may be known. Not to just know God. God has his reasons for wanting us to know Him. For wanting us to have this relationship with Him. The Beatitudes, in a most concrete way, drive us, to show us, where it is that we must show God, the poor, the meek, the mourning, those who suffer. That's where God wants us to be.

Accompaniment

There is a word that is part of formation that wasn't always part of formation and the word is accompaniment. You accompany people in the process. Good formation depends on good information. It is not wrong to have the information, but it's wrong to settle for the information as the formation. It's not only necessary only that we help people understand what they are suppose to do. It is necessary to understand how they do it. So there is an accompaniment, this is why you cannot have all the formation on one person. Other people have to be involved in helping the formation program. If I am going to have classes where I'm giving information, fine then give it all to me. I'll do it all, formation for the people in the first six months, formation for the people in the first two years, the people in the second period of three years, and the formation, I can give classes. Yeah, you can see how much I can talk. I can give classes all you want, but if you want me to actually accompany these people on the way, not being their spiritual director, not an invasion of their privacy, but there is a spiritual accompaniment that goes along. Those of you who do formation, you develop a relationship with the people in formation. They begin to talk with you about difficulties as they get to different points. So this is very true in some places.

It is very true in the Philippines, they have thirty-five to forty people in formation in their communities, in initial formation. They divide them up and have four people for the first stage and four people for the second stage, they divide them up. It is a new approach of how to do the formation.

Before, maybe forty, fifty, or sixty years ago, the formation was on how to do mortification or penances. I think this was true of the order, if you asked me when I first wanted to become a Discalced Carmelite, which was 1965, and somebody asked me why I wanted to become a Carmelite. Well, Carmelites don't eat meat, they sleep on boards, they do penances and mortification for the Church. They were ideals for me. That was how people defined who we were. They didn't define us as people who lived the spirituality of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. They defined us by the external things that we did. In many ways the formation, even of the tertiary, in those days in the Secular Order was the formation of how to do penances and what days you fasted on, and what days you had feasts on.

Information has changed now. All the friars who can remember, what were the three books? The Constitutions, The Ceremonial and The Manual or something like that..... Instruction. It was all about doing the external things right because you wanted to please God. There was nothing wrong in the sense of they were not making a mistake. They were doing what their times taught them to do and they did it for the glory of God, and so that they could know God and become saints and die and go to heaven. We have different materials and different responsibilities now. So, part of the mistake we made in learning all this was we changed the information, but didn't change the formation. We are still learning how to do this. Now, we are learning. We have learned. We have to accompany people to do these things. It is not just sufficient to give a good class.

It is necessary to accompany these people in understanding this, gently. That is why all these periods of formation say no less than six months, two years, and three years. Rule of thumb, practical experience of the Church, the Church allows in law, if there is a set period of formation, you may add up to one half of that set period as an extension. If you say six months, and at the end of six months they are not sure, you are not sure and it is

more important for you to be sure, by the way, if you are not sure, you can add three more months. If they are for two years in that period of formation before First Promises, they're not sure, you're not sure, you can add up to one more year. At the end of three years, they're not sure, you're not sure, you can add up to a year and a half, in segments, three month segments, six month segments; because you want to make the right decision and you want them to make the right decision.

I was Provincial in my Province three times. I sent eleven people home in those three times. Sometimes I sent people home I liked and sometimes I accepted the profession of people I did not like; because liking people has nothing to do with it. It is not whether you like them or not.

Are they whole?

Do they have these requisites?

If they are nice people, especially if it's your brother's, sister's, husband's, mother-in-law's daughter, that doesn't mean she has an in to make profession. Right?

This becomes, I think it becomes clearer with practice than it can be in theory. No, these lawyers, I'm telling you, Oh. The question was; is there a criterion or set of criterion that can be used in order to say no, if it is necessary to say no? My response to that is that I think that it is something that becomes clearer as the practice goes of accompaniment, because you begin to see things. Pay attention to doubts. You are the formatter, you pay attention to doubts. You don't make them a cause for a persecution and you don't white wash them away. You pay attention until they go away. If they stay there is something there. If they stay and it's not the first time, you wait, you have six months in getting people familiar, maybe nine months if it is necessary.

If you are a formatter, we have so many means of communication available to us, through e-mail, through telephone. You keep in touch with people along the way.

If you are formatter, you want to keep in touch because you want to accompany them. At times, you have nine months. They haven't made a promise yet but they are beginning to have two maybe three years before they make the First Promise.

We are not assembling Carmelites. We are forming Carmelites. I think it becomes apparent when a Formation Director says to the Council, "this person I think, really has it." The Council has the opportunity to make observations objectively, that might help make the Formation Director have an answer or might open the Formation Director's eyes to something that they are not seeing because they are too close. It works out with practice. The criterion is not set, because it's not objective, in the terms that it is not a test that you can pass or fail on. It is more under the influence of the Holy Spirit today.

I do want to make one little correction in the way you use order. The order is not you and us. It's us. How does the order make a commitment to you, when you make a commitment to the order? Because they receive your commitment. They provide a place for you to meet. Mainly, your other people in your community who are part of the order, you're meeting with them. They're there every month for you. Not just you there every month for them. The order makes a commitment.

No Carmelite, it would be impossible even for the friars, to take every course available to every Carmelite friar. There are certain people who go from certain provinces, I'm one with maybe two or three others, four others from my province in different years, we went to Avila for one year to study. The Philippines send a layman, the Secular Order members, not the Friars, the Secular Order members from the Manila community paid for

one of their people to go in Washington for two years. He is returning now that he's finished. He has returned now to be part of the formation team - a secular, a man, OCDS. Not everybody in every community needs to go, but a community can decide to support one of its members that might have the free time to go. So that person comes back and then shares with the community through the formation program that they help design. The commitment of the order is to be there. This is your commitment to be there. The order is not the friars, the order is not the nuns, the order is not the seculars. The order is the friars, the nuns and the seculars. Part of our mutual support is your mutual support to each other. If you lived over in one of those houses over there and you wanted to become a Carmelite, you couldn't do it alone. You would have to find other Carmelites, and you found them. The order made a commitment to you, it is there. At the end of six years it is definitive. That is why it is called definitive, you are a member of the order. Now it is your job to be there for others. The friars make a mistake all the time about the word order, they think it is us, meaning friars. A little way of correcting that word, and understanding the word, how is the order there, in the same way you are there for the people coming who are coming to your meeting now. The order sets up a structure for us, for the nuns, and for you. We all become a part of that structure to be present. And in the second part is that not everybody can come. When you are paying for courses that you're inviting people to come to teach, and they're coming from other places, you have to pay their airfare along the way. I don't know why things cost the way they cost, but they do. [Response to question from audience] No, you need be an accompanier. I am against being satisfied with information. In my province we made a mistake by confusing intelligence for capacity, or intellectual with intelligent.

[Response to question from audience] No, we are incarnate. It's not just the Holy Spirit. We learn from each other, this is part of being community.

[Comments from audience] Again, I am not defending anything of any course of action. I am defending the principle. The principle is that formation is not information. Formation is being accompanied in the process. You get someone joining Carmel, who has been formed personally in Our Lady of Medjugorje, who can take the information and twist it. If you don't have people who know what the information means, then it is not going to be the same information. You can take somebody who takes St. John of the Cross and the Ascent of Mt. Carmel and so distorts the words of St. John of the Cross, that you have people actually insulting the spirituality of St. John of the Cross by living a kind of rigidity and mortification that is offensive to God. Using the words, because they don't understand what is put to death in mortification. It is not you, it is not the self. There really has to be someone trained to give that information. To know what does it mean. This is the whole tradition of accompaniment in formation.

[Response to question from audience] It does. Now, we have to thank you. You opened up a theme that is also very important. Why is that some people come to some communities and turn away. Because they do not see in the community, the example of people who are living Carmelite spirituality. Especially if they come in and find groups, cliques, divisions. They can find that in the office. Why do they need to go on Sunday? It depends on how the community is functioning as a community.

Is the community functioning as a community?

This leads us to how the Council functions as a Council. Many times the divisions that exist in communities come from Councils that are divided. Especially if the Council has

on it a perpetual member. One of the advantages I have is that I don't know anybody or anybody's community, so I can come in and say things that nobody else can say. But the structure that is given in the Constitution on Councils, in order for someone to be a third time President, you have to get the Provincial permission. Two times is enough because the Council has to be able to function. It has to function, rationally speaking it has to function with respect for each other. I am trying to say what sometimes are the roots of divisions that exist in communities and why the community does not reflect or have the ability to live that experience is because as a community there's divisions that exists because this person was not elected. They were not elected as President and they're on the Council and they are upset, because they really wanted to be president, why? whoever knows. They set up sort unconsciously many times, a co-presidency. Or an anti presidency. There is a division in the community. Or it comes times for the Council to vote on people and somebody says something against somebody or a negative opinion about something and one of the people on the Council goes out and tells the person. It happens, I think, where people say things, that are said in the Council. Then the Council stops functioning as a Council because the person who is spoken about, her feelings get hurt, then her friends side with her and it leads to silly division, because the Council did not function as a Council. The Council has to function as a Council as long as there is respect for what is said in the Council.

What do they call that?

Confidentially, the persons, or members of the Council have to be able to speak their mind clearly. If they can do that, and the people understand that the way the Holy Spirit works, because it is according to the Constitution which is also the same in the Rule of Life (article 24 in the Rule of Life): the superior of the community is the Council, not the president. The president is not superior of the community. The president is not even superior of the Council. The president is the spokesperson of the Council, the mouthpiece. Some mouthpieces are very mouthy. The President speaks for the Council. It is the Council that decides. If you have three councilors who say "yes, mame" to the president, you don't have a council. The Council discusses, the president, the three councilors, the formation director. Those five people make up the Council, who discuss for the good of the community. Remember in the Rule of Life, it said the Council was supposed to meet once a year. Right? Now, in the Constitutions, when it talks about the Council, it says in number 47, it says the Council meets frequently and always when necessary in reference to taking care of formation programs and the growth of their own community.

Constitution Number 46 says: The Council composed of the president, three councilors, and the director of formation constitutes the immediate authority of the community. The primary responsibility of the council is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community. The Council has to function as a Council. Confidentiality, respect for what is said in the Council, understanding that's the way God arrives at decisions in our community is through the Council functioning. Also, it says the President, when it describes the president, is not to favor one person over another in the community, but is to be president actually of everybody in community. So, if we can avoid, and it is normal and natural, it happens among us, it happens with the nuns, and it happens with you, is that we like some people more than we like other people. It's natural. That's not what makes us brothers and sisters in Carmel. What makes us brothers

and sisters in Carmel is that we are committed to something beyond ourselves. When that works, then communities can and do. The communities form more by example, than they do by classes. This is the purpose of accompaniment in the formation process. You can talk about Christian charity in your formation class, but if they go into the community and hear back biting or gossip...if you're a gossip, go home now. Send them home now, because it ruins the ability for the community to function as a community. And as the community functions as a community, that shows. It guides the example of what is given in classes. You're right, but there is a condition on that.

[Response to question from audience] I think that basically it is true, because the more you look inward without abandoning the outward, the more integrated you would become with the outward. There are some people who look so inward that they disconnect from reality. The reality of life, the reality of family, the reality of work everyday, the reality of food to be eaten and prepared, the reality of schedules, they just disconnect. I think if you're connected to the outside, the more you become an inward person, the more you, I am not saying this very professionally, but the more integrated you become as a whole person in connection with the world.

[Response to question from audience] Well let's clarify one thing. Many of us when we use the word contemplative, especially as Carmelites, we have in mind probably a lot of times the example of St. Therese of the Child Jesus and St. Teresa. There are almost too many Carmelite nuns as saints, because we confuse contemplation with cloister and a cloistered style of life. Contemplative style of life is not a cloistered style of life. There are many people who have lived in cloisters, for many years who are still waiting to become contemplative, because contemplation, in Carmelite spirituality, is a gift of God. It is a quality of life as lived, gifted by God to be in relationship with Him in that certain way that enhances that life. Whether it is a nun in a cloister, a friar in a monastery, or a secular in a family, in work, in a parish of a secular priest. First thing is to clear up what do we mean by contemplation. We do not mean cloister, cloistered style of life. One of the readings I love is on the feast of St. Francis de sales, which is in office of readings, one of the examples he is using, if you're a mother of a family, you can't live like that of a Poor Clare Nun. I talked about this when I talked about Mary on Sunday. How much time it takes out of your day to do what you are supposed to do as lay people. You can still be contemplative because it depends on God, number one. We don't practice contemplative prayer unless God gives us contemplation. There is no sense in feeling guilty about not being contemplative because it is up to God, not up to you. It is the quality of life that improves with this knowledge of God that comes through prayer, through meditation, through dedicating ourselves to sometime for that contemplation.

[Response to question from audience] I sometimes say that Carmelites have the temptation to feel themselves dispensed from what the Church teaches because we are Carmelite. I got this a lot when I sent out original drafts about things and the importance of Christifideles Laici and all that Christifideles Laici says about the commitment necessary on the part of lay people in the Church. It is like St. John of the Cross says that if you are contemplative you don't have to do anything else. Well that depends on if God gave you contemplation, not whether you are making mental prayer, number one. Number two, it is a misunderstanding of what St John said and they know nothing about St. John of the Cross' life. So there is a temptation to think that because we are Carmelites we do not have to do anything else that the Church says. In the formation

programs that we hope are being developed in provinces now, after the new Constitution. (I have seen them, because some have been submitted already to Rome), it is not necessary to cover everything about St. Teresa or everything about St. John of the Cross in the first six years. It is necessary to see if the person has the stamina and the commitment to make themselves available to this life style in those six years, then we have the whole rest of life. Ongoing formation is so important, because it gives us the opportunity for all of this to deepen.

posted by Aloysius, ocd @ **05:34**