

Communicationes 317

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Two congresses on Elizabeth of the Trinity

November was marked by some unforgettable events of the Teresian Carmel. If on the 19th November, in Avignon, Fr Marie Eugene was beatified in a massive ceremony at which attended Fr General accompanied by a good number of religious, the impact of the canonization of Elizabeth of the Trinity produced the celebration of two important congresses in CITEs (Avila) and the TERESIANUM in Rome.



From the 10th to 13th November, in the CITEs University of Mysticism, the thought and doctrine of St Elizabeth of the Trinity, as well as her simplicity sensitivity and depth were presented, which was a source of enlightenment for the more than 100 who attended. The on-line transmission allowed some 80 or so Discalced Carmelite nuns to follow the congress closely in their own monasteries from such diverse countries as Spain, Costa Rica, Panama, the United States, Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Colombia, Venezuela, Morocco, Lebanon, Portugal, and the Czech Republic.

On its part, the Teresianum organized a congress for the 22nd and 23rd November, with great public participation. The new saint was placed in her historical context and after presenting a spiritual-biographical outline, the speakers explained some of the fundamental elements of her doctrine: relationship with St Paul, Christology and Trinitarian spirituality. The grand finale of the Congress was Mass celebrated in the Teresianum chapel at which presided Cardinal Angelo Amato, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints.



Meeting of the European Conference of Provincials

Between the 7th and 11th November the European Conference of Provincials met in Linz, Austria. Taking part at the meeting were the Major Superiors of the various European areas of jurisdiction together with Fr Agustí Borrell, the Vicar General and Fr Lukasz Kansy, the second Definitor General.

During the first day, the Superiors reflected on dependence on the internet, assisted by Fr Giovanni Cucci, s.j. This is an argument of enormous pertinence in our time involving, as it does, not only religious in formation but also adults.

On the morning of 9th November, Fr Agustí Borrell gave a presentation on the situation of the Teresian Carmel in Europe as well as the progress of the re-reading of Constitutions, of great worth at this time of crisis, as we seek to invigorate our own identity as Carmelites.

The same day, in the evening, Fr Lukasz Kansy presented to the assembly a proposal from Fr General: to set up a year in the Salamanca monastery (Spain), together with an adequate community, for the European students in formation. This has the purpose of deepening knowledge of our patrimony of the Teresian charism, as well as assimilating the fundamental elements of our spirituality. The proposal will be studied in the provincial seats so that dialogue on the subject with the General Government can be continued.

On the 10th, the delegates were able to enjoy a day of rest and fraternal sharing by visiting the city of Vienna, and on the morning of the 11th they returned home.



Visit to Secular Carmel in Venezuela

From the 2nd to the 20th November 2016, the Delegate General for Secular Carmel carried out a fraternal visit to the communities of Secular Carmel in Venezuela and other lay groups inspired by Carmelite spirituality, as well as to the religious communities of Discalced Carmelite friars and nuns. The present time is one of particular

difficulty for the country, with lacks in essential sectors, such as food and medicine.

In each one of the communities visited in company with Fr Daniel, OCD Delegate General in Venezuela, in the cities of San Cristóbal, Mérida, Valera, Maracaibo, Barquisimeto, Valencia, San Joaquín and Caracas there could be sensed that there is a growth in canonically erected communities with 5 canonically erected and 8 more in formation. In each one of them the members have pastoral activities or others concerning the charism. Among the many lay groups of Carmelite inspiration there stand out the Teresian Carmelite University of Barquisimeto with its presence in the UCLA university of medicine, the youth groups (“Project of Love”) and those at the service of families (for example, “Emmaus” and “Holy Family”) as well as those involved in music, such as the “Vinyard of Carmel”. In Barquisimeto there is also a School of Christian Spirituality, which offers classes in theology and spirituality and collaborates a great deal in the Christian formation of the faithful in general and of the members of Secular Carmel.

Concerning the whole of the journey, we can see images in a video made by Fr Daniel for the web: <https://youtu.be/nTwEdxGNczI>

OCD-OCarm Meeting on Mount Carmel

From 27th November to 2nd December 2016, the Superiors General of the Carmelites, Fr Fernando Millán O.Carm. and Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD, together with the General Definitors or Councillors of both religious Orders, met together on Mount Carmel (Haifa, Israel), to spend time together and to discuss various matters. This initiative is part of the practice of dialogue and fraternal closeness that has been customary in recent years.



The central topic of the meeting was the relationships between consecrated life and the local Church, with regard to the new version of the document *Mutuae Relationes*, which is in an advanced stage of preparation in the relative Vatican congregations. The discussion was directed by Fr Agostino Montan, from the Congregation of St Joseph (Murialdo Josephites) a professor in the Lateran Pontifical University and a recognized specialist on the topic. Together with him they went over the history of the question, giving special attention to the viewpoint adopted by Vatican Council II and its evolution afterwards, with the rediscovering of the local Church and the ecclesiology of communion. The present situation was analyzed, as well as the prospects for the future, valuing, among other elements, the emphasis of the recent document *Iuvenescit Ecclesia* on the coessentiality (oneness in essence or nature) of the hierarchical gifts and the gifts of charisms.

The rich dialogue of these days took specially into account the experience of our Carmelite families in particular fields (parishes, missions, laity...). Also discussed was female contemplative life and the new directions of the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei Quarere* and its implications at various levels (monasteries, federations, friars and nuns, diocese, Vatican congregations, etc).

On the other hand, during the days of the meeting, those taking part took the opportunity to come in contact with the past and the present of Carmelite presence in the land of Israel. One of the special visits was to Wadi-es-Siah, the cradle of Carmelite life; there they were able to check and comment on the steps to be taken, little by little, to preserve and dignify the ruins of the first monastery and to facilitate pilgrimage to this enclave which is so significant in our history. They also visited the present Carmelite monastery of Muhraqa, tied to the tradition of the prophet Elijah and the destination of numerous pilgrims and visitors. The stay in the Holy Land was completed with a day of pilgrimage to places of special mention in the Gospel, such as Mount Tabor, Nazareth, Capernaum and the lake of Galilee.

The experience of these days served to strengthen the cordial and fraternal relationship between the general governments of our religious families and to renew the desire to continue living and transmitting this style of gospel life which was born in the land of the bible and is now spread throughout the whole world in many forms and nuances. We all felt called, in the spirit of the Rule given by St Albert to the first hermits on Mount Carmel, to "live in allegiance to Jesus Christ, serving him faithfully with a pure heart and a good conscience", meditating day and night on the law of the Lord".

**Homily on the feast of Saint John of the Cross. Fr
Saverio Cannistrà, ocd, Superior General**



Greetings to you all,

The Word of God, we have listened to in this liturgical celebration, helps us to enter into the spirit of the saint we celebrate today, our father and brother John of the Cross, and at the same time, to understand the gift of the solemn profession of religious vows, which these five brothers of ours are about to make.

Before all, God's Word speaks to us all of our dignity as human beings: "because you are precious in my eyes and glorious, and because I love you" as the Lord has said to us by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah in the first reading. As well, the apostle Paul echoed this by stating that we are not slaves, but sons and heirs of God, called to share in his glory. God's glory is a mysterious goal that we can only glimpse at from afar as in a mirror, because it is beyond our capacity of understanding and even our desires. Finally, in the Gospel, Jesus asks for us from the Father the greatest and even more inconceivable thing: that we may all be one in him as the Father is in Jesus and Jesus in the Father. In this way, Jesus clearly reveals to us that he is the glory of God: he is the mystery of unity, of communion, of finally overcoming solitude and division.

How beautiful and consoling is all this! We should often look towards this horizon, otherwise the journey will seem to us too hard, too long and too demanding. I believe that one of the secrets on the road to holiness, particularly that of St John of the Cross, is to nourish this call in the heart, to keep alight the desire for great things, without limiting either the heart or the mind with tiny projects, with tiny earthly satisfactions.

This is what our brothers are about to promise solemnly before the Church: they are committing themselves to remain in this unceasing tension, in this unsatisfied desire, in this openness and docility to God's designs. It is for this reason they are making to God vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, because they desire to be men of a measure that is full, high, that which God has thought of for his sons.

The Word of God, however, if we have listened to it with attention, speaks to us as well of another dimension of the human condition, darker and uncomfortable: our weakness, our ignorance. "We do not even know what we should ask", writes Paul. Fears and desires at war among themselves, drag us, confuse us, make us lose the way. As Isaiah ways in his poetic language, we fear that we have to cross rivers and walk through fire. However, there is no contradiction between the glory for which we are destined and the recognition of this frailty and poverty. On the contrary: only by accepting totally our own nothingness, can we arrive at everything. Only by descending into the dark depths of our human being, can we encounter God who lifts us up to himself on eagle's wings. So the meaning of the vows that our brothers now are going to make is also this: be prepared to experience their own weakness, their being miserable and sinners, without being frightened, without escaping, but humbly remaining in their own nothingness, trusting in the merciful love of God. Sometimes I meet proud religious, whose only preoccupation seem to be to defend their own rights, or to glorify themselves through their own merits. This scares me, not because it is a sin, but because it is a living contradiction, a total loss of meaning. If we are not disposed to take a road of abasement and nakedness, it is better to seek a different way than that of the religious life.

There is a third topic about which the Word of God speaks to us this evening, which was fundamental for John of the Cross as well as for Teresa and the other saints of

Carmel; that of the truth: “Holy Father, consecrate us in the truth. Your word is truth”. As for ourselves, do we still believe in the truth? Is it still important for us to accept the truth of facts, the truth of who we really are? Are we capable of telling the truth? We live in an era of *post-truth*: what influences the decisions of persons are not facts, but impressions, feelings, The “I like it-I don’t like it” of social networks. Thus the circle closes in on itself and, as well, *verum* is devoured by the culture of “post” (post-modern, post-Christian, post-human, etc.).

We are Discalced Carmelites, sons of Teresa and John of the Cross. It appears that our speciality is spirituality. According to my way of thinking, the spiritual life, by its radicality, can and ought to be the last defensive line of the truth. Often, however, it comes to grief by the fog of tastes and emotions. I advise everyone, and especially our brothers who are about to commit their lives to a way of spiritual life, to re-read the letter John of the Cross wrote to a Carmelite religious in 1589: it is a prophetic text, which strikes us by its timeliness and logical rigour by which it distinguishes between feelings and love. God is reached through love, which is God himself in his being and is the love by which God loves us. Our feelings, happiness and sadness, pleasures and disgust, are not without value: they are “motives for loving”, but they are not love. If they are transformed into ends in themselves, the soul shrinks into itself and becomes closed to God.

Dear brothers, we need to listen again to these words, meditate upon them often; they are words from a person who has carried out in depth the experience of vocation and, because of this, is capable of forming us. If there is something I would like to wish you on the day of your solemn profession, it is precisely this: that your training be not limited to these first years of religious life. Continue reading the writings of our saints, continue drawing from them the words of love and light which open out your hearts and make them capable of God.