



GENERAL
CHAPTER
2021 | DISCALCED
CARMELITES

Message of the 92nd General Chapter of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites

The 92nd General Chapter of the Discalced Carmelites was held at the La Salle House of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Rome (Via Aurelia) from August 30 to September 14, 2021. Ninety-two Chapter Fathers and four invited non-clerical Brothers attended. Technical and logistical support was provided by the officials of the Generalate and the translators. Given the various measures to avoid the spread of Covid19, it was not easy to gather all the participants in the Chapter. Thanks to the tireless commitment of the Definitory and the officials of the Center of the Order, the General Chapter took place and the participants in the Chapter were able to arrive in Italy and at the indicated place, except for four who were forced to remain in their respective countries. They followed the proceedings by Zoom.

In a Marian form of Christian existence and under the mantle of Our Lady, we felt united with all our Discalced Carmelite brothers present in all the monasteries of our Order, as well as with every one of our Discalced Carmelite nuns who accompanied us by their prayers. They carried this Chapter with particular intensity from its preparation until today and will certainly pray that good fruits may arise from it for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. We feel united with our brothers and sisters who continue the incarnation of our charism in all sectors of secular life. Our hearts remain close to the members of religious institutes who share the spiritual heritage of the Teresian Carmel. We do not forget the members of the ecclesial movements associated with our Order. It is with all of them that we place ourselves in the Church to deepen more and more who we are. We intend to address a message of encouragement and hope to the world in disarray, borrowing the words of Psalm 121 (120), 7-8: "The Lord will keep you from all

evil; he will guard your soul. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will guard your soul. The Lord will keep you from the beginning and from the end, from now on and forever.”

To all those who are united to us by charism at whatever level, we affirm that we are also united by the responsibility to consider the “flesh of this world” that the Second Vatican Council taught us to experience as “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this time” and to embrace them as “the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ.” Our attitude towards what is happening in the world is not “to gather information or to satisfy our curiosity, but to become painfully aware, to dare to transform what is happening in the world into personal suffering, and thus to recognize the contribution that each one of us can make.” “The world is on fire”, St. Teresa would say; it needs peace and joy in the midst of so many vicissitudes: the Covid19 pandemic and its unknowns, economic crises of various kinds, world balances that are constantly being recomposed, threats to the peace and security of peoples and the migratory movements that they provoke, etc.

Dear brothers and sisters who recognize that they are with us under the mantle of the Virgin Mary, do we have a solution that we can offer? Our solution is the one that comes from our presence before the Lord like Abraham: “Walk in my presence and be perfect. I have made a covenant between me and you, and I will increase you greatly” (Gen. 17:1-2). It was not, therefore, out of routine that our work was punctuated by the Eucharistic celebration, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, and the psalmody of the Church. It is in the deepening of our presence before the Lord that our being and our action in the Church draw all their meaning. St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus summed it up: “to be love in the heart of the Church.” Before her, St. John of the Cross indicated that “the love by which she is united to God moves her to the love of God in all things and through all things.” With the “artisanal” perseverance of a bee, we strive to extract from the “wildflowers,” where they are found, the sweetness (pollen) of love that makes our charism fruitful to love “God in all things, whether delightful or bitter.”

It is the deepening of this defining element of our charism that has mainly mobilized our energies in this Chapter. It could not be otherwise, for this Chapter is the culmination of a six-year period (2015-2021) during which we have had the joy of continuing a search undertaken by the whole Order to deepen its specific place in the life and holiness of the Church. At the same time, it constitutes a starting point for perspectives that will accompany the one we are beginning. Upon our arrival and during the Chapter, we all carried the concern that has animated the entire Order since the systematic reading of the

Constitutions launched after the General Chapter of 2015. All of us, coming from the circumscriptions that had studied them, carried in our hearts an answer, however partial, to the question of our charismatic identity in the Church and how we could credibly bear witness to it in every context in which we live and work. Having manifested it in our lives, what is the way in which we might speak of it in a language that is understandable today? The Declaration on the Charism is the document that the Chapter has analyzed and approved in order to propose it to our brothers for an in-depth reception in all the circumscriptions, called to make it their own by adopting criteria and methods of reading and understanding, of interpretation and assimilation, in their environments of existence and apostolate.

The guests who were invited to the Chapter to speak to us and to celebrate the Eucharist with us spoke to us in a consistent way, each one in his own terms and way about the beauty and the demands of the Carmelite charism in today's world. We listened to them with sustained attention. We reached the culmination of this listening by virtue of its ecclesial character when we were received by Pope Francis in the Clementine Hall for a private audience. In a speech that had its roots in his own magisterium on the one hand, and in our spiritual patrimony on the other, the Holy Father briefly sketched the features of the Discalced Carmelites that the Church expects today: religious who listen to the signs of the present time, Carmelites who cultivate a sense of discernment and never tire of exercising it; witnesses who let themselves be seen by their joy nourished by a sense of humor; and all of this from the contemplative identity that bursts forth from a spirituality of friendship with God and human beings, and holds in horror the invasive worldliness that corrupts all that it affects.

It is as if the nine young guest friars from different regions had prepared us from within our walls to hear this message, because they spoke of fidelity to prayer, of the coherence between what we say and what we are, of the prophetic dimension of our life in today's world. We needed these voices to fill us with joy and to confirm us in the direction that our work was about to take in several ways, notably the doctrinal way (Declaration on the charism) and the legislative way (Norms and Determinations). The intervention of Father Míceál O'Neill, Prior General O.Carm, strengthened us once more in this direction, through a conference which drew its strong points from our common source which is the Rule of St. Albert and developed in a pattern woven by the testimony of our holy parents Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross, as well as other saints and spiritual masters who are dear to us.

From all this it can be deduced that this Chapter has been a chapter of listening. Chronologically, we were introduced to this listening by the analysis of the state of the Order given by Father Saverio Cannistrà, our previous General Superior, based on his experience of 12 years at the head of the Order. We thank him and the Definitory over which he carefully presided. It is up to us to draw concrete consequences from this. We also listened to the state of the economic means that support the functioning of our Order. Thanks to our General Bursar Paolo De Carli, not only for having communicated to us the economic needs of our time, but also for having reanimated both the spirit of solidarity in our religious family and the ardor for work.

Sometimes listening to the voices that come from outside the ecclesiastical world delights and stimulates us. Thus, the news that UNESCO is preparing to put St. Thérèse of Lisieux on the list of anniversary celebrations for the 150th anniversary of her birth in 2023 has resonated in our ears and vibrated in our hearts. For our part, we link this anniversary of her birth to the first centenary of her beatification which falls in the same year and to the first centenary of her canonization in 2025. Shouldn't we read in these occurrences the sign that our listening must extend to all the voices that express in multiple ways the truth, the beauty, and the good because their origin is in God, their inspiration in the Holy Spirit? It is in this sense that the multiform listening to the voice of our Creator God whose murmur crosses all that he poses in this world spurs us towards an "integral ecology" because "everything is connected", listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the people, the environmental concern and the passion for the human image of God. Listening also opens our eyes so that together with all our brothers and sisters who fight tirelessly for the defense of life and human dignity, we participate in the prevention and fight against all abuses against minors and vulnerable people, as Father Vincenzo Mancusi, ofm Cap, alerted us.

This listening without borders should lead us along the path of our Mother Saint Teresa in the determination to do the little that is in us to please and help Our Lord. This is what drives us forward into the future and pushes us to place ourselves resolutely under the guidance of our Father General Miguel Márquez Calle, whom the Lord has given us together with the Definitors. It is this determination, inherited from St. Teresa, that impels us to go and live our charism in the various contexts in which the Lord has raised us up and/or sent us, strengthened by a long tradition, and enriched by the uninterrupted multitude of witnesses from all times, all cultural areas, and all ages. In today's world, with its challenges and ways of expression, we carry Christ who dwells in us, drawing us into an ever-renewed covenant through his word, his Sacraments, and his friendship. From this fullness towards which we never cease to strive, we will burn with

zeal, making our own St. Teresa's words: "Let us walk together, Lord; wherever you go, I will go."

In this march forward we feel supported by the Spirit of love and truth. We know that we are accompanied by our Discalced Carmelite Sisters who are always at our side in daily oblation and unceasing prayer. We remain in communion with our brothers and sisters of the Secular Carmel whose company delights us, and we are supported by the brothers and sisters who share in one way or another the spiritual goods of our great Carmelite family. We do not forget all those to whom the Lord sends us directly and indirectly. May the blessing imparted by the Holy Father to the participants in the General Chapter extend to all of them so that we may keep alive the flame of love that the Spirit never ceases to kindle, either by purifying us, or by making us bear together fruits whose intensity and extent only he knows!