The Servant of God

VÍCTOR RODRÍGUEZ MARTÍNEZ

Secular Discalced Carmelite
(1925-2012)
He was born on April 12, 1925 in Quintanadiez de la Vega (Palencia), the son of Daniel Rodríguez and Margarita Martínez. Four days later he was baptized in the parish of El Salvador, and there he received Confirmation on October 5, 1929.

In his childhood he had experiences that foreshadowed that the Lord had chosen him for something special, as he describes in his autobiographical writings: “When death came and took me, when I crossed the threshold, there I met Jesus, Mary and Joseph. The Virgin protected me and took me by the hand. I was two years old and they gave me dead. Suddenly a red stain appeared in front of my face. For that reason "paint" they called me. As it grew, the stain decreased. I was six years old and a car rolled over me and left me unharmed. At fourteen with a shotgun I was playing, which I thought was unloaded, suddenly I shot myself. The face brushed against me, without stabbing a pellet. A hole was left in the wooden ceiling."

Are they three miracles with which the Lord delivered him three times from death in his childhood? The first is especially striking, since it speaks of having died, having met Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and that the Virgin, taking him by the hand, restored his life. His parents, who had already lost two of their children at a tender age, left him for dead. How could he remember something that happened to him when he was two years old?

His childhood passed normally, doing, yes, tasks typical of agricultural towns that today seem incredible to us, and the same can be said of his youth, in which he stood out for being a tireless worker, for his responsibility and for his availability to help others.

On July 24, 1948, he married María Asunción Merino, in the Shrine of Our Lady of the Valley, Queen and Patron Saint of the region. What better place to celebrate the sacrament of marriage than at the feet of the Virgin who had brought him back to life!
Of this sacrament he says: “When we arrive at marriage, united in God we remain. By accepting how many children you gave us, you filled us with thanks.” (They had ten children, of whom three died almost at birth).

To get his new home off the ground, he had to continue working with his father, but at the same time, to increase his income, he started raising own chickens on his own, which gave him a very good result. Given this profitable experience, he decided to sell his properties in town and move to Medina del Campo in 1953 to install a good farm there.

The business was going from good to better, so he expanded the warehouses, increased production, opened a feed and egg sales store, and even, going one step further, opened another store in Madrid, on Calle Marcelo Usera, for the direct sale of its production. It couldn't be better.

It was in this first stay of Victor with his family in Medina, which lasted from 1953 to 1966, when he came into contact and made friends with the Discalced Carmelites. As a result of this approach and friendly treatment with the parents of the community, the invitation to join the Order as a Tertiary should have arisen and that his acceptance should be immediate upon seeing himself incardinated to an order as Marian as that of the Carmelites.

We don´t know the exact date of his entry, since the books in which he could settle have disappeared. Brother Eugenio Crespo, who took the habit at the Carmel Discalced Secular in Medina del Campo on September 14, 1947, and who knew Victor a lot, said that he entered a few years after him, but without being able to specify the year. Victor's entry into Carmel Discalced Secular, his novitiate and his profession had to be between 1955-1958.

During the aspirantate and novitiate, he showed real interest in discovering the charism of the Third Order of Carmel Discalced, as set forth in the Manual approved in 1921, which was the one in force when Victor entered the Carmel.
He realized and accepted that three facets are fundamental to the charism of the Order of Carmel: **A) the Mariana** (Carmel is all of Mary); **B) the Contemplative** (from those hermits we proceed); and **C) the Active**, as a consequence of contemplation (I burn with zeal for the glory of God). A lay person who doesn’t put Mary at the center of her life, doesn’t spend much time in prayer and does not do an apostolate, may be a good Christian, but not a good lay discalced Carmelite.

Victor as OCDS carrying the Virgin of Carmel.

Concluded the aspirantate, he proceeded to the habit with a rite very similar to that of the religious. The aspirant, accompanied by the novice master, went ahead, knelt before the priest and answered the questions that he asked him:

**Q / What do you ask for?**

**R / The mercy of God and the habit of the Third Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel and of Saint Teresa of Jesus.**

Next, the priest made a brief exhortation, encouraging him to thank God and Mary for calling him to his Order and to reciprocate that grace with a holy life, and at the end asked him:

**Q / Are you determined to persevere to death in the state you intend to embrace?**

**A / I hope and wish so, helped by God and the prayers of the entire Order.**
The following year, upon concluding the novitiate and being approved by the professed members of the community, he issued his profession with this formula:

"I, Brother Victor, make my profession and I promise God, the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, our Mother Saint Teresa and the Superiors of the Order, obedience and chastity, according to the Rule of the Third Order, which I want to observe as perfectly as possible, until death”.

Her daughter Begoña will remember years later: “As a Secular Discalced Carmelite who had the vows according to his condition as husband and father, of married chastity who lived Christianly with his wife, both of whom were always open to life and accepting the children that God gave them (that were ten). They received ten children”. The laity didn’t take a vow of poverty, but Victor lived poorly all his life and knew from his poverty to always help the poorer than him, because he loved them.

**Did your Christian life radically change from the moment you made that commitment to live as perfectly as possible until death?**

*Apparently not*, because as Fr. Juan Jesús, who was a seminarian at the time and knew him very well, testifies, he remembers him as a man “who led a somewhat bourgeois and mundane lifestyle, focused, naturally, on the material world. I think he liked to live well and enjoy life without too many Christian concerns or commitments. I remember him always smoking brand cigars.”

*But in reality* the changes began, even if they were not radical, because their fruits were manifesting little by little. **First**, he realized that he had become a member of a new family: that of Carmel, through a community: that of Medina del Campo, to which he never ceased to belong, not even during the years that passed in Madrid or Velillas del
Duque and to which, whenever he was in Medina, he attended all his events and meetings.

Second, by belonging to that community of Carmelite Tertiaries, their communication with the First and Second Orders became closer. As Brother Eugenio Crespo testifies, the men held their meetings in the convent's library, and at Christmas they met with the religious of the community and ate with them, and they did the same on the day of the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. We also know that he helped the PP Carmelitas, to create a chicken farm in the vegetable garden that they had outside the Villa, to help the livelihood of the seminarians and that he was the one who worried that it worked well and even vaccinated the chickens. He did the same with the Carmelite Mothers, helping them to create a small farm to help the community. Even today there are still religious who remember with love and admiration his selfless work, the affability of treatment and charm of that person.

But the third and most important thing was his participation in the religious acts of the Discalced Carmelite Secular and his rapport with the Carmelite spirituality through a deeper knowledge of the life and writings of Saint Teresa, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Therese, etc.

As for the participation in religious acts of the Discalced Carmelite Secular, in the OCDS Manual of 1921, reissued in 1952, which is the one he used most, they were exhorted to attend the sacred functions that were held in the churches of the Order, and if possible, they should attend "the Salve Regina, which is sung in the churches of the Fathers of the Order every Saturday afternoon and at all the vigils of the feasts of the Blessed Virgin." Similarly, there is talk of the procession of the Blessed Virgin Mary: “All the third Sundays of the month, or another Sunday according to custom, once the monthly conference or sermon to the people is finished, the Tertiaries will attend the procession of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel” (Manual. No. 160).
Eugenio Crespo tells us how they complied with these councils in Medina del Campo: “On Saturdays we used to celebrate vespers and hear mass and sing the Salve and make a procession with the image of the Virgen del Carmen throughout the Church, accompanied by aspiring Carmelites from the school preparatory that they were in uniform. We met twice a month. At that time, there were 25 people, 15 women and 10 men, in Carmel Discalced Seglar. He (Víctor) took up the habit and made his profession here in Medina del Campo”. And his wife, Asunción, confirms that Víctor, “being a Discalced Carmelite Secular from a young age, in Medina del Campo he attended all the acts of the Secular Discalced Carmelites”.

From his profession as a Secular Carmelite a desire arose in him to know in depth the saints of Discalced Carmel and their writings, especially those of their holy founders Teresa de Jesús and Juan de la Cruz, knowledge that led him to intensify his prayer life and over time, guided by S. Juan de la Cruz, to achieve high mystical experiences.

When everything was developing in a harmonious way, when he enjoyed a family to which he could offer everything, when his generosity reached heroic acts such as going to live with all his family in a small house that he had on the farm to leave his own to the family of his friend Mariano Nozal while they repaired his house that had suffered a devastating fire, or gave it up on another occasion to welcome a deceased neighbor until the time of his burial, when according to brother Tomás and the Carmelites of Medina they already had him by a saint ..., an unexpected event radically changed the trajectory of his life.

In the midst of the boom, in 1966, there was a crisis in poultry farming at the national level that affected him brutally and led to the ruin of his businesses, since he could not meet the loans he had requested, since daily losses they were large. He lost everything. He had to seize all his assets to satisfy debts with creditors, leave Medina del Campo with his
family, and move to Madrid, which was where he found a job as a pawn in the Pepsi Cola Bottling Factory. In a few months he went from a wealthy person to a simple pawn in a factory.

This tragedy, and seeing his family plunged into poverty overnight, made him realize that you could not put trust in perishable things, but only in God. Thus, his economic misfortune became the greatest grace that God granted him in his life. This was openly proclaimed by Father Juan Jesús, his confessor, in the last years of his life:

“It was a little strange and at the same time amazing to hear him say and proclaim that the greatest grace God had ever done to him in all his life, was to allow him to ruin himself financially, because this freed him completely from blindness and the slavery of money and of material goods, which would have been his downfall, serving at the same time, as interior illumination and transformation of the mind and heart to progress spiritually and surrender to the fulfillment of the will of God throughout his life."

His daughter Eva, today a Discalced Carmelite in Sabarís (Pontevedra) expresses in a few words what happened: “The ruin of this business (poultry) with which it had prospered years ago, was the cause of
the total change that my father's life brought about. Since then, he understood the vanity of riches and put his trust in God, giving himself up to a life of prayer, in which, helped by the writings of Saint John of the Cross that both fed his spirit and that was almost known by heart, he advanced by the Ascent of Mount Carmel, passing through the dark nights that the Saint relates”.

This was the key moment of his CONVERSION. There is a Victor before and another after that moment. In the previous one to that ruin, we found a believer who fulfilled his Christian commitments and even charitable and fervent, but attached to the goods of this world. In the aftermath of that ruin, a Victor detached from all terrain and unconditionally surrendered to the Lord to fulfill his will. This is recognized by his daughter Teresa: "I can only say that there was a before and after my father's conversion, which I understand, because the same thing has happened to me ... It is not the same to follow Christian norms by tradition, that to meet the Lord and to live differently".

Without a doubt, the years he had already been as a secular Carmelite influenced his conversion, and although he immediately moved to Madrid and could no longer attend spiritual meetings and practices with his community, from now on he continued to practice them and even intensified them, especially in related to his intimate love for Mary and to prayer or intimate dealings with the Lord.

His wife Asunción testifies that "he never stopped doing Carmel's own prayers and reading Santa Teresa, Santa Teresita and more than anything San Juan de la Cruz, whose works didn´t fall out of his hands, learning, as who says, from memory and whose teachings made life of his life ”.

His intimate love for Maria increased and he even reinvented himself in the face of the new circumstances of his life. From his childhood he had prayed the Rosary every day in the paternal home and that custom
introduced him from the first day in his new home. He always took time to do it, especially after dinner.

**Some curious brushstrokes of his devotion to Mary**

- Over time, the recitation of the Rosary wasn´t limited to doing it at home, but it was becoming her favorite prayer, for which any moment was appropriate. *What better way to walk than with Mary praying the Rosary!* There are several witnesses who claim to have seen Victor walking with the rosary on his hand, praying in an exemplary attitude of humility and recollection.

- More curious is how he used the hours he spent in the chain of the Pepsi-Cola Bottling Plant to pray many rosaries. As he did? Her daughter Begoña gives us the answer: "*When he was in the bottling chain, the row of bottles served as beads for him to pray the Rosary.*" How many thousands of Rosaries would he pray throughout his life! If San Simón de Rojas for always greeting with the words "Ave María" they called him "Father Ave María", Victor should be called "Brother Rosario".

- Some Secular Discalced Carmelite members changed the prayer of the Parvo Office for the official Lauds, Vespers and Complete, but Victor never had *the Diurnal*, nor the four volumes of the *Liturgy of the Hours*, but used the *book Prayer of the Church* that contains only Lauds and Vespers of the four Sundays, and from Monday to Saturday is the same every week. But Víctor also prayed the Parvo Office and for that he took advantage of the time he spent on the bus until he reached the factory. One day this curious anecdote occurred to him: The bus collector, when observing that he sat down every day, always took out the same book and spent the whole journey reading, out of curiosity, approached him to ask him: **"When are you going to finish reading that little book? "**
- Cuando vivían en el barrio de Oroquieta, su hija Begoña nos cuenta que “Víctor se inscribió en el Parroquia para que una vez al mes la Virgen del Carmen viniera, una pequeña estatua que recorría de casa en casa a todos los que la amaban (la visita a casa). Cuando ella venía, rezábamos el Rosario como una familia y el día siguiente la misma cosa antes de llevarla a la dirección que seguía en la lista”. Lo que no dice es que fue seguro Víctor, debido a su amistad con el cura parroquial, quien introdujo esta costumbre en la nueva parroquia de San Clemente Romano y incluso donó la imagen.

- Cuando Eva, su hija más pequeña, expresó su deseo de ser una Discalceada Carmelita, de alegría lo exclamó: “I don't believe it even if I were drunk”. Luego añadió: "After so much hammering before the Virgen del Carmen, God finally granted me a vocation". Copiamos algunos párrafos de la carta que escribió el 16 de noviembre de 2002: “The greatest joy was when you expressed to us the desire to be a Carmelite; For my part, I was so flattered that nothing you could have done in the world can be compared to the grace of participating all your life in the infinite love that God gives you ”. "Clothed and protected by the Blessed Virgin who took
you to Carmel, until you go up to the Mount of which Saint John of the Cross speaks” And concludes by saying: "May the Blessed Virgin Mother of Carmel make us all participate in the monitoring to the Infinite Future”.

If the Marian charism of Carmel lived it with such fidelity, we can say as much or more of the contemplative charism.

The people who treated him closely speak of him as a great prayer, of someone who dedicated several hours every day to that friendly treatment with whom we know he loves us, in the words of Santa Teresa. So, how it sounds. Although it seems strange to us that a worker and father of a family could do it, every day he dedicated several hours to be in silence with the Beloved.

His wife and accomplice so that he could dedicate so many hours to prayer without his children even knowing it, testifies: “Victor went every night to pray to the Church until his spiritual director advised him not to do it because of the dangerous which was walking at night in Madrid. From then on he continued to spend the nights in prayer, only instead of doing it in the Church, he did it at home. As for the time he spent in prayer in the Church, as well as during the night, he ordinarily spent it on his knees. So much so, that calluses came out on his knees ”.

Every day he dedicated as much time as he could to prayer, both when the Lord made him feel his loving presence and time was short, and when he felt absolutely nothing and time was endless and he was tempted to abandon . What was he doing in this case? “When praying was heavy, denying my laziness, I devoted myself twice to this need. Two hours in a row to prayer came to me. More like days than hours. Dry and poor there I was, until time passed ”.

With this constancy in prayer, the Lord was purifying him of all his imperfections and preparing to receive those special graces that are
generally only given in mystics. His niece Carmen García, always referred to him as: "my uncle the mystic", and she wasn´t exaggerating.

The purification of all his imperfections was experienced in a special way during his stays in the Carmelite desert of San José de Las Batuecas where, for 19 years, he spent most of his work vacation to dedicate himself fully to the Lord.

The Carmelite parents allowed him to live with them because he was a Secular Discalced Carmelite, they put him in the habit and allowed him to participate in all their acts, including getting up for the prayer of Matins at midnight. He soon observed that Father Valentín de San José, having finished the Matins prayer, while the others retired to rest, he remained praying, and Victor imitated him. Hence his habit of getting up at midnight in his own home and staying in prayer until it was time to go to work.

For Victor those days were days of great intimacy with God, but at the same time of interior anguish and tribulations, because he went through such hard experiences that he even said: “A slab fell on me. I was inexperienced, I didn't get to prayer, I wanted to go, because I couldn't hold on. I fought against myself and kept going”. Thank you that the provident Lord made use of Fr. Valentín de San José, the confessor of today's Santa Maravillas, so that with his wise guidance he would help him pass these tests.

As the tests were repeated, he goes on to say: “Year after year I came to the desert on my vacations, I was eager to get there, although I knew that I was going to suffer. There, upon arrival, everything changed. The Holy Spirit took me by the hand and showed me all my miseries. I was so miserable that I only cried with pain, that if I didn't have this, the worse it would be”.
Victor in Batuecas in the cell where King Alfonso XIII stayed during his visit to Las Hurdes on June 24 and 25, 1922.

But out of those dark nights he came out so purified and transformed that he was finally able to exclaim: “Lord my God! You have enlightened me to see that I myself am your room where you are hidden. My soul, rejoice and consider that your good and your hope is in you, and you cannot be without Him. What can I look for and desire outside of me, if You have condescend to establish your dwelling within my soul? Here, within the sanctuary of my soul and heart, I want to love you, desire you, adore you and glorify you, and I will no longer go looking for you outside of me”.

He enjoyed this experience during the rest of his days: "I had and have had the grace of praying for several years, whether it was eating, working, traveling, or even when I was dialoguing with people". With a permanent presence of God Love, how could he not become a person full of kindness and delicacy towards others!
A few words about his apostolate.

As General of the Order, Fr. Silverio de Santa Teresa, in a letter to the Congress of the Third Order held in Zaragoza in 1954, pointed out to the Secular Carmelites three kinds of apostolate that they could exercise in society: “That of prayer, to the teresiano; the one of the example, by the own style; and that of the Catholic affirmation, also of classic Teresian substance, without cowardly concessions”. Victor excelled in those three classes of apostolate.

A prayer without an apostolate would not be authentic. A prayer that does not include the desire that everyone be saved and come to the knowledge of the merciful God the Father and doesn´t do his part to achieve it, would be false.

His daughter Begoña summarizes it in a few words: “My father's life was intensely apostolic, a direct result of the intimacy that he maintained with the Lord in prayer. He loved all men with the greatest love you can have: the desire for their salvation”.

Going down to details would take up a lot of space, so we just point out their special fields. He exercised it in the family, being, according to Asunción, the best of the spouses and the caring father who worried about the religious and professional training of his children. He wanted all of them to enjoy the training that he could not achieve. He exercised it in the Pepsi Cola factory, courageously defending the rights of his colleagues against the company bosses, who even, as a delegate of the workers, took them to court without fear of being fired, but asking them to be faithful to the Lord and inviting them to the Christianity Courses. He exercised it in Night Worship by encouraging its members to glorify Jesus in the Sacrament and to ask him for the salvation of all. He exercised it in the Congregation of San Felipe Neri being the first in the delicate care of the sick. He exercised it in the Parish helping its construction and offering himself to the parish priest for whatever he needed. He exercised it with his
relatives, with his friends and even with strangers, always treating them with delicacy, etc.

And he did it with his word, giving talks, speaking of God in all circumstances, bearing witness to his faith without fear of what they will say. He also did it with his writings full of love and hope. He did it by example, especially helping the poor and the sick and loving everyone. And he did it with prayer, in which he always asked for the church and presented his friends and enemies to the Lord. For everyone he asked for his salvation.

His abundant and fruitful apostolate, he himself recognizes, was the result of his intimacy with the Lord. Speaking of his painful mystical experiences in Batuecas, he says: “The fruit would later come when he returned with worldly people and also with those who were struggling to live Christianly. I infected everyone and they admired the faith that I had. It made them see that it was more difficult not to believe the truths of the faith than even the moments he lived and that he felt with his eyes and senses”.

The last stage of his life, already retired and sick, was spent in Velillas del Duque and Medina del Campo, where, despite his limitations, he didn´t stop attending all the meetings, as long as health allowed him. Brother Eugenio Crespo says that: “As soon as he arrived in Medina, he immediately rejoined the Community and came to the Juntas like the rest of the brothers, and to Salve and Vespers on Saturdays like everyone else. He went to all the acts of the Secular Discalced Carmel always accompanied by his wife, except for the Juntas, because she didn´t belong to Secular Discalced Carmel. When he came back to Medina, he was all deified. He had an extraordinary spirituality ”.

Alzheimer's disease worsened until he lost his memory. He regretted what was happening to him and accepted it as coming from the Lord. When he could no longer even hold the Rosary in his hands, his daughter
Begoña asked him questions like these: "Dad, what are you doing?" "Praying". Others asked him: "Dad, what are you thinking about?" "In God". And a few months before he died, during a moment of lucidity, he asked him: "Dad, do you want to die?" His face lit up. His countenance glowed and it was as if he were in heaven. He did not need to give me an answer in words, but he also gave it to me: "Yes, but when God wants". And God wanted to come looking for him at night, at dawn, as when he was before the Blessed Sacrament on the 21st of each month as a night worshiper. And he died with the Scapular of the Virgen del Carmen that he carried from young to the moment of his death.

The Secular Discalced Carmelites of Medina attended his funeral, and, as they usually do when a member of the Secular Carmel dies, they put the flag of the Order on the coffin. In a few words, Victor sums up his life, his belonging to Carmel and the experience of his spirituality.

*In the Church I militated.*

*I lived in Carmel.*

*In blind faith I walked.*

*In hope I lived.*

*Charity burned me.*
NOTE. To get to know this Servant of God better, we recommend reading:

- Shocking life of a Christian on foot. Víctor Rodríguez Martínez.

- Victor. Smile of Peace.

- Spiritual writings of a Christian on foot. Víctor Rodríguez Martínez.

- And visit to Víctor's blog:
