

Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites

Formation II

Year A

The Ascent of Mount Carmel



"Only the honor and glory of God dwell on this mount."

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Introduction to Formation II

(Members who have made the First Promise)

Formation II is in preparation for the Definitive Promise and takes a minimum of three years, and in some instances, due to discernment by the candidate or the council, may take longer. The purpose of this period of formation is to prepare the candidate to maturely make a lifetime commitment to living the Discalced Carmelite charism as expressed in the OCDS Constitutions. Deepening union with God in interior prayer should lead the candidate to grow in virtue, in the desire to serve others, and in faithfulness to the Evangelical Counsels and Beatitudes. Growth in community life continues to be an important aspect of formation. Because this period leads to the Definitive Promise, serious ongoing discernment of the vocation by the Council and the candidate is crucial during this time.

Candidate responsibilities:

The candidate will strive to be consistent in the practices begun in earlier stages of formation and be faithful to the Promise made at the end of Formation I. (The noted references are not exhaustive; there are many others throughout the Constitutions, local statutes, and Ratio.)

- Attend and participate in monthly community meetings and formation sessions (see Const. 24.b,c).
- Be conscientious in the study and internalization of assigned material and topics (see Const. 24.d and 32-34).
- Continue to study and strive to live the OCDS Constitutions and Statutes (see Const. Preface).
- Develop the habit of reading Church documents, especially those addressed to the laity (see Const. 19 and Ratio 80).
- Read and reflect on Sacred Scripture regularly. (see Const. 19 and Ratio 15)
- Practice silent prayer (remain in God's presence with loving attention) daily for at least half an hour (see Ratio 20-21, 90).
- Pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Pray Night Prayer if possible (see Const. 6.d and 23-24).
- Participate in daily Mass as far as possible (see Const. 6.d and 23-24).
- Continue the habit of daily examination of conscience (commonly included as part of Night Prayer).
- Fast on the vigils of the Carmelite feasts listed in the Provincial Statutes.
- Participate in the community apostolate (see Const. 26).
- Share in the duties and responsibilities of the community as assigned by the local council (see Const. 15).
- Participate in community retreats and days of recollection (see Const. 24.d).
- Most importantly, continue to strive for Christ-like charity toward all in the community, in the family, and in daily life (1 Cor. 13).

The Specific Guidelines for Formation

It is important to keep clearly in mind the purpose of formation in Carmel and to strike a balance between “head” and “heart.”

- “Number 32 of the Constitutions states that the purpose of formation is ‘to prepare the person to live the spirituality of Carmel.’ This sentence of the Constitutions gives a very important emphasis to the purpose of formation, indicating those elements that are not the priorities in the program of formation. The purpose of the formation program is not to produce experts in Carmelite spirituality, nor to obtain a university degree in spirituality or spiritual theology” (Ratio Institutionis 4).
- “The purpose is to ‘prepare the person.’ The stress on the person who is to be prepared helps the formation community understand that the process must be directed to the individual in a concrete way. The people who come to the Secular Order of Carmel are, with few exceptions, people who have many commitments, especially with families and with work. The program of formation must be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances of each person who is to become a member” (Ratio 5).
- “...The primary role of the person responsible for formation... is to **accompany** those in formation, to help them put into practice what they learn through the process of formation. The information they are given through reading and classes is meant to be a help to the person’s spiritual growth” (Ratio 7).
- “...With a progression suitable to the various stages, the candidate should get a clearer idea of how important, indeed necessary, our charism is for [one’s] personal life...” (Ratio 23).
- “The spirituality of the Discalced Carmelites has a sound intellectual foundation. As members of the Order, Secular Carmelites are called to represent and give witness to a mature and authentic spirituality. Any person who wants to be a Discalced Carmelite must be a person with interest in learning from the teachers of Carmel. There are three Doctors of the universal Church, Teresa, John of the Cross, and Therese” (Ratio 78).
- “There is an intellectual aspect to the formation of a Discalced Carmelite. There is a doctrinal basis to the spirituality and identity of one who is called to the Order. As the friars and nuns, the seculars too ought to have a good intellectual and doctrinal formation since as members of the Order they represent and witness to a mature and profound spirituality” (Ratio 79).

“The directors [formators] should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls in this matter, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one. Thus, the whole concern of the directors [formators] should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one...”

(The Living Flame of Love, Stanza 3:46).

Introduction to Formation II, Year A

During this year of Formation II, candidates immerse themselves in the writings of St. John of the Cross. “St. John of the Cross was the original collaborator with Our Holy Mother St. Teresa in both the spiritual and juridical re-founding of Carmel in this new charismatic way. So, he is called Our Holy Father” (Ratio 77).

Those who want to understand John’s writings should read his work directly, frequently, and reflectively. “We do not read John merely to gain clearer understanding of how people understood discipleship in the sixteenth century; but to gain insight into the nature of Christian commitment and spiritual growth in our own time. So, we must read John with an eye on our own situations — personal, ecclesial, and societal” (The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross, pg. 26).

This year begins with an in-depth exploration of St. John’s writings. The main syllabus is divided into two parts with each session focusing on a distinct theme or sub-theme. Part One covers the sense desires — the inordinate, unmortified desires which are known to be a hindrance to God’s action in the soul. John begins to discuss the purgative phases of spiritual growth with vivid visual images and metaphors. However, he quickly points out that one cannot achieve anything in one’s effort to practice self-denial without “a habitual desire to imitate Christ.” The desire to imitate Christ leads into a prayer of “urgent longings” — kindled in love with yearnings. In this prayer, God becomes the intense desire. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, one will possess the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites (see Ascent ch. 14). This is the heart of John’s teaching, that Christ is the source of all holy love and strength.

Part Two briefly covers the purification process of the intellect by faith, the memory by hope, and the will by charity. John identifies this period of purification as the “Active Night of the Spirit.” He calls souls to practice total detachment not only from their unruly desires and possessions, but also from “spiritual goods” whether in the form of spiritual consolation, locutions, visions, or ecstasies. The heart of John’s teaching is that the purification of the spirit leads one to practice a mature form of prayer, from meditation to the gift of contemplation.

St. John inspires the Secular Carmelite to be vigilant in the practice of faith, hope and charity. “He guides the Secular Carmelite through the dark night to union with God. In this union with God, the Secular Carmelite finds the true freedom of the children of God” (OCDS Constitutions Art. 8).

“Based on this principle, the Saint also sees the purifying and unifying effect of the theological virtues in sisterly and brotherly relations. This is particularly so in the exercise of love for others: ‘Where there is no love, put love, and you will draw out love’ because that is what the Lord does: by loving us, He makes us capable of loving” (OCDS Constitutions Art. 24B). “...one act done in charity is more precious in God’s sight than all the visions and communications possible...” (Ascent Bk. 2, 22:19).

St. John’s teaching reminds his readers that, through complete detachment, a degree of perfection is attained, not by withdrawal from the world, but by taking up the Cross and facing the real world with all its uncertainty and limitations: “Carmelite Seculars accept from the

viewpoint of faith, hope and love, the work and suffering of each day, family worries, the uncertainty and limitations of human life, sickness, lack of understanding and all that makes up the fabric of our earthly existence. They will strive to make all this, material for dialogue with God, in order to grow in an attitude of praise and gratitude to the Lord” (OCDS Constitutions Art. 22).

As can be seen, prayer and union with God is the focal point of John’s teaching of detachment and self-denial. Deepening union with God in interior prayer allows one to grow in virtue and the desire to serve others. As previously noted, the Carmelite apostolate is based on a fervent interior life — friendship with God.

In closing, the purpose is to live the teaching of Our Holy Father St. John of the Cross and be a witness to our Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer. By paying heed to his counsels, all souls can sing with the Saint:

*—ah, the sheer grace!—
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.*

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About the Syllabus

Formation II, Year A

Required Reading:

Selected chapters from *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, ICS Publications, 1991.

Selected chapters from Foley, Marc. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Saint John of the Cross. Reflections*. ICS Publications, 2013.

The Holy Bible — Referred sections in the main text.

Glossary of Terms: *Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, pgs. 767-777.

Additional Reading:

Foley, Marc. *John of the Cross: The Ascent to Joy*. ICS Publications, 2002

The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross: An Introduction to His Life and Teaching. ICS Publications, 1995.

The Collected Works of John of the Cross, ICS Publications, 1991. Dark Night, Book One, Chapters 1-8 (Imperfections of beginners)

Hardy, Richard P. *John of the Cross — Man and Mystic*, ICS Publications, 2015. (This book describes how John himself practiced the spirituality he teaches. It shows John in a very human light, especially his fatherly love and care of others and his joyfulness.)

Matthew, Iain. *The Impact of God: Soundings from St. John of the Cross*. Hodder & Stoughton, 1995.

Note: “Additional reading” is intended for personal enrichment and is not required.

Note: The following syllabus (12 sessions) is not limited to academic study. Each session with its explanatory notes and essential points is the prescribed guideline for each candidate to follow throughout the year. “Although the Ascent is a masterpiece, it is important to concentrate on the content, the dynamic process, and not on the scholastic or a negative sounding language that some may find distracting. The reader must distinguish between what is said, and how it is said” (*The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*, pg. 36). John’s writings are the expression of the Discalced Carmelite charism, as such it is important that each candidate takes time to read, meditate and experience the progression in prayer at his or her own pace.

Explanatory note regarding “Essential points to discuss”: The candidates and formator are expected to read and reflect on the materials and ponder the essential points prior to the monthly formation sessions. However, it would not be practical to try to discuss every point during the session. It is preferable to choose several points for in-depth discussion. It is good practice to discuss those points which make a personal impression on the participants.

Because formator participation is crucial to the candidates’ formation, good preparation is indispensable. After the opening prayer and the discussion of the legislations, formators are encouraged to take about 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the session to talk about the

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session theme, the assigned reading, and a brief review of the points to be discussed before moving on to the discussion itself.

Studying the OCDS Legislations: Unless the community is studying these materials together, it is appropriate for each session to begin with ten minutes of discussion on some selection of the OCDS legislations or documents of the Order, as determined by the local Council.

Session One: Who John is, overview, and terminology

Part A. General introduction: Biographical sketch.

Required Reading: Collected Works of John of the Cross *General Introduction* (pg. 9-28) and *Biographical Chronology* (pg. 28-33)

Additional Reading: John of the Cross — Man and Mystic, ICS

Essential Points to discuss:

- The early years: His birth; his early school years
- Carmelite vocation — entering the Carmelite novitiate; studying at Salamanca University
- Vocational crisis and meeting St. Teresa: “Fray John listened, he felt inspired, caught the enthusiasm, and beheld a new future opening before him” (General Intro. pg. 13).
- Conflicts of jurisdiction and St. John’s imprisonment in a monastery in Toledo
- A brief introduction to his writings (General Intro. pg. 33-34)
- His drawing of Christ on the Cross (General Intro. pg. 87)
- Final years
- Death — Ubeda, Spain in 1591; his body was laid to rest in Segovia, Spain.
- Honors bestowed by the Church: John was beatified by Clement X in 1675, canonized by Benedict XIII in 1726, and declared a Doctor of the Church by Pius XI in 1926.

Part B. The Mount of Perfection: the path of Mount Carmel, the perfect spirit. Only the honor and glory of God dwells on this mount. (This session also covers the different terminologies used in the writings of St. John of the Cross.)

Required Reading: Introduction to The Ascent of Mount Carmel, pg. 101-118, The Sketch of the Mount, the poem *The Dark Night* and the diagram of the mount

Essential Points to Discuss:

- The Sketch of the Mount serves as a summary of the doctrine contained in his treatise. John of the Cross gave many copies of his drawings to nuns and friars.
Note: Go through the sketch of the Mount during the session. John’s doctrine is beautifully expressed in this sketch.
- “It is a work that explains the path one must follow in order to reach perfection, or union with God... Yet the book amounts to far more than a collection of workable rules and techniques...; it is a work of spiritual theology” (pg. 102).
- John tells his readers that he will explain the active night of purification of the senses in Book One of The Ascent of Mount Carmel (chapters 1-15) and the active night of the spirit (intellect, memory and will) in Books Two and Three of the Ascent.

Side note: The Ascent of Mount Carmel is the most structured theological work of St. John of the Cross. The understanding of human behavior and its faculties (sense and spirit) as it

relates to God in prayer is the main theme of Book One of the Ascent. It is important to spend a generous amount of time reading and reflecting on the different terminologies, images, metaphors, and symbols to understand the depth of his teachings that lead to one's transformation in Christ. The following excerpt is taken from The Ascent of Mount Carmel: Reflections, Marc Foley, OCD, pages 2-16.

The Dark Night:

The dark night is John's primary metaphor for the periods of sensory and spiritual purification. It is John's way of speaking of God's transforming presence in our lives and our response to Him. The term "night" explained by him in Book One Chapter 2 of the Ascent has different meanings as the theme develops. In Book One, "night" symbolizes "**the point of departure**" because individuals are learning to lay down their possessive desires and attitudes in order to focus upon a higher purpose. "This denial and privation are like a night for all one's senses" (see A.1.2:1). John uses the term "active night of the senses" to explain the purification process. Another reason is the darkness of the road travelled: "Now this road is faith (**the means**), and for the intellect faith is also like a dark night." Night also "pertains to **the point of arrival, namely God,**" for God is also a dark night to the soul in this life (A.1.2:1). All who long for union with God must courageously enter this threefold darkness of the journey (A.1.4). In actuality, these three nights comprise only one night, the night of the senses, resembles early evening... The second part, faith, is completely dark, like midnight. The third part, representing God, is like the very early dawn just before the break of the day (see A.1.2:5).

John uses the term "active night of the spirit" in Books Two and Three of the Ascent to understand the purification process of the spiritual faculties (intellect, memory, and will).

In Book Two of the Ascent (chapters 1-15) the "night" is the journey in faith, which is darkness or "night" to the natural understanding. It is the purification of one's intellect by the practice of the virtue of faith.

In Book Three of the Ascent (chapters 1-15), the "night" is the purification of the memory by the practice of the virtue of hope. It is "darkened" or purified of distinct forms, images and ideas which are not of God.

In Book Three of the Ascent (chapters 16-45), the "night" is the purification of the will from all imperfection, feelings or emotion, by the virtue of charity.

Senses: For John, the soul refers to the whole human person. Its two major divisions are sense and spirit. Sense includes the five bodily senses (touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste) and the interior senses of the imagination, phantasy and sense memory. "All these components — the five bodily senses and the interior senses of the imagination, phantasy, and sense memory — are interrelated and work together. The five bodily senses receive impressions from the external world, the sense memory stores them, and the imagination and phantasy construct them" (The Ascent of Mount Carmel Reflections, pg. 4).

Spirit: "The spirit, or the 'higher part' of the soul, consists primarily of the faculties of the intellect, memory, and will. They are not objects, but rather our capacities to know, to desire, and to love" (pg. 5).

Passive and Active: Just as sense and spirit are two interrelated parts of the soul, so passivity and activity are two inseparable dimensions of our purification and transformation. The active dimension of purification is the soul's response to God's invitation and presence. Active purification alone is insufficient for attaining transforming union. In The Dark Night, Books One and Two, St. John describes how God purifies the soul passively and perfects the theological life.

Detachment: "The equivalent of poverty of spirit, refers to a freedom from the appetites so the heart may be surrendered entirely to God..." (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 768.)

PART ONE

The Active Night of the Senses

Session Two: Disordered desires and inordinate appetites greatly hinder one's prayer life

Appetites: Generally, inordinate affective desires in which the will participates; that is, willful desires not rightly ordered to a moral or spiritual good. Appetites, when habitual, impede union with God. These weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken the soul (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 767).

Required Reading: Ascent, Book One, ch. 1-5

*One dark night,
Fired with love's urgent longings
—ah, the sheer grace!—*

Explanatory note: Book One of the Ascent deals with the active night of sense. John calls this night “the point of departure” (A.1.2:2). “Its focus is on behavioral change; correcting obvious faults, choosing to mortify our self-centered ego, and exercising restraint regarding sensory (disordered) pleasures. The purpose of the active night of sense is not to repress desire but to reorient it. It is the soul's first attempt to change its life (a new form of life). In short, God is luring the soul away from the pleasures of earth by means of the pleasures of heaven” (Ascent Reflections pg. 7-8). “The point of departure” is a sense of need, a recognition that our life will not be complete until God is at the center. In essence, “the point of departure” is the orientation toward one's prayer life. Hence, this night is “the sheer grace!”

*“Though the path is plain and smooth for people of good will,
those who walk it will not travel far, and will do so only with difficulty
if they do not have good feet, courage, and tenacity of spirit.”
(Sayings 3)*

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Here John uses the expression “night” to signify the denial of gratification of the soul's inordinate appetites in all things (see A.1.2:1).
- It is the nature of human desire and attachment which is at issue, not the things of the world and relationships that are part of daily life. Created things and human relationships are good and worthy of desire, provided they are used as God intends. “Since the things of the world cannot enter the soul, they are not in themselves an encumbrance or harm to it, rather, it is the will and appetite dwelling within that cause the damage when set on these things” (A.1.3:4).

Note to formators: This clarification is essential to the understanding of John's teaching throughout his work (see footnote 2 in the Ascent).

- John is talking about stripping away the craving for gratification (gusto, apeto) in those things (something internal). “This is what leaves it free and empty of all things even

though it possesses them.” Likewise, even though David (Ps 88:15) was manifestly a wealthy person, he says he was poor “because his will was not fixed on riches” (A.1.3:4). When desires are put in order, one can be rich or poor and still turn everything to God.

Side note: “John does not mean to say that we have to kill all our desires since he is going to say we find all our desires satisfied in God, which would be impossible if they were all eliminated. What we want to be rid of is not desires as such but the disorders. Adam and Eve before the fall had a perfectly integrated human nature in which none of the desires were disordered and all led to God's glory. John does not want us to become bodiless angels without human desires, but fully integrated human beings as God created us to be.”

“From this chapter 3 paragraph 4, I always take away one important point for self-examination: What is disordered in my desires? Am I as ‘detached’ as I like to think? I am surrounded by so many possessions. How many of them really possess me? It's easy to think I am ‘detached’ when my ordered little world is not threatened. The test, for me, is not how much I have or lack right now but how I respond when those things are taken away”

— Fr. Steven Payne
courtesy Cincarm - a Carmelite platform

- “When inordinate desires are cast out, the soul will be clothed with new knowledge of God. As a result, one’s activities, once human, now become divine. This is achieved in the state of union, when the soul in which God alone dwells has no other function than that of an altar on which God is adored in praise and love” (A.1.5:7).
- “Those who have no other goal than the perfect observance of the Lord’s law and carrying of the cross of Christ will be true arks, and they will bear within themselves the real manna, which is God...” (A.1.5:8).
- As can be seen, John’s attention is on the inner person, and not on things themselves which are value-neutral. Understanding one’s own shortcomings and imperfections leads to growth in self-knowledge, which in turn leads to truer knowledge of God. “Night” is an encounter of God’s presence — purifying and transforming one’s life.
- Participants may wish to discuss practical applications of these concepts.

Session Three: The harm that inordinate appetites cause in the soul

Required Reading: Ascent, Book One, ch. 6-10; The Ascent of Mount Carmel Reflections, pg. 27-52

Explanatory note: In chapters 6 through 10 of Book One of the Ascent, John sets before the reader the self-inflicted misery, damage, or harm that comes from indulging inordinate appetites. John mentions two types of harm that inordinate appetites cause in the soul: privative and positive. The deepest harm that inordinate desires cause is privative — the loss of desire for God. The specific effects that flow from this privative harm are the positive harms that “weary, torment, darken, and defile the soul” (Ascent 1.6:5; Reflections p. 29). John states time and again, “this is a venture in which God alone is sought and gained” (Ascent 2:7:3). John uses powerfully descriptive language to convey one’s miserable condition and possessive attitudes.

Essential points to discuss:

- “To begin with, it is clear in speaking of the privative harm that a person by a mere attachment to a created thing is less capable of God...Since love of God and attachment to creatures are contraries, they cannot coexist in the same will” (A.1.6:1). Obsession with an object, person, project or idea makes one neglectful of his or her duties toward God and neighbor.
Side note: The phrase “attachments to creatures” can include possessive relationships, over-indulgence in otherwise legitimate pleasures, over-concern with rules and procedures, self-willed ideas, excessive interest in programs of self-help, personal fulfillment, materialism, over-use of electronic devices, etc.
- John uses the passage of Matthew 15:26-27 to segue into expressing his experience as a spiritual director. He takes the concept of dogs feeding on crumbs and applies the image to people who settle for the crumbs of created things when God is inviting them to eat at His table. “The crumbs serve more to whet their appetite than to satisfy their hunger” (see A.1.6:2-3).
- The five positive harms to the soul are:
 - weariness
 - torment and affliction
 - blindness and darkness
 - defilement and stains
 - weakness and tepidity (A.1.6:1)
- Discuss how these harms manifest in the Christian’s life in the world.
- John observes that life is thrown out of balance by disordered inclinations. Behavioral patterns stem from tendencies (inclinations) that are often unconscious and reflexive. While external improvement in behavior is praiseworthy, the root tendencies need deeper healing. By responding to God’s invitation (prayer and meditation), one’s body, mind, and spirit are realigned toward God. **God works deep healing in the soul that**

habitually seeks Him. In Christ's words: "Come to me ... I will refresh you; and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:28-29). God's invitation: "Come listen to me, come to the waters" is further explained in *Ascent* 1 ch. 7:3-4.

- John is also making another important observation about those who practice extraordinary penances and other religious practices (outward observances) without striving to deny their appetites (inner purification). "The ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain union with Divine Wisdom. But **such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites.** If they would attempt to devote only half of that energy to the renunciation of their (inordinate) desires, they would profit more in a month than in years with all these other exercises" (A.1.8:4) (emphasis added).

Side note on external practices: It would be appropriate for the candidates to reflect on how their prayer life has evolved over the past three years. John is not against penitential practices. The focus is on inner purification rather than outward observances.

Understanding the term "penitential practices":

A. John's observation reflects the teaching of St. Therese of Lisieux regarding penance and growth in virtue. Therese was very much disappointed when her entrance to Carmel was delayed:

"... I was unable to hold back my tears at the thought of such a long wait...The trial was very great and made me grow very much in abandonment and in the other virtues... I made a resolution to give myself up more than ever to a serious and mortified life. When I say mortified, this is not to give the impression that I performed acts of penance. Alas, I never made any. Far from resembling beautiful souls who practiced every kind of mortification from their childhood, I had no attraction for this. My mortification consisted in breaking my will always so ready to impose itself on others, in holding back a reply, in rendering little services without any recognition...etc., etc. It was through the practice of these nothings that I prepared myself to become the fiancée of Jesus..." *Story of a Soul* ch. VI.

B. The following is a commentary on *Ascent*, Book One, 8:4, by Fr. Steven Payne, OCD, courtesy, Cincarm -- a Carmelite platform

I thought I'd mention one comment that struck me again in Chapter 8 paragraph 4. There, John notes that "the ignorance of some is extremely lamentable; they burden themselves with extraordinary penances and many other exercises, thinking these are sufficient to attain union with Divine Wisdom. But such practices are insufficient if these souls do not diligently strive to deny their appetites. If they would attempt to devote only half of that energy to the renunciation of their desires, they would profit more in a month than in years with all these other exercises."

I was struck because I can see in my own life how much easier it has always been to substitute works of piety and religious practices for the more difficult challenge of

purifying my own desires. Think how much people run after the extraordinary today, instead of focusing on the very ordinary struggle to overcome our own selfishness in the very ordinary circumstances of our daily lives. Saint Teresa talks somewhere about meeting a group of pious women whose devotion impressed her — until she said “no” to their plans, and then they became unbearable. She said they frightened her “more than all the sinners in the world.” Anyway, it struck me because it’s a theme that will recur so often in John: that the greatest dangers on the spiritual journey come not so much from obvious evils but from apparent (even real) goods that are nonetheless not properly ordered to God

- John presents three privative harms:
 - “The appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue” (A.1.10:1).
 - When the soul dissipates its energy in other things, it loses its fervor for God and its strength in the practice of virtue (see A.1.10:1).
 - “Ordinarily, the reason many people do not have diligence and eagerness for the acquisition of virtue is that their appetites and affections are not fixed purely on God” (A.1.10:4).

Note: For a detailed study of John’s explanation of the five effects of positive harm, please refer to Appendix A “Positive Harms.”

Session Four: Understanding “voluntary” and “natural” appetites. Freedom from all voluntary appetites, even the smallest, is necessary to attain divine union

Required Reading: Ascent, Book One, ch. 11 and 12; Ascent of Mount Carmel Reflections, pg. 53-54.

“Those who do not allow their appetites to carry them away will soar in their spirit as swiftly as the bird that lacks no feathers.”
(Sayings, 23)

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Having spelled out in vivid detail the privative and positive effects inordinate attachments can cause in the soul, John is careful to explain in chapter 11 that not all appetites (desires) are harmful, nor equally a hindrance to union with God (see A.1.11:2). John is not speaking of good, natural desires for God-given things — food, drink, good music, healthy friendships, etc. These are part of human existence. The concern here is attachments which take away the soul’s freedom to follow God unreservedly and instead cause one to stumble, to grow lax, and to be uncharitable.
- Voluntary appetites that involve imperfections must be “put in order.” “That is, one must not give consent of the will advertently and knowingly to an imperfection...” (A.1.11:3). The word “knowingly” is important because “one will fall into imperfections, without having knowledge or control of them” (A.1.11:3). Of course, one cannot do much about imperfections or disordered appetites that one is not even aware of. First, they must be brought to consciousness.

Note: It is the “disordered” that needs to be eliminated, not the appetites (desires) themselves.

- When voluntary desires become habitual, they become an obstacle to union with God. As long as one is sincerely trying to serve God, scattered failings are not necessarily a hindrance to prayer, but habitual desires that are not resisted and conquered become a barrier to spiritual progress and divine union (see A.1.11:3). Some examples of these habitual imperfections are: the common habit of being very talkative; love of gossip (including electronic “gossip” through cell phones and the internet); a small attachment one never really desires to conquer, for example, to a person, to clothing, to over-eating (A.1.11:4), and in the modern world, attachment to TV, cell phone, internet, social media, and not having times of silence in one’s day.
- John offers a telling image. “It makes little difference whether a bird is tied by a thin thread or by a cord... Admittedly the thread is easier to break, but no matter how easily this may be done, the bird will not fly away without doing so. This is the lot of those who are attached to something: No matter how much virtue they have they will not reach the freedom of the divine union” (A.1.11:4).

- “If a small crack in a pitcher goes unrepaired, the damage will be enough to cause all the liquid to leak out... Accordingly, one imperfection leads to another, and these to still more” (A.1.11:5).
- Resisting first movements (the first stirrings of temptation) “wins strength, purity, comfort, and many blessings” (A.1.12:6). Virtue is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9). John’s solution lies in looking away from self to Jesus who is the fullness of life; for, as John says, souls become like the things they love.
- Mortifying inordinate desires does not lead to the elimination of desire, but rather the release of our deepest desire for God, which in turn, purifies, transforms, and integrates all natural desires” (Ascent to Joy, pg. 55).

Imperfections: From the viewpoint of their object, the diminutive is used: “small attachments,” “little satisfactions.” The problem lies not in the object but in the subject; that is, one’s attachment interferes with the dynamism of love and spiritual progress. Habitual imperfections, when known, recognized, and voluntary, impede one from reaching the freedom of union (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 770).

Session Five: Counsels and methods on how to overcome miseries — inordinate appetites and desires; how to enter the “night of the sense”

(The topic is continued in sessions six and seven.)

Required Reading: Ascent, Book One, ch. 13, 1-4; and Ascent Reflections *The Imitation of Christ*, pg. 62-65

Additional reading: Ascent Reflections, pgs. 66-68.

Explanatory note: After having explained the self-inflicted misery and harm that come from indulging inordinate appetites, John offers some counsels on how to overcome inordinate attachments and begin to make progress on the path to spiritual maturity.

Chapter 13 of the first book of Ascent is one of the most well-known and frequently quoted sections of John’s writings. It contains “counsels and methods” on how to actively participate in overcoming shortcomings by entering the “dark night.” “The active way, which will be the subject of the following counsels, comprises what one can do and does by oneself to enter this night. The passive way is that in which one does nothing, but God accomplishes the work in the soul while the soul acts as a recipient. This will be the subject of the fourth book, Dark Night I & II” (A.1.13:1).

The dark night involves “an inflow of God into the soul” (N.2:5.1). Thus, the “active” night comprises what we do, the choices we make that create an opening in our lives through which the awareness of God would flow freely without a hindrance (see Reflections, p. 55).

*“Reflect that your guardian angel does not always move your desire for an action, but he does always enlighten your reason. Hence in order to practice virtue do not wait until you feel like it, for your reason and intellect are sufficient.”
(Sayings, 37)*

Essential Points to Discuss:

- **(1) “First**, have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with his. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate him and behave in all events as he would” (A.1.13:3). The Carmelite Rule (which will be studied later) offers a way of living a life of allegiance to Jesus Christ, “pondering the Lord’s law (e.g., Scripture) day and night and keeping watch at his prayers unless attending to some other duty.”
- John bids his readers to ‘study’ (considerer) the life of Christ. The Spanish word *considerer* means to ponder, to consider, to reflect upon, and to esteem. Each person is called to reflect upon how God is calling them to practice the virtues seen in Christ’s life, rather than to replicate Christ’s behavior (see Reflections, pg. 63).

- “Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the **encounter** with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Thanks solely to this encounter — or renewed encounter — with God’s love, which blossoms into an enriching friendship, we are liberated from our narrowness and self-absorption” (Evangeliu Gaudium — The Gospel of Joy, emphasis added).
- John counsels that ascetical practices should be performed with “order and discretion” (see A.1.13:7). God meets each person where they are, each with their own unique personality and understanding of the spiritual journey. Consequently, “a devotion or ascetical practice should never conflict with the responsibilities and obligation of our life. All of us are called to practice the virtues that we see in the life of Christ. However, we need to practice them according to our station in life” (Reflections, pg. 65).
- **(2)** Second, in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction that is not purely for the honor and glory of God. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ (see A.1.13:4).
- One cannot practice detachment/self-denial (the emptying of sensory satisfaction) simply by one’s willpower or obligation. One’s motivation should come from “love of Jesus” and the means is daily meditative prayer and interior recollection.
- The counsel to deny one’s appetites on the sensual level must be understood as a means of awakening one’s desire for God. The less one is focused on sensual desires, the more one is awakened to the presence of God. In other words, the emptying of self is transformed into the inpouring of God.
- “John’s teaching is based upon the reality that there are certain objects, persons, substances, situations, and so on, that we have to either modify our use of or keep a distance from, not because they are bad in themselves, but because we don’t have the capacity to use them without suffering spiritual damage. All of us have our fatal attractions” (Reflections, pg. 72).

Mortification: A progressive attitude, a holy indifference to all inordinate appetites within oneself (and all actions deriving from them). One cannot find God without mortifying unholy desires within oneself. And this gets to the practice of all virtues: self-denial embraced out of love for Jesus Christ and patterned after His death (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 773).

Session Six: Counsels and methods — continued

Required reading: Ascent, Book One, ch. 13:5-10

Additional Reading: Ascent Reflections, pgs. 75-80

For further understanding of John's "maxims" or "sayings," please refer to the article *Understanding the Maxims or "Sayings"* (Appendix B).

(3) Third: Endeavor to be inclined always not to the easiest but to the most difficult... (A.13:6-7)

Read the entire Maxims meditatively.

Explanatory note: "It is important to note that St. John does not say to do the most difficult thing, etc., but rather to be *inclined* to do the most difficult thing, etc. He is speaking about a readiness, an openness, an attentive state of mind that stands in vigilance to do God's will. This mental stance, which is a sustained act of the will, makes a person conscious of the presence of God because it alters a person's consciousness." In the end, one learns to be governed not by what pleases or displeases the appetites, but by the will of God.

"...just as Jesus found his 'meat and food' in doing his Father's will (A.1.13:4), we too are nourished on a deep spiritual level when we live out a habitual desire to do God's will. We experience this nourishment because when we are inclined to do God's will, we are united to both our deepest will and God's will that connects us to our true selves" (John of the Cross: Ascent to Joy, pg.69, note 5).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Do not go about looking for the best of temporal things, but embrace the life of Christ, and desire to enter into complete nakedness, emptiness, and poverty in everything in the world (see A.1.13:6).
- "As noted, by the introductory words, 'endeavor to be inclined,' John reveals that he is speaking of a habit of mind through the love of Christ, and this inner attitude, one will find the freedom and power necessary to do the Father's will, whatever it may be" (footnote 3. A.1.13:6). Practicing John's counsel gives great peace of mind and heart during the uncertainties and limitations of human life. It frees the soul from fruitless anger, conflict, and disappointment.
- "The great danger in today's world...is the covetous heart — the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures...Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades" (*Evangelii Gaudium* — The Gospel of Joy).

Session Seven: Counsels and methods — continued

Required Reading: Ascent, Book One, ch. 13:11-13; ch. 14 and 15

(4) Fourth: “To reach satisfaction in all, desire satisfaction in nothing...” (A.1.13:11-13). These lines are those already written down in the sketch at the beginning of this book, that of The Ascent of Mt. Carmel.

Additional Reading: Read the entire Maxims meditatively)

Explanatory note: John underlines the importance of non-possessiveness. He also speaks about a fundamental truth of life, namely, “...they cannot rejoice in them (things of the world) if they behold them with possessiveness...In detachment from things they acquire a clearer knowledge of them and a better understanding of both natural and supernatural truths concerning them, and they receive great benefits and advantages from their joy. They delight in these goods according to the truth of them, but those who are attached delight according to what is false in them...One should seek this alone in the use of things, turning away from vanity and concern of one’s own delight and consolation” (A.3.20:2-3).

“There is another exceptional and principal benefit of detachment from joy in creatures: freedom of the heart for God” (A.3.20:4).

John teaches that it is only the non-possessive heart that is truly free, and although such persons “have nothing, possess everything with greater liberty” (A.3.20:3).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “... and when you come to the possession of the all you must possess it without wanting anything. Because if you desire to have something in all your treasure in God is not purely your all” (A.1.13:12).
- “In this nakedness the spirit finds its quietude and rest. For in coveting nothing, nothing tires it by pulling it up and nothing oppresses it by pushing it down, because it is in the center of its humility. When it covets something, by this very fact it tires itself” (A.1.13:13).

Poverty of Spirit: A detachment from particular knowledge, earthly and heavenly, and from satisfaction and pleasure. The reality indicated by other expressions such as purity of heart, emptiness (void), night, nothing (nada), detachment, and nakedness (denudation); the negative aspect of the theological virtues, which bring it about. Those who have attained it are blessed; only they find complete satisfaction of heart (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 773).

Sub-theme: “Fired with love’s urgent longings.” (Chapters 14 and 15)

*“When evening comes, you will be examined in love.
Learn to love as God desires to be loved
and abandon your own way of acting.”
(Sayings, 60)*

Explanatory note: John concludes his counsel with a rather surprising note: but essential to the understanding of the Discalced Carmelite charism of prayer. He says that while we must make an honest effort, our disordered appetites will never be healed except by “another deeper love” of God (consolation in prayer). In this prayer, God becomes the intense desire. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, one will possess the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites. John’s understanding is that by finding satisfaction and strength in this love (of God), one could readily deny all other appetites and temptations (see A.1.14:2). Again, John is not expecting from beginners the complete mortification of their appetites. Beginners do what they can with the help of God’s grace, but complete purification won’t come until God himself brings it about in the passive nights. Consequently, discursive prayer and meditation are essential practices that enable one to turn toward God. John observes that our focus should not be always on our imperfections and shortcomings. Rather, we turn to God in prayer for healing and transformation. One’s compulsive, sensual love needs to be replaced with a higher, nobler love. John promises that in the end all our desires will be fulfilled in God.

“Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me. What do you ask, then, and seek, my soul? Yours is all of this, and all is for you. Do not engage yourself in anything less or pay heed to the crumbs that fall from your Father’s table. Go forth and exult in your Glory!”
(*Sayings of Light and Love*, 27)

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Chapter 14 of the Ascent, Book One is the most important: it gives a retrospective key to everything that has gone before, putting all John’s ascetical advice into perspective. In other words, John’s active night of sense does not begin with a grim determination to annihilate all desires in order to please God. Rather, God first takes the initiative, enkindling the soul with longings, so that it “wants” to make the effort to remove whatever impedes union. What gives the impetus is an infatuation with God. At the beginning, these longings are immature and sometimes misdirected, but they get the person moving and make one “want” to grow and change. (paraphrasing Fr. Steven Payne, OCD — For further understanding, see “*Consolation in Prayer — enkindling of another love*” Appendix C).
- In this prayer, God becomes the object of intense desire. This is the heart of John’s teaching: that Christ is the source of one’s focus, love and strength.

When souls follow John’s counsels, and depart from those inner “houses” in which they have been imprisoned by inordinate desires and attachments, they too can sing with the Saint:

*“—ah, the sheer grace!—
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.”*

Introduction to Part II of the Syllabus

THE ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL - BOOK TWO

PROGRESSION IN PRAYER AND UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF UNION WITH GOD

ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT — PURIFICATION OF THE INTELLECT, MEMORY, AND WILL

Prayer: Communion with God, requiring a will that is with Him and a mind set on Him. Its aim should be what is more pleasing to God. Objects and places should be a means to help one pray in the living temple, which is interior recollection. All the prayers of the Church are reducible to the Our Father. Interior prayer may be meditative or contemplative. In union, it becomes wholly the exercise of love (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 773).

*“For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven,
it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.”*

— St. Thérèse of Lisieux

*“Seek by reading and you will find by meditating; knock in prayer
and the door will be opened in contemplation.”*

— St. John of the Cross.

Explanatory note: Part two of this formation year touches on the period of purification identified by John as the “active night of the spirit,” when the intellect is purified by faith, the memory is purified by hope, and the will is purified by charity. This active night of the spirit and the active night of sense are two aspects of the same night. “The purgation of the senses is only the gate to and beginning of the contemplation that leads to the purgation of the spirit. This sensitive purgation [of spirit] ... serves more for the *accommodation of the senses to the spirit than for the union of the spirit with God*” (N.2.2:1). [emphasis added]

When consolations are withheld, the person may not realize that God is continuing to work in the soul. “When the sweet breast of consolation is withheld, God does not withdraw. Rather, the mode of God’s presence changes... God is no longer found on the surface of the waves because he is present on the bottom of the ocean.” John calls this gentle, quiet mode of God’s presence “contemplation,” and the soul’s receptivity and response to it the “passive night of sense” (See Ascent Reflections pgs. 9-10).

Session Eight: Purification of the intellect by the practice of faith

Required Reading: Ascent, Book Two, ch. 1-4

*In darkness and secure,
by the secret ladder, disguised,
—ah, the sheer grace!—
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.*

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “The secret ladder represents faith, because all the rungs or articles of faith are secret to and hidden from both the senses and intellect. Accordingly, the soul lives in darkness... to climb the divine ladder of faith, that leads up to and penetrates the deep things of God” (1 Cor, 2:10) (A.2. 1:1).
- “...John is not concerned with the content or articles of faith. Rather, his focus is on faith as contemplation: the quiet, gentle presence of God that ‘instructs (the soul) in the perfection of love without its doing anything or understanding how it happens.’ Faith as contemplation, does not communicate facts about God but is an experience of God’s self-communication. Faith... communicates God Himself to us...” (Ascent Reflections pg. 108).
- “...all that is required for complete pacification of the spiritual house is the negation through pure faith of all the spiritual faculties, gratifications and appetites. This achieved, the soul will be joined with the Beloved in a union of simplicity and purity and love and likeness” (A.2.1:2).
- The previous purification pertaining to the senses is more external. In other words, purification of the lower part has an impact, but does not affect one’s deeply held beliefs and spiritual pleasures. Hence, “this spiritual night, which is faith, purifies everything, both in the intellect and in the senses. As a result, the soul declares in this stanza that it departed in darkness and secure... For the less a soul works with its own abilities, the more securely it proceeds because its progress in faith is greater” (A.2.1:3). Note the difference between “dark night” (in the first stanza) and “darkness” (in the second stanza).
- “Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul... It brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. As a result, the excessive light of faith bestowed on a soul is darkness for it” (A.2.3:1). “The intellect knows only in the natural way, that is, by means of the senses” (A.2.3:2).

Note: This is another important teaching of John. In later chapters, he will explain that the excessive light is the loving knowledge of God Himself. “The knowledge that faith provides is **intuitive**” (Ascent: Reflections, pg.108). St. Therese spoke of being guided by

the light of faith as a **“felt sense.”** *“He teaches without noise of words. Never have I heard Him speak, but I feel that He is within me, at each moment; He is guiding and inspiring me with what to say and do”* (Story of a Soul, pg. 179, Study Edition pg. 276, near the end of chapter 8. See The Ascent to Joy, pg. 95).

- The novelty of the knowledge does not lie in the information, but in a new sense of the presence of God through faith and love. One receives it in a kind of passive activity. There are no adequate human controls. Before God, only poverty, confidence, and abandonment remain (see DN Intro, pg. 356).
- “Such is the faith to the soul; it informs us of matters we have never seen or known... This amounts to saying that faith is not a knowledge derived from the senses but an ascent of the soul to what enters through hearing” (A.2.3:3).
- John observes that attachment to understanding, feelings and opinion hinders one’s spiritual growth. Consequently, one must pass beyond everything to **“unknowing”** (see A.2.4:4).
“Unknowing” means the way one experiences the whole realm of the supernatural that cannot be known by natural means of feeling and understanding.
“Supernatural” in this context means the initiative comes from God, not from oneself. In general, it may refer to the realm of the mystery of God, of Christ, His grace (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 776). That is, the “supernatural” does not refer to extraordinary or rare experiences; it refers to grace, sanctity, and to being authentically human.
- Regarding this road to union: entering on the road means leaving one’s own road and moving toward the goal. Turning from one’s own mode implies entry into what has no mode (unknown) — that is, God. John strongly encourages one to move from the “natural bound” to the “supernatural bound” (spiritual bound) by practicing the virtue of faith (see A.2.4:5).

Purification: The process by which one eliminates, through the theological virtues, all that is contrary to receiving into one’s own life the fullness of God’s life. The entire spiritual journey is purifying, comprising God’s communication and the human person’s effort to respond. (see Glossary of Terms, pg.775)

Session Nine: Explanation of the nature of union with God

Required Reading: Ascent, Book Two, ch. 5

Additional Reading: Ascent to Joy, *The Goal: Union with God* pg. 49; *The Metaphors of Union* pg. 52

Union: 1. Natural union is that by which God is present to creatures preserving them in being.
2. Supernatural union is the goal of the spiritual journey, a union of likeness brought about through love (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 776).

Explanatory note: “John sees the spiritual life as this universal call to search constantly for union with God. It is a personal exodus from our own captivity to the promised land... This exodus of spiritual dedication is a departure from security, implies a willingness to journey through the nights” (Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross, pg. 46). In chapter 5, John explains the phrase “the nature of union of the soul with God.” “This chapter is fundamental to his entire work because the whole process of purification flows from the nature of union and our willing participation” (footnote ch. 5:1).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- John is not discussing “substantial union” by which God sustains every soul and dwells in it substantially, even those in mortal sin. This union between God and creatures always exists. John is talking about the soul’s “union of likeness” with God. This “union of likeness” does not always exist, except when there is a likeness of love by active participation in it (see A.2.5:3).
- “God communicates supernatural being only through love and grace, which not all souls possess. And those who do, do not possess them in the same degree... A person who has reached complete conformity and likeness of will has attained total supernatural union and transformation in God” (A.2.5:4).
- Souls must detach themselves from all that is not God “so that God, who is naturally communicating himself to them through nature, may do so supernaturally through grace” (A.2.5:4).

Note: the virtue of detachment is closely connected to union with God.

- It is important to note that the presence of God — who is naturally communicating himself to souls through nature and through grace — is not different in kind, but in intensity. The soul is now more aware of the presence of God. This increase of consciousness happens because in the process of purification, the soul’s capacity and receptivity for God has increased; it has made more “room for God” (see Ascent to Joy, *The Goal: Union with God*, pg. 49).

Note: the process of purification of the faculties is closely linked to union.

- John provides two excellent metaphors to explain the nature of union: The “window” and the “painting.” “A ray of sunlight shining on a smudgy window is unable to illumine that window completely and transform it into its own light...the cleaner the window is, the brighter will be its illumination. The extent of illumination is not dependent on the

ray of sunlight [God] but on the window [the soul]" (A.2.5:6).

"A soul makes room for God by wiping away the smudges and smears of creatures, by uniting its will perfectly to God's; for to love is to labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God" (A.2.5:7).

- "When God grants this supernatural favor to the soul, so great a union is caused that all the things of both God and the soul become one in participant transformation, and the soul appears to be God more than a soul. Indeed, it is God by participation" (A.2.5:7). Happy are the souls who can cry out: *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God..."* (Gal.2:19-20).
- *"Let us rejoice and give thanks. We have not only become Christians but Christ himself... Stand in awe and rejoice. We have become Christ"* (St. Augustine "On the Gospel of St. John," lecture 21).

Note: even though the soul is transformed, it is still distinct from God. It remains a "window." (see A.2.5:7)

- Consequently, the preparation for this union, "is not an understanding by the soul, nor the taste, feeling, or imagining of God or of any other object, but purity and love, the stripping off [what is not God] and perfect renunciation of all such experiences for God alone" (A.2.5:8).

Note: John's teaching of purity of heart in relation to union is "entirely cleansed, clear, and perfect."

- John's painting metaphor sheds light on the nature of this union. One whose sense of sight is impaired will discover less detail and delicacy in the painting, while one who has better vision will discover more details and perfections. "There is so much to behold in the painting that no matter how much one sees in it, still more remains unseen" (A.2.5:9).

Side note: Grace increases one's capacity to see the beauty that was *always present*. "This increase of sight we call faith (or contemplation), which is the conscious awareness of the soul's pre-reflective and preconscious knowledge of God. This increase of the knowledge of God is the result of grace alone, but it follows upon the soul's choice of love which is the decision to 'labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God.' Thus, for John, there is an interfacing and interaction between knowing and loving; they are inseparable. We can only love what we know, but only love has the power to disclose to us the true nature of what we love" (Ascent to Joy, pg. 50). John calls this "loving knowledge."

Transformation: A term for union, which implies a change in form by which a soul receives a new form. God's likeness in its being and activity, while remaining different from God in its nature. It is the human person who is transformed in God, and not vice versa. The life of one transformed is Christ's life (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 776).

Session Ten: Growth in prayer — the point of departure for the means, which is faith, hope, and love

Required Reading: Ascent, Book Two, ch. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12

Theological Virtues: Faith, hope, and love (charity): working interdependently and being the likeness of God, they bridge the infinite distance between God and His creatures. They are the only proper and proximate means to union with Him (see Glossary of Terms, pg. 777).

Explanatory note: In part one of this formation year, John uses the term “the point of departure” for purification of sense faculties of all that is not God. Part two looks at John’s explanation that the soul might leave the “point of departure” for the means, which is “faith” “hope” and “love” — a way to emptying and purifying the spiritual faculties of all that is not God (see A.2.5:6). The three theological virtues are the means and preparation for the soul’s union with God (see A.2.6:6). John especially addresses those who have begun to enter the state of contemplation (see A.2.6:8). John discusses the faculties and the theological virtues separately, *however*, they do not function independently or in isolation from one another. When a person is touched by divine grace, the whole of the soul is affected, not just part of it. As one’s faith vision is transformed, so is the object of one’s hope and one’s desire or love that seeks the ultimate good (see Ascent to Joy, pg. 89).

*“The very pure spirit does not bother about the regard of others or human respect, but communes inwardly with God, alone and in solitude as to all forms, and with delightful tranquility, for the knowledge of God is received in divine silence.”
(Sayings, 28)*

Essential Points to Discuss:

- The theological virtues perfect the faculties of the soul and produce emptiness and darkness: faith in the intellect, hope in the memory, and charity in the will (A.2.6:1).
- “...the soul is not united with God in this life through understanding, or through enjoyment or through imagination, or through any other sense; but only faith, hope, and charity (according to the intellect, memory, and will) can unite the soul with God in this life” (A.2.6:1).
- “...faith is the substance of things to be hoped for and that these things are not manifest to the intellect, even though its consent to them is firm and certain. If they were manifest, there would be no faith. For though faith brings certitude to the intellect, it does not produce clarity, but only darkness” (A.2.6:2). The reason for this darkness is that it strips the intellect of the customary light (natural knowledge).
- “Hope, also, undoubtedly puts the memory in darkness and emptiness as regards all earthly and heavenly objects. Hope always pertains to the unpossessed object. If something were possessed there could no longer be hope for it” (A.2.6:3).

- “Charity, too, causes a void in the will regarding all things since it obliges us to love God above everything” (A.2.6:4).
- John observes that some are content with a certain degree of virtue, such as perseverance in prayer and detachment, but never achieve true nakedness of soul — Christ’s poverty, selflessness, and spiritual purity. Such a one searches only for sweetness and delightful communications from God (a spiritual sweet tooth) (see A.2.7:5).
- The cross is a supporting staff that greatly lightens and eases the journey (see A.2.7:7).
Note: Outward self-denial is insufficient for faith if one is inwardly filled with spiritual pride, missing the entire point of imitating Christ’s poverty of spirit.
- “... the road leading to God does not entail a multiplicity of considerations, methods, manners and experiences;” but demands only one thing — surrendering self to the suffering Christ. “A person makes progress only by imitating Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (A.2.7:8).
- John’s understanding is that Jesus accomplished the most marvelous work of His whole life by dying on the Cross. That is, He brought about the reconciliation and union of the human race with God through grace (union with God through participation). When reduced to nothing, the highest degree of humility, the spiritual union between God and soul will be accomplished (see A.2.7:11).
- The intellect gets ideas and concepts in two ways: naturally and supernaturally. Natural knowledge includes everything the intellect understands by way of the bodily senses or through reflection (see A.2.10:2). “The ‘natural’ are those the soul can actively construct by its own power through forms, figures and images” (A.2.12:3). “Supernatural knowledge comprises everything imparted to the intellect in a way transcending the intellect’s natural ability and capacity” (A.2.10:2). “The supernatural are represented passively [the initiative comes from God] without the work of the senses” (A.2.12:3).
Note: Reason and faith are compatible with one another. John is not against reason. He is against a desire to know God through “extraordinary charismatic phenomena” (knowledge that comes from vision, locution, feeling, understanding, forms and images, etc.). “There is no necessity for any of this kind of knowledge since one can get sufficient guidance from natural reason and from the law and doctrine of the Gospel. We should make such use of reason and the law of the Gospel that, even though — whether we desire it or not — some supernatural truths are told to us, we accept only what is in harmony with reason and the Gospel law. All matters must be regulated by reason save those of faith, which though not contrary to reason transcend it” (A.2.21:4).
- “Contemplation, consequently, by which the intellect has a higher knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, meaning secret wisdom of God” (A.2.8:6). The soul passes from lower levels of awareness to higher ones.
Note: John captures the unexplainable experience of the higher knowledge of God in his poem, *Transcending All Knowledge*: “I entered into unknowing/yet when I saw myself

there/without knowing where I was/I understood great things/I will not say what I felt/for I remained in unknowing/transcending all knowledge” (Collected Works pg. 53).

- To grow in faith is to deepen one’s awareness of and attentiveness to God’s indwelling presence. It is a “habit of soul” or a habitual state of consciousness (see A.2.3:1 and Ascent Reflections pg.108).

Session Eleven: The impediments and harm caused by different apprehensions arising from objects supernaturally and the proper conduct of the spiritual persons in their regard

Required Reading: Ascent, Book Two, ch. 11 and 17

Additional Reading: The Collected Works of John of the Cross, ICS Publications, 1991. Dark Night, Book One, chapters 1-8 (imperfections of beginners)

Side note: John's focus in these chapters is the supernatural knowledge that reaches the intellect by way of the exterior bodily senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch). It is important to keep in mind John's cautionary observations as one navigates this journey in the uncharted waters of the world within.

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Spiritual persons can — and often do — perceive supernatural representations and phenomena: visions of saints or angels; hearing extraordinary words; smelling extraordinary fragrances, etc. John's advice is to ignore such visions and apprehensions. "The more exterior and corporeal these things are, the less certain is their divine origin. God's self-communication is more commonly and appropriately given to the spirit, in which there is greater security and profit for the soul..." (A.2.11:1-2).
- "...they [these apprehensions] are ready occasion for breeding of error, presumption and vanity in the soul... A person, then, forsaking faith, will follow after these communications, believing that their light is the guide and means to the goal, which is union with God" (A.2.11:4).
- "...they [the persons experiencing this] often develop secretly a special opinion of themselves — that they are important in God's eyes. Such a view is contrary to humility." It's easy to fall into a self-satisfaction that becomes truly obvious at times. Such representations and feelings must always be rejected (A.2.11:5).
- "... if the corporeal vision or feeling in the senses has a divine origin it produces its effect in the spirit at the very moment of its perception... God produces the effect passively in the spirit. The good effect, accordingly, does not depend on one's wanting or not wanting the communication" (A.2.11:6).
- Consequently, John identifies six kinds of harm from one's attachment to extraordinary phenomena (see A.2.11:7):
 1. Faith will gradually diminish.
 2. Sensory things are an impediment to the spirit because they detain the soul and prevent the spirit from soaring to the invisible. This is one of the reasons our Lord told the disciples that it was fitting for him to go so that the Holy Spirit might come (Jn.16:7).
 3. The soul begins to develop a possessive attitude toward these communications and fails to persevere on its journey to genuine renunciation and nakedness of spirit.

4. Individuals gradually lose the effect of these communications and the interior spirituality they produce because they set their eyes on the sensible aspect, which is the least important part of the communication.
 5. Individuals gradually lose God's favors because they receive these favors as something belonging to themselves and do not profit well by them.
 6. Lastly, in desiring to accept them one opens the door to the devil (A.2.11:7).
- "If individuals remain both faithful and retiring in the midst of these favors, the Lord will not cease raising them degree by degree until they reach divine union and transformation" (A.2.11:9).
 - John poses the question: *Why does God allow such visions if they are potentially harmful?* (see A.2.17:1). The reason is that God perfects people gradually, according to their human nature, and proceeds from the lowest and most exterior to the highest and most interior (see A.2.17:4).

Note: Reading chapter 17 is helpful for understanding God's action in "lifting the soul from the extreme of its low state to the other extreme of the high state of divine union" (A.2.17:3).

- John ultimately leads souls to the safest and most reliable vision of all — that of Jesus Christ. "God could answer as follows: If I have already told you all things in my Word, my Son, and if I have no other word, what answer, or revelation can I now make that would surpass this? Fasten your eyes on him alone because in him I have spoken and revealed all and in him you will discover ever more than you ask for and desire. You are making an appeal for locutions and revelations that are incomplete, but if you turn your eyes to him you will find them complete. For he is my entire locution and response, vision and revelation, which I have already spoken, answered, manifested, and revealed to you by giving him to you as a brother, companion, master, ransom and reward." (A.2.22:5)

Session Twelve: Meditation to contemplation (the passive night of sense) — recognizing the signs of contemplation

Required Reading: Ascent, Book Two, 12-15; Ascent Reflections *The Passive Night of the Sense*, pg. 97-100

Explanatory note: John's understanding is that meditation is the work of the sense faculties since it is a discursive act built on forms, figures, and images — imagined and fashioned by the senses. For example: imagining Christ crucified or some other scene (see A.2.12:3). John is not advising turning away from Christ; rather, he stresses communion in loving faith more than discursive reflection; a simple gaze of faith and personal communion rather than imaginative representation (see footnote 2 of A.2.12:3). This is the Carmelite charism of prayer.

Meditation: Its purpose is to acquire some knowledge and love of God. It is helpful for learning how to follow and imitate Christ. As the acts and knowledge of love of God increase, **a habit of knowing and loving God is begotten in the one meditating**, and the activity of meditation simplifies into a loving attention. In this simplification of meditation, one begins to perceive the three signs of readiness to move beyond discursive meditation (see Glossary Terms, pg. 772).

*"In all our necessities, trials, and difficulties, no better or safer aid exists for us than **prayer** and hope that God will provide for us by the means He desires... 'When means are lacking and reason cannot find a way ... we have only to raise our eyes to You that You may provide in the manner that pleases You.'" (A.2.21:5, 2 Chron. 20:12)*

Essential Points to Discuss:

- "These considerations, forms, and methods of meditation are necessary to beginners... They are suitable as the remote means to union with God" (A.2.12:5). John's observation is that many spiritual persons err greatly by holding on to the former ways of approaching God through images, forms, etc., and fail to allow God to lead them to more spiritual, interior, and invisible graces (see A.2.12:6).
- "Once the faculties reach the end of their journey, they cease to work, just as we cease to walk when we reach the end of our journey. If everything consisted in going, one would never arrive; and everywhere we found means, when and where could we enjoy the end and goal?" (A.2.12:6).
- "Since these individuals do not understand the mystery of this new experience, they imagine themselves to be idle and doing nothing. Thus, in their struggle with ...discursive meditations they disturb their **quietude**..., and they drag the soul further away from spiritual space" (A.2.12:7).
- This withdrawal of sensible consolation results in a twofold crisis that John calls the "passive night of sense." First, it is a crisis of choice. Will the soul continue to pray and practice virtue without the support of consolation, or will it give up? Second, it is a crisis

of confusion. This is because many beginners have the erroneous belief that God's presence in their lives is the intensity of consolation that they experience. Therefore, when consolation is absent, they think that God has withdrawn from them, and they do not know why (see Ascent Reflections, pg.97).

Note: Even though the aspect of the passive night of sense that John focuses on is the transition from discursive meditation to the beginnings of contemplative prayer, **we need to keep in mind that the passive night of sense involves every aspect of one's daily life.** A common analogy for the passive night of sense is the period in a marriage when the honeymoon wanes and the couple begin to grow in love together by means of daily sacrifices (see Ascent Reflections, pg. 100). Also see St. Therese of Lisieux's "Christmas Story" (Appendix D).

- "The proper advice for these individuals is that they must learn to abide in the quietude with a loving attentiveness to God and pay no heed to the imagination and its work. At this stage, the faculties are at rest and do not work actively but passively, by receiving what God is effecting in them" (A.2.12:8).

Side note: In chapter 13, John explains the signs for recognizing in spiritual persons when they should discontinue discursive meditation and pass on to the state of contemplation. And in chapter 14, he explains why the presence of these signs are necessary for one to advance. These two chapters should be read in their entirety to better understand the progression of prayer.

- "The first [sign] is the realization that one cannot make discursive meditation or receive satisfaction from it as before" (A.2.13:2).
- "The second sign is an awareness of a disinclination to fix the imagination or sense faculties on other particular objects, exterior or interior" (A.2.12:3).
- "The third and surest sign is that person likes to remain alone in loving awareness of God, without particular considerations, in interior peace and quiet and repose, and without the acts and exercises of the intellect, memory and will. Such a one prefers to remain only in the general loving awareness and knowledge we mentioned, without any particular knowledge or understanding" (A.2.13:4).

Note: John's observation is that spiritual persons must observe within themselves all three signs together (see A.2.13:5). Contemplation, as the general loving knowledge of God, is the decisive element in this new situation (see footnote 2 of A.2.13:2). If the third sign is missing, the person is more likely to be experiencing a period of lukewarmness rather than readiness for infused contemplation.

- "...the more habituated persons become to this calm, the more their experience of this general loving knowledge of God will increase. This knowledge is more enjoyable than all other things because without the soul's labor it affords peace, rest, savor, and delight" (A.2.13:7).
- John's understanding is that: "what the soul therefore was gradually acquiring through the labor of meditation on particular ideas and forms has now been converted into

habitual and substantial and general loving knowledge... Accordingly, the moment prayer begins, the soul, as one with a store of water, drinks peaceably without labor” (A.2.14:2). John further observes that this union with pure knowledge is independent of time. “This is the short prayer that, it is said, pierces the heavens” (A.2.14:11). “*For a little of this pure love is more precious to God and the soul and **more beneficial to the Church**, even though it seems one is doing nothing, than all these works put together*” (SC. 29:2).

- John further observes that in this new experience, some spiritual persons (at least at the beginning), become disturbed with the thought of backsliding and going astray. They are indeed getting lost, but not in the way they imagine, for they are losing the exercise of their own senses and first mode of experience. This loss indicates that the spirit being imparted to them, in which the less they understand the further they penetrate into the night of the spirit. They must pass through this night to union with God beyond all knowing (see A.2.14:4).
- The supernatural knowledge and light shines so purely and simply in the intellect that it frees it from all intelligible forms. This causes darkness because it dispossesses the intellect of its customary light (see A.2.14:10). This is an important teaching of John’s understanding of the term, “darkness.” It is truly a “sheer grace” to pass through the senses to spirit “in darkness and concealment,” and to experience the “loving knowledge of God” in contemplation.

*—ah, the sheer grace!—
in darkness and concealment,
my house being now all stilled.*

At the end of this year of formation, the candidate should have a basic grasp of the following concepts:

- John's doctrine on the "appetites"
- The harm disordered desires inflict on the soul
- Behavioral patterns are tendencies more than choice, and they need a deeper healing rather than just behavioral improvement. Hence, Jesus says: "Come to me...I will refresh you" (I will heal you) (Matthew 11:29).
- Transformation and union with God are not about the individual only. God gives His gifts to individuals for the good of the Church and the World.
- For Seculars, union with God through participation is lived amid life's daily challenges and informs their attitudes and actions.
- The virtue of self-denial is a form of love and union with God. Love is the very essence of detachment and self-denial. "Fired with love's urgent longings" — "a more intense enkindling of another, better love is necessary for the denial of all inordinate pleasures" (A.1.14:2).
- Genuine love is not a romantic, self-gratifying experience. Rather, it involves a process of conversion, of transcending one's ego, of giving one's life for the Beloved. Love is a self-disciplined process. "To love is to labor to divest and deprive oneself for God of all that is not God" (A.2:5-6).
- The fruits of detachment and self-denial:
 - Increased knowledge of God and of self;
 - Growth in humility and in understanding and empathy toward others;
 - Freedom from slavery to desires and attachments, and the experience of a sense of God's mercy;
 - A single-minded, single-hearted choice for love of God and the habit of seeing everything as secondary to the quest for God's love. "All the world's wisdom and human ability compared to the infinite wisdom of God is pure and utter ignorance" (A.1:4.4).
- Faith as contemplation does not communicate facts about God; it is an experience of God's self-communication. Faith communicates God Himself to the soul.

And progress with the following spiritual attitudes appropriate to this level of formation:

- A single-hearted desire to embrace the theological virtues of faith, hope and love as the living expression of union.
- An increased desire to cast out everything that interferes with the inflowing God.
- Detachment not only from possessions and unruly desires, but also from "spiritual goods" (spiritual sweet tooth).

- No expectation of or desire for extraordinary experiences such as locutions, visions, or ecstasies.

Note: More important than a candidate’s intellectual knowledge is the internalization of St. John’s teachings. The purpose of all formation is to prepare the person to live the OCDS vocation. There is to be no sort of final exam or test. Councils may evaluate how well the candidate is progressing by observing the person’s behavior in community life, by listening to the person’s participation in the formation discussions, and by regular “check-ins” to talk informally with the candidate about how things are going.

Ratio 66. Signs of a vocation to Carmel, at the level of the Teresian charism:

- a taste for prayer and
- a desire to establish a personal and friendly relationship with God
- a contemplative and active spirit. [“This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works” (IC, VII.4:6.)]
- a love for the Church
- a desire to familiarize oneself with Carmelite spirituality.

Note: It is recommended that candidates continue reading the rest of the Ascent for their spiritual enrichment and understanding of the purification process of the intellect, memory, and will according to the teaching of St. John of the Cross.

BOOK TWO OF THE ASCENT (Chapter 1-32)

**ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT -PURIFICATION OF INTELLECT
BY THE PRACTICE OF FAITH**

BOOK THREE OF ASCENT (Chapters 1-15)

**ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT — PURIFICATION OF THE MEMORY
BY THE PRACTICE OF HOPE**

BOOK THREE OF ASCENT (Chapters 16-45)

**ACTIVE NIGHT OF THE SPIRIT — PURIFICATION OF THE WILL
BY THE PRACTICE OF CHARITY**

Note to Formators:

In his letter to the Secular Carmelites (March 28, 2020), Superior General Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, OCD, reminded the Secular Carmelites of the need to participate in the mission and apostolate of the Church and the Order as an integral part of the OCDS identity. “Unfortunately, with regard to this, there are still misunderstandings and many people think that it is enough to

attend community meetings for some practices of devotions, reflection or conferences, but without a real and concrete commitment of service in the activities of the Order or the Church in which one finds oneself. Perhaps this is due to weak formation which does not take into account what the Constitutions recommend: 'In the last three years of initial formation there will be a deeper study of Scripture, the documents of the Church, the Saints of the Order, prayer, and **how to participate in the apostolate of the Order...**' [emphasis added] (n. 36 d).

Following from Father General's letter, formators are requested to introduce the candidates to the following article and selected paragraphs of the Church documents:

Fr. Deeney's article, *New Vision — Apostolate of Our Charism*, Welcome to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites pg. 38.

Vatican documents: *Christifideles Laici*, and *Evangelii Gaudium* — The Gospel of Joy.

OCDS Constitutions *Serving God's Plan* 25-28

Note to the Council: The following needs to be completed well before the discernments begin; it may be divided into two or more sessions, if needed. It is important to have special sessions with the Formation Director for candidates in their third cycle of Formation II.

Special Session with the Formation Director for candidates in their third year of Formation II: Called to holiness — the Definitive Promise in the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites

Required Reading: OCDS Constitutions, Art. 11-16. Ratio, 59-93.

Ritual for the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Chapter III: Rite of Making the Promise

Additional Reading: The Promise and Vows in the Secular Order, Fr Alzinir Debastiani, OCD

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “The Secular Carmelite wants to see God, wants to know God, and recognizes that prayer and meditation now become more important. The Promise is a commitment to a new way of life in which the ‘allegiance to Jesus Christ’ marks the person and the way this person lives” (Ratio Art. 88).
- “For the members of the Secular Order it is an honor to be part of the Carmelite family...The Secular Carmelite seeks intimate union with Christ in the world through the lived experience of the Promise made according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order” (Ratio Art.86).
- “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” (OCDS Const. Art.11).
- “The promise of chastity reinforces the commitment to love God above all else and to love others with the love God has for them...This promise does not prevent a change in state of life” (Const. Art. 13).
- “By the promise of poverty the Secular Carmelite expresses the desire to live in accordance with the Gospel and its values. In evangelical poverty there is a wealth of generosity, self-denial, and interior liberty...” (Const. Art.14).
- “The promise of obedience is a pledge to live open to the will of God...For this reason the Secular Carmelite freely cooperates with those who have responsibility for guiding the community and the Order in discerning and accepting God’s ways: the Community’s Council, the Provincial and the General” (Const. Art. 15).
- “The beatitudes are a plan of action for life and a way to enter into relationship with the world, neighbors and co-workers, families and friends. By promising to live the beatitudes in daily life, Secular Carmelites seek to give evangelical witness as members of the Church and the Order, and by this witness invite the world to follow Christ: ‘the Way the Truth and the Life’ (Jn.14:6)” (Const. Art.16).

- “What is the element that distinguishes those called to be Secular Carmelites? It is not the spirituality, nor the study, nor the devotion to Mary. Simply put, the Secular Carmelite is moved to commit himself or herself to the Order: to commit himself to the service of the Church through collaboration and cooperation with the goal of the Order. This commitment in the form of the **Promise** is an ecclesial event and an event of the Order in addition to being an event in the life of the person who makes the Promise” (Ratio Art. 83).
- Secular Carmelites are called to share in the common vocation to holiness (see, Preface to the OCDS Constitutions). “We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation...* is the vocation to holiness, that is perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony to the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church” (*Christifideles Laici — Called to Holiness*, para. 16). Hence, “... this promise is a pledge to pursue personal holiness...” (OCDS Const. Art. 11).
- “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and their participation in earthly activities. Once again, the Apostle admonishes us: ‘Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ (Colos. 3:17) (*Christifideles Laici — The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II). “... The Secular Order receives new vocations with joy, but also with a feeling of responsibility, so that in them also the charism may be daily understood more deeply, bear fruit and expand...” (Ratio 20).
- “... within the lay state diverse ‘vocations’ are given, that is, there are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a ‘commonly shared’ lay vocation, ‘special’ lay vocations flourish. In this area we can also recall the spiritual experience of the flourishing of diverse forms of secular institutions that have developed recently in the Church. These offer the lay faithful, and even priests, the possibility of professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience through vows or promises while fully maintaining one’s lay or clerical state” (*Christifideles Laici — The Various Vocations in the Lay State*, para. 56).
- “...Our Lord will reward anyone who does more than he [or she] is obliged to do. See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues” (Rule of St. Albert, Art.24).

The Definitive Promise:

I, (name), inspired by the Holy Spirit, in response to God’s call, sincerely promise to the Superiors of the Order of the Teresian Carmel and to you my brothers and sisters, to tend toward evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty,

obedience, and of the Beatitudes, according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites, **for the rest of my life**. I confidently entrust this, my Promise, to the Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel.

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As the candidates prepare for the Definitive Promise, it is helpful to recall the words of Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Letter to the OCDS, March 20, 2020:

... I urge you to know your [legislative] documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.

I ask the Lord to enlighten you so that you may continue to be faithful to the essential elements of your vocation as Secular Carmelites. May the light and strength which come from prayer as friendship with the Lord and fraternal relationship with your brothers and sisters enable you to respond to the challenges and needs of your personal, family and community realities.

May the contemplation of the Risen Christ fill you with peace and joy. May Mary, Queen of Heaven, give you the joy of her Living Son forever.

Faternally, Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Superior General, 2009–2021

(The entire letter is in Appendix E)

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Appendix A: Session 3, The Five Positive Harms of Attachment

See *the Ascent of Mount Carmel, Book One, chapter 6*

St. John of the Cross describes the positive harms to the soul under their five effects: they weary, torment, darken, defile, and weaken the soul (A.1. 6:5.)

- Weariness is illustrated in John's description of a lover. "Just as lover is wearied and depressed when on a longed-for day his opportunity is frustrated, so is the soul wearied and tired of all its appetites and their fulfillment, because the fulfillment only causes more hunger and emptiness" (A.1. 6:6.) John also portrays this weariness in the image of a covetous treasure hunter. "Just as anyone who digs covetously for a treasure grows tired and exhausted, so does anyone who strives to satisfy the appetites' demand become wearied and fatigued." (A1.6.6.)

Note: The focus of the first illustration (lover) is on "fulfillment." What the soul really hungers for is God. Trying to satisfy this hunger with anything other than God leaves the soul wearied and dissatisfied. The focus of the second illustration (treasure hunter) is on the "exhaustion" caused by covetous desires. After spending so much time and effort trying to get what can never satisfy, the soul feels exhausted.

- Torment and affliction are the second kind of damage the appetites cause in an individual... "A soul is tormented and afflicted when it reclines on its appetites just as is someone lying naked on thorns and nails." (A.1.7:1) "The appetite torments in the measure of its intensity...and the more numerous the appetites that possess a soul the greater in number are its torments" (A.1.7:2.)
- God, then, in compassion for all, invites them to drink the living water and eat the real manna. "The Spirit of God refreshes the soul. 'Come to me,' Jesus says, 'all you who labor and are burdened [with wrongful desires and affections], I will refresh you' (Mt 11:28) — and you will be relieved of all of your inordinate desires. (see A: 7:4).
- The third kind of harm the appetites bring upon a person is blindness and darkness. As a cloudy mirror does not clearly reflect a person's face, and as muddy water reflects only a hazy image, so too it is with our intellect when cluttered with sinful desires. It becomes darkened and unable to receive a clear impression of either natural wisdom or supernatural knowledge (see. 8:1). As David laments: "My iniquities surrounded me, and I was unable to see." (Ps 40:12).
- "The appetite blinds and darkens the soul... A moth is not helped much by its eyes because, blinded in its desire for the beauty of light, it will fly directly into a bonfire." (8:3)
- The fourth way the appetites harm the soul is by defiling and staining it. "Strokes of soot would ruin a perfect and extraordinarily beautiful portrait, so too inordinate appetites defile and dirty the soul, in itself a perfect and extremely beautiful image of God." (9:1)

- The vision of the prophet Ezekiel teaches that there are three kinds of wrongful desires and affections: those in the intellect — thoughts of base things; those in the will — desire for sensual things; those in the memory — reflecting and keeping them in mind. The total yielding to wrongful affections and desires in any one of these three faculties would be a total turning away from God. (see 9:5-6; Ezk 8:10-16)
- “Weakness and tepidity are the fifth kind of harm the appetites produce in a person. The appetites sap the strength needed for perseverance in the practice of virtue” (A.1.10:1.) When the soul dissipates its energy in other things, it loses its fervor for God and its strength in the practice of virtue. (A1.10:1.) “Ordinarily, the reason many people do not have diligence and eagerness for the acquisition of virtue is that their appetites and affections are not fixed purely on God” (A.1.10:4.)

Appendix B: Session 6, Understanding the “Maxims” or “Sayings”

By Steven Payne, OCD (Courtesy, Cincarm — a Carmelite platform.)

First, I think it's worth reminding ourselves of the "literary genre." That is to say, John is giving us “maxims” or “sayings,” which have a venerable tradition in Christian spirituality. A maxim is a kind of pithy and memorable summary of practical advice (e.g., "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today") but not a complete treatise on ethics or behavior. Maxims have to be interpreted and applied (for example, we'd die of exhaustion if we tried to do EVERYTHING today instead of postponing some things until tomorrow). Jesus himself was fond of “sayings” or “maxims” and many Scripture scholars believe that some of the earliest written documents among believers were collections of his sayings. And we know that some of these are very hard sayings (“let the dead bury the dead, offer no resistance to evil, unless you hate father and mother, etc., etc.”), and that some Christians have gotten into trouble when they interpret these out of the context of the whole gospel message. Moreover, Jesus' sayings, though in the tradition of "wisdom" sayings, often turn conventional wisdom on its head and show us the paradoxical possibilities of the kingdom that he came to inaugurate and proclaim.

Much the same can be said of John. We know that in his early years in Carmel he gave many spiritual conferences and did much spiritual direction, and that he liked to leave people with pithy little summaries of his main points. These maxims or “dichos” were among his first writings, then, and later sometimes were simply incorporated into his treatises. They're not complete treatments of the subjects they address, but succinct reminders of important points.

Notice that these maxims are simply meant to help us follow the first counsel, which is to imitate Christ. Notice at the end of the list how he says that we should desire to enter into complete nakedness and poverty “for Christ.” If anyone wants to reject his maxims as too hard, I'm sure John would say, “Fine, if you know another way of learning to imitate Christ, more power to you!” But in his own experience, some counter-measures against our natural inclinations are needed in order to break the power of the “pleasure principle.”

“Not to the easiest, but to the most difficult, etc.” He encourages us to “embrace these practices” not in order to punish ourselves but “to overcome the repugnance of your will toward them,” so that we can learn to be governed not by what pleases or displeases our appetites, but by what God wills. The point is not to form new attachments but to break the power of the ones we already have, so that we're guided not by whether something gives us pleasure or pain but by whether or not it is God's will.

Far from being impossibly idealistic, I think of John's advice as eminently practical (though admittedly I may be watering it down to fit my own spiritual limitations). I think of these maxims as like riding a bicycle; if you've got one that keeps pulling to the left, then you have to lean to the right in order to provide a counterbalance and keep on a straight course. We human beings struggle with inertia, and even in religious life we can easily get into a rut without noticing it: our favorite place in choir, our favorite person to sit beside in recreation, our favorite housework assignment, etc., etc. That's why I find it personally useful to vary and change things when I can, to sit where I don't usually sit, to talk to the person I don't usually talk to, to take the help out I'm not naturally inclined to, to eat the foods I like less, etc., etc.

Ultimately you get used to those, too. We'll always have preferences. But the work of the "active night of the senses" will be done when we get to the point where we can eat what's put in front of us, where we can pray whether we're given our "favorite spot" or not, where we don't become all unglued if our preferences aren't followed. Again, I think John would say the goal is to get to the point where, after letting God know our preferences, we can still honestly pray, with Jesus, "Yet not my will but Thine be done." Peace, Steven Payne, OCD

Appendix C: Session 7, Consolation in Prayer — “enkindling of another love”

Chapter 14 is one of the most important chapters in the first book of John of the Cross's ASCENT, and gives us a retrospective key to everything that has gone before. John begins by saying that he has now "explained the first verse" of the Dark Night poem, and "discussed the nature of this night, the reason for calling it a night, and the method of actively entering into it." It reminds me of the old advice for organizing a talk: begin by telling them what you are going to say, then say it, then tell them what you've said. But there's one thing he hasn't really mentioned before now, and is perhaps the most important point of all for putting all the ascetical advice in perspective. Here John says that "a more intense enkindling of another, better love (love of the soul's Bridegroom) is necessary for the vanquishing of the appetites and the denial of this pleasure. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, it will have the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites.... For the sensory appetites are moved and attracted toward sensory objects with such cravings that if the spiritual part of the soul is not fired with other, more urgent longings for spiritual things, the soul will be able neither to overcome the yoke of nature nor to enter the night of sense.... How easy, sweet, and delightful these longings for their Bridegroom make all the trials and dangers of this night seem."

In other words, at the most fundamental level, John's active night of sense does not begin with a grim determination on our part to annihilate all our desires in order to please God. Rather, God first takes the initiative, enkindling us with longings for him, so that we will *want* to make the effort to remove whatever impedes union. What gives us the impetus is our infatuation with God. Granted, at the beginning these longings are immature and sometimes misdirected, but they get us off the mark and make us *want* to grow and change. I think of it as analogous to human love. Think of a teenager whose parents are always after him (or her) to shape up, apply himself, dress right, use good manners, keep his room clean, all of which he has no motivation to do.... until suddenly he gets a crush on a girl and wants to impress her, and starts doing all these things. (It doesn't have to be a teenager, and maybe that's not a good example, because he might try to impress her by getting a tattoo or a nose ring these days!) The point is, the journey John presents to us in ASCENT I looks discouraging if we think of it as an enormous feat of self-mastery that *we* have to accomplish before we can move on. But if we think of it rather as a response to the enkindling of love for God in our hearts, it makes all the difference. I think of all the popular songs in which the singers profess that they would "climb the highest mountain, swim the deepest sea, walk through fire, etc., etc." to be with the ones they love.... And we don't think of this as masochistic or negative. In fact, lovers often seek challenges to prove their love. So it is here, I think. So much for my \$.02.

Peace, Steven Payne, OCD

Appendix D: Session 12, St. Therese's Christmas Story

One of the convincing stories about St. Therese's life was her childhood conversion at the age of fourteen. Grace intervened to change her life on Christmas day in 1886.

The following year she entered the Discalced Carmelite convent. In her autobiography, Story of a Soul, she referred to this Christmas as her "conversion" (Chapter V):

I was really unbearable because of my extreme touchiness; If I happened to cause anyone I loved some little trouble, instead of forgetting about it, I cried like a Magdalene and then when I began to cheer up, I'd begin to cry again for having cried. I was quite unable to correct this terrible fault. I really don't know how I could entertain the thought of entering Carmel when I was still in the swaddling clothes of a child!

God would have to work a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant, and this miracle He performed on that unforgettable Christmas day. On that luminous night, the gentle, little Child of only one hour, changed the night of my soul into rays of light.

It was December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion. We had come back from Midnight Mass where I had the happiness of receiving the strong and powerful God. Upon arriving at Les Buissonnets, I used to love to take my shoes from the chimney-corner and examine the present in them. This old custom has given us so much joy in our youth that Celine wanted to continue treating me as a baby since I was the youngest in the family. Papa had always loved to see my happiness and listen to my cries of delight as I drew each surprise from the magic shoes, and my dear King's gaiety increased my own happiness very much. However, Jesus desired to show me that I was to give up the defects of my childhood years. He permitted Papa, tired out after the Midnight Mass, to experience annoyance when seeing my shoes at the fireplace, and that he speak those words which pierced my heart: "Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!" I was going upstairs to remove my hat, and Celine, knowing how sensitive I was and seeing the tears already glistening in my eyes, wanted to cry too, for she loved me very much and understood my grief. She said, "Oh, Therese, don't go downstairs; it would cause you too much grief to look at your slippers right now!" But Therese was no longer the same; Jesus has changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa, and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I had a happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing. Celine believed it was all a dream! Fortunately, it was a sweet reality; Therese had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half (when her mother died,) and she was to preserve it forever!

On that night, Jesus made me strong and courageous, arming me with His weapons. Since that night, I have never been defeated in any combat, but rather walked from victory to victory, beginning, so to speak, "to run as a giant." The source of my tears was dried up...The work that I have been unable to do in ten years was done by Jesus in one instant...I could say to Him like His apostles: "Master, I fished all night and caught nothing" (Lk5:5.) More merciful to me than He was to His disciples, Jesus took the net Himself, cast it, and drew it in filled with fish. He made me a fisher of souls. I experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a

desire I hadn't felt so intensely before. I felt charity enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please other; since then I've been happy!

Therese's conversion story is not simply a sentimental touch, mingled with Christmas presents and little children. Her "Christmas conversion" has deeper meaning. Her participation in God's saving Grace - the realization that God is working within the nitty-gritty of everyday life is the lesson at the heart of her Christmas story.

Thus, Therese's Christmas story is clearly reflecting the teaching of St, John of the Cross. The knowledge and light shines so purely and simply in the intellect in such a way that frees all intelligible forms — causes darkness because it dispossesses the intellect of the customary light (see A. 1. 14:10). This is an important teaching of John's understanding of the term, "darkness." It is truly a "sheer grace" (for Therese) to pass through the senses to spirit "in darkness and concealment," and to experience the "loving knowledge of God" in contemplation.

St. Therese's participation in God's invitation amid her dark night experience - this enlightenment, and the spiritual theology that flowed from this Christmas story, transformed the Catholic Church and brought Therese the status not only of being the greatest saint of her time, but eventually being named a Doctor of the Church.

Appendix E: Special session, Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD Superior General March 28, 2020 letter to OCDS

CASA GENERALIZIA CARMEUTANI SCALZI
CORSO D'ITALIA, 38
00198 ROMA

Rome, 28 March 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Order,

On this day when we commemorate the 505th anniversary of the birth of our Holy Mother Saint Teresa, I greet you, using the words with which Teresa used to begin her letters: may *Jesus and the grace of the Holy Spirit be with you.*

This anniversary reminds us of the great gifts that the Lord gave to Holy Mother. We also remember this year the 50 anniversary of the Doctorate proclaimed by St. Paul VI on September 27, 1970. The Apostolic Letter *Multiformis sapientia Dei*, which I invite you to read and meditate on, recognizes that Teresa “has always been celebrated, both for the extraordinary facts of her life, for the rare virtues of her soul and for her spirit of good judgment”, and “a very sure guide and teacher of sacred sciences”. As Teresa herself wrote, to remember what “is a gift and that we possess it, we are compelled to love the giver.” (cf. Life 10:5). Therefore, in recognizing the gifts received from God’s goodness in the lives of our Saints, in the history of our Order, as well as in the personal history of each one of us, everything invites us to thank Him and to grasp the signs of His living, faithful, and active presence in the events of our time.

In this context I would like to recall this year another important event of 20 years ago: the 2nd International Congress of the OCDS held in San Juan de los Lagos (Mexico) from August 31 to September 7, 2000.

In commemorating this event, I would like, first of all, to thank all those who collaborated in the organization and in the organization of the Congress, in particular Fr. Aloysius Deeney OCD (General Delegate for OCDS), Irma Estrada Franco OCDS (General Secretary of the OCDS), and the members of the OCDS of Mexico.

Secondly, after a brief reminder of the Congress, I would like to enumerate some of its fruits, offering some reflections so that you may continue on your path of following Jesus according to the charism of the Teresian Carmel with that attitude dear to the Cardinal, and now Saint, John Henry Newman: “To live is to change, and to be perfect means to have changed many times”.

The 2nd International Congress

The Letter to the Congress participants (of 23 September 1999) stated that “the theme and purpose of the Congress will be the revision of the Rule of Life [of 1979], with particular attention to the responsibilities and gifts of the laity in the Order and in the Church, as expressed in *Christifideles laici, Vita Consecrata*, and other documents of the Church”.

This objective responded to the request of the 1st International Congress of the OCDS in 1996 (held in Rome) and the operative conclusions of the OCD General Chapter of 1997: “The Secular

Order should be promoted and supported in the various Circumscriptions of the Order, according to the diversity of situations. Particular attention should be given to the revision of the *Rule of Life* from the laity's point of view" (n. 107.a).

The 2nd Congress, in which about 250 lay and religious delegates participated, had as its motto: *A single Order with the same charism*. It emphasized that the one charism of the Order is lived differently by the friars, the nuns, and the seculars, and that from a solid formation on the identity of the laity of the Order, based on the doctrine of our Holy Founding Parents, also springs the essence of their mission, that of witnessing to friendship with Christ and with their brothers and sisters in the midst of the world.

Some Fruits of the Congress

A first fruit of the 2nd Congress was the creation of an International Commission composed of 10 members of the OCDS of different nationalities. The objective was to continue the drafting of the new Constitutions. It was coordinated by the General Delegate and took into account the contributions of the 1st International Congress and the proposals of the working groups of the 2nd Congress, as well as other contributions sent by the Provinces. The editorial work was carried out in 3 years, thus in 2003 a draft of the new Constitutions of the OCDS was presented at the General Chapter of Avila. This draft was then revised by the General Definitory and finally sent to the Holy See, which approved it in June 2003.

The new Constitutions were enriched with the insertion of the text of the Rule of St. Albert. This was an important addition because the Rule is the primordial inspiration common to all: the friars, the nuns and the laity. This was confirmed with the insertion in the Constitutions of the affirmation that *the laity of the OCDS are members of the Order*, like the friars and nuns (cf. *Proemio* and Art. 1); Secular Carmelites live the charism of Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross in the world and enrich consecrated life (OCD friars and nuns) with their secular style of life.

A challenge that perhaps we must continue to face in the circumscriptions is that the experience of the charism of the Teresian Carmel for OCDS should be realized first of all in the family environment, work, and other commitments in the midst of the world. It is there that the witness of the living God, who desires to maintain a relationship of friendship with every human being created in His image and likeness, should take place and bear witness. Unfortunately, it is perceived that there are still members of OCDS who live their vocation only in the sacristies of monasteries or convents, without an effective "spreading" of the charism in the world around them.

Another fruit of the Congress was the clarification of the identity of the laity in the Order. Your vocation is both contemplative, lay and apostolic, which presupposes a daily commitment to integrate these three key elements. This identity brings with it the awareness of having common elements of the Teresian charism with the other branches, with which to collaborate in an interdependence that respects the differences, the right autonomies, and the vocational identity proper to each one.

The autonomy of the OCDS must be well understood. It concerns government according to its own Constitutions and Statutes, but also formation. The accompaniment of the friars, on whom for historical reasons the OCDS depends juridically (cf. Const. 41; Ratio 19; cf. Const. 2), should

promote the maturity of lay identity in the Order and fraternal relationships of collaboration, with mutual respect for the autonomy of each one.

A third fruit of the Congress was the emphasis on the need to participate in the mission and apostolate of the Church and the Order as an integral part of the OCDS lay identity. The Church asks for this in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, in *Christifideles laici* (1988) and in *Vita Consecrata* (1996). This dimension was somewhat underestimated and hidden because of a reductive vision of contemplation. Instead, we know that the fruit of authentic contemplative prayer is service to others, striving to bring about “good works” (cf. St. Teresa, 5M 3,11; 7M 4,6) according to one’s own abilities and talents, for the good of the Church, the Order and society, as did Teresa and John of the Cross (cf. Const. 26).

Unfortunately, with regard to this, there are still misunderstandings and many people think that it is enough to attend community meetings for some practices of devotions, reflection or conferences, but without a real and concrete commitment of service in the activities of the Order or the Church in which one finds oneself. Perhaps this is due to weak formation which does not take into account what the Constitutions recommend: “In the last three years of initial formation there will be a deeper study of Scripture, the documents of the Church, the Saints of the Order, prayer, and how to participate in the apostolate of the Order...” (n. 36 d).

In the Congress, and as it appears in the Constitutions, the importance of the organization of *Provincial Councils* in the circumscriptions of the Order was highlighted (cf. Constitutions 57). Their specific mission is to prepare the Statutes of the circumscription and to coordinate the initiatives of the apostolate and formation in the communities. In this sense, many circumscriptions have organized and developed the OCDS with great commitment and have collaborated to increase awareness of the lay identity in the Order and a mature autonomy, growing in number, internal organization and formation, as well as developing communion among the communities. In other countries or circumscriptions, unfortunately and for various reasons, this has not been the case. The Provincial Council has not acted as a body of communion and animation both in the life of the communities and in relationship with the friars and nuns. And here, for all of us, we have a good way to go according to the principle of *synodality*, as I mentioned in last year’s letter.

Finally, as a further fruit of the Congress, in 2009 the *Ratio Institutionis* of the OCDS was published, which offers the guiding principles for the formation of the laity of the Teresian Carmel, reiterating the need for a solid formation that allows us undertake a vocational journey and service in the mission animated by the spirit of our Saints. More recently, the aspect of fraternal communion in the OCDS has been highlighted with the insertion of the chapter on fraternal communion (3 B) and the paragraph on St. Joseph (31 a). Thus, what is essential in the OCDS has been completed in the documents, defining your identity, objectives and goals as lay members of the Order.

Dear brothers and sisters of the OCDS,

With this commemoration of the Second International Congress of the OCDS, the signs of some of its fruits, as well as commemorating an important event in the history of the OCDS, I would

like to thank the Lord with you for his gifts. At the same time, this urges us to grow spiritually, especially in living charity so that we may return love to the infinite Love of the Holy Trinity (cf. John of the Cross, *Song* 38, 2-4).

I urge you to know your documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.

I ask the Lord to enlighten you so that you may continue to be faithful to the essential elements of your vocation as Secular Carmelites. May the light and strength which come from prayer as friendship with the Lord and fraternal relationship with your brothers and sisters enable you to respond to the challenges and needs of your personal, family and community realities.

I also entrust to your fraternal and filial prayer the last *Extraordinary Definitory* of this sexennium, which will take place in September in Mexico City, as well as the preparation work for the General Chapter to be held in May 2021.

I wish a Holy Easter of Resurrection to each of you, your families and communities. May the contemplation of the Risen Christ fill you with peace and joy (cf. *Way* 26:4). May Mary, Queen of Heaven, give you the joy of her Living Son forever.

Faternally,

Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD
Superior General

PS: I would like to add to you Secular Carmelite sisters and brothers, and to your loved ones, a word of closeness, comfort, and hope in these moments of trial due to the Covid-19. It is an unexpected, fast, and enveloping situation that makes us experience our human fragility and precariousness: physical, psychological, economic, and above all it leads us to reflect on our relationship with God, others, and nature.

Obviously, our first duty is to abide by the dispositions of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities in order to avoid exposing ourselves to contagion and putting our own family and the people around us at risk.

I know that there are many challenges facing you, especially being unable to work to support the family. Those who have children and the elderly at home find themselves having to manage their own care and educational needs in confined spaces. Even this creates tension and requires sacrifices. Others, on the other hand, experience loneliness and isolation, locked up at home without the possibility of receiving visitors. These situations require a great deal of balance, great patience, and the daily commitment to live harmoniously and peacefully with others. Definitely, it is a propitious time to exercise the Teresian virtues.

Today we are rightly concerned to equip ourselves with devices to protect ourselves from contagion, but it is also important to wear the armor of which our Rule speaks to us, the “weapons of the virtues, living an intense life of faith, hope and charity” (CC 6 f), trusting in God, who allows trial, but does not abandon us in it. We constantly remember the words of Isaiah, quoted in our Rule:

“In silence and hope will be your strength” (Is 35:15; *Rule of St. Albert*, 21).

Let us take advantage of this time of apparent powerlessness to pray, read, form ourselves, strengthen family relationships, making virtue out of necessity, as our Holy Mother St. Teresa said (cf. *Way* 32:4; 5; *M* 3:7; 6 *M* 5:2). Let us intensify our prayer, asking the Lord’s Mercy for an end to this pandemic and other evils; may He give strength to all those involved in the fight against the virus and assistance to the sick.

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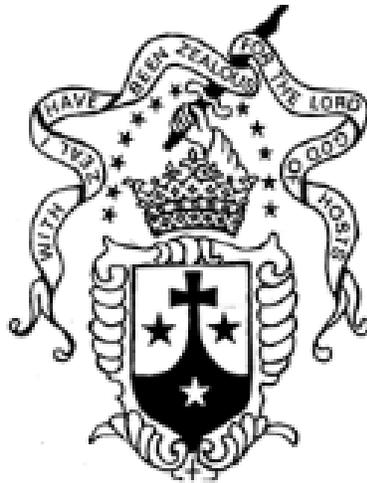
Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites

Formation II

Year B

The Interior Castle

(The Seven Dwelling Places)



*“Let us desire and be occupied in prayer
not for the sake of our enjoyment,
but so as to have this strength to serve.
Martha and Mary must join together
in order to show hospitality to the Lord...”*

Interior Castle, VII, 4:12

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Introduction to Formation II

(Members who have made the First Promise)

Formation II is in preparation for the Definitive Promise and takes a minimum of three years, and in some instances, due to discernment by the candidate and the community's council, may take longer. The purpose of this period of formation is to prepare the candidate to maturely make a lifetime commitment to living the Discalced Carmelite charism as expressed in the OCDS Constitutions. Deepening union with God in interior prayer should lead the candidate to grow in virtue, in the desire to serve others, and in faithfulness to the Evangelical Counsels and Beatitudes. Growth in community life continues to be an important aspect of formation. Because this period leads to the Definitive Promise, serious ongoing discernment of the vocation by the Council and the candidate is crucial during this time.

Candidate responsibilities:

- The candidate will strive to be consistent in the practices begun in earlier stages of formation and be faithful to the Promise made at the end of Formation I. (The noted references are not exhaustive; there are many others throughout the Constitutions, Provincial Statutes, and Ratio.)
- Attend and participate in monthly community meetings and formation sessions. (see Const. 24.b,c)
- Be conscientious in the study and internalization of assigned material and topics. (see Const. 24.d and 32-34)
- Continue to study and strive to live the OCDS Constitutions and Statutes. (see Const. Preface)
- Develop the habit of reading Church documents, especially those addressed to the laity. (see Const. 19 and Ratio 80)
- Read and reflect on Sacred Scripture regularly. (see Const. 19 and Ratio 15)
- Practice silent prayer (remain in God's presence with loving attention) daily for at least half an hour. (see Ratio 20-21, 90)
- Pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Pray Night Prayer if possible. (see Const. 6.d and 23-24)
- Participate in daily Mass as far as possible. (see Const. 6.d and 23-24)
- Continue the habit of daily examination of conscience (commonly included as part of Night Prayer).
- Fast on the vigils of the Carmelite feasts listed in the Provincial Statutes.
- Participate in the community apostolate. (see Const. 26)
- Share in the duties and responsibilities of the community as assigned by the local council. (see Const. 15)

OCDS Formation II Year B

- Participate in community retreats and days of recollection. (see Const. 24.d)
- Most importantly, continue to strive for Christ-like charity toward all in the community, in the family, and in daily life. (1 Cor. 13)

The Specific Guidelines for Formation

It is important to keep clearly in mind the purpose of formation in Carmel and to strike a balance between “head” and “heart.”

- “Number 32 of the Constitutions states that the purpose of formation is ‘to prepare the person to live the [charism and] spirituality of Carmel.’ This sentence of the Constitutions gives a very important emphasis to the purpose of formation, indicating those elements that are not the priorities in the progress of Carmel of formation. The purpose of the formation program is not to produce experts in Carmelite spirituality, nor to obtain a university degree in spirituality or spiritual theology” (Ratio Institutionis 4).
- “The purpose is to ‘prepare the person.’ The stress on the person who is to be prepared helps the formation community understand that the process must be directed to the individual in a concrete way. The people who come to the Secular Order of Carmel are, with few exceptions, people who have many commitments, especially with families and with work. The program of formation must be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances of each person who is to become a member” (Ratio 5).
- “...The primary role of the person responsible for formation ... is to **accompany** those in formation, to help them put into practice what they learn through the process of formation. The information they are given through reading and classes is meant to be a help to the person’s spiritual growth” (Ratio 7). [emphasis added]
- “...With a progression suitable to the various stages, the candidate should get a clearer idea of how important, indeed necessary, our charism is for [one’s] personal life...” (Ratio 23).
- “The spirituality of the Discalced Carmelites has a sound intellectual foundation. As members of the Order, Secular Carmelites are called to represent and give witness to a mature and authentic spirituality. Any person who wants to be a Discalced Carmelite must be a person with interest in learning from the teachers of Carmel. There are three Doctors of the universal Church, Teresa, John of the Cross, and Therese” (Ratio 78).
- “There is an intellectual aspect to the formation of a Discalced Carmelite. There is a doctrinal basis to the spirituality and identity of one who is called to the Order. As the friars and nuns, the seculars too ought to have a good intellectual and doctrinal formation since as members of the Order they represent and witness to a mature and profound spirituality” (Ratio 79).

“The directors [formators] should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls in this matter, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one. Thus, the whole concern of the directors [formators] should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one...”

(The Living Flame of Love, Stanza 3:46)

About the Syllabus

Required Reading: St. Teresa of Avila, The Interior Castle Study Edition, ICS Publications, 2010; or second edition, 2020 (page numbers differ)

Additional Reading:

Ahlgren, Gillian T.W., Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle. A Reader's Companion, Paulist Press, 2005.

Alvarez, Thomas, OCD, St. Teresa of Avila, 100 Themes on Her Life and Work, ICS Publications, 2011, pages 337-358 on the Interior Castle.

Glossary pages 456-465 (second edition pgs. 427-437).

Note: "Additional reading" is intended for personal enrichment and is not required.

Explanatory note regarding "Essential points to discuss": The candidates and formator are expected to read and reflect on the materials and ponder the essential points prior to the monthly formation sessions. However, it would not be practical to try to discuss every point during the session. It is preferable to choose several points for in-depth discussion. It is good practice to discuss those points which make a personal impression on the participants.

Because formator participation is crucial to the candidates' formation, good preparation is indispensable. After the opening prayer and the discussion of the legislations, formators are encouraged to take about 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the session to talk about the session theme, the assigned reading, and a brief review of the points to be discussed before moving on to the discussion itself.

Studying the OCDS Legislations: Unless the community is studying these materials together, it is appropriate for each session to begin with ten minutes of discussion on some selection of the OCDS legislations or documents of the Order, as determined by the local Council.

Session One: Preface, general introduction and prologue

Required Reading: The Interior Castle Study Edition, pgs. 1-29 (second edition, pgs. xv-xxxix)

Additional Reading: St. Teresa of Avila: 100 Themes on Her Life and Work, *The Basic Essentials of the Interior Castle*, pgs. 345-348

Explanatory note: The Interior Castle is the image most developed by St. Teresa. It forms the basis of all her teachings. She uses it to illustrate the entire spiritual process, serving as a means of explaining the structure of human persons (body, soul, and spirit), and their relationship with God, Who is both transcendent and immanent. It serves as well to comment on the biblical text of the indwelling of God in the soul. “The Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). “And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him” (Jn. 14:21). “Whoever loves me will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (Jn.14:23). (see Glossary pg. 456; second edition 2020, pg. 427)

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “The Interior Castle is more than a book. It is a wonderful image of the mystery of the human person” (Preface, pg. 1).
- St. Teresa wrote The Interior Castle at the request of Fr. Gracián, OCD, an enthusiastic supporter of her reform, and Don Alonso Velasquez, her spiritual director.
- Turmoil within the Order: Teresa was living through one of the most adverse periods of her life when she was engaged in writing her sublime book on prayer:
 - a. Teresa was ordered to return to her monastery (St. Joseph’s in Avila) and to remain there “as a kind of prisoner.”
 - b. In October of 1577, she was re-elected prioress of the Monastery of the Incarnation (in Avila). The election was not supported by the authorities in charge, who gave orders to annul the valid election. The nuns persisting to vote for Teresa in the second election were excommunicated.
 - c. St. John of the Cross was secretly seized by the non-reformed [Calced] Carmelites and imprisoned in a small cell in the Carmelite monastery in Toledo.
Note: Religious communities of the time did have the authority to punish members who were persistently disobedient. While the friars were acting in good faith, John was acting in obedience to the Dominican visitators that the Pope had appointed for all religious orders in Spain. (For more details on the competing ecclesial authorities, see Journey to Carith chapter 6, or John of the Cross Man and Mystic chapter 3.)
- Teresa began writing The Interior Castle on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, June 2, 1577, in the reformed Carmelite (Discalced) Monastery of St. Joseph, Toledo, Spain. In little over a month, she had written more than half the manuscript. Due to discord in the Order, her work was interrupted for almost five months. Teresa took up her pen again and

completed her work by November 29, 1577, the eve of the Feast of St. Andrew. Thus, the actual time spent on this spiritual masterpiece was a mere two months (see General Introduction, pg.7; second edition, pg. xxi).

- Teresa speaks of this castle on three levels: experiential, symbolic, and theological. At the *experiential* level, this castle belongs to the author herself. *Symbolically*, Teresa uses the castle to express what is, in reality, inexpressible. *Theologically*, Teresa explains the profound meaning of her experiences (see Prologue — Interpretive Notes, pg. 31, second edition, pg. 5).
- In writing The Interior Castle, Teresa proposed at the outset to compose a fundamentally theological treatise — neither devotional nor superficial. “May God deliver us from foolish devotions” (Life 13.16).
- Teresa uses the castle and its many rooms to describe the dwelling places. “At the center of the castle is God’s dwelling place. The gate of entry is prayer” (General Introduction, pg. 12, second edition, pg. xxvi).
- Teresa observes that the human soul is capable of God; that is to say, from the depth of its being, the soul is open to transcendence. The soul is not locked up in itself, but has a primordial call from God. The human person is a paradise and a garden for God. The seven dwelling places are not seven rooms but seven degrees of life or communion of the human with the Divine (100 Themes on Her Life and Work, pgs. 345-346).
- **Humanity of Christ:** The single most important teaching of Teresa is the “Humanity of Christ” as first described in chapter 22 of Life and years later she repeats in the Interior Castle, chapter 7 of the Sixth Dwelling Places. “After reading both texts one can only conclude that Teresa, in both texts, has a decisive message about the radical centrality of the humanity of Christ for the entire Christian life...When Teresa speaks of the humanity of Jesus, she is thinking of the Jesus of salvation history — the historical Jesus...At the same time, the humanity of Christ is integrated into the mystery of his person in which both divine and human are joined, constituting the mysterious framework of his being and history” (Interpretive notes, pg. 324. second edition, pgs. 296-297).

“The Lord helps us, strengthens us, and never fails; He is a true friend. And I see clearly, and I saw afterward, that God desires that if we are going to please Him and receive His great favors, we must do so through the most sacred of humanity of Christ, in whom He takes His delight [see Mt. 3:17]. Many, many times I perceived this truth through experience...I have definitely seen that we must enter by this gate [see Jn. 10:9] if we desire His sovereign Majesty to show us great secrets. ...You should desire no other path even if you are at the summit of contemplation. On this road one walks safely. This Lord of ours is the one through whom all blessings come to us” (Life, 22:6-7).

- **Ascetical prayer:** This is the prayer found in the first three dwelling places. It relies on human effort along with God’s grace.

- **Mystical prayer:** This is the prayer found in the last four dwelling places. Teresa calls it “supernatural prayer” because it is a gift of God and cannot be acquired through one’s own efforts (see Glossary, pg. 456; second edition, 434). Teresa observes: “We always hear about what a good thing prayer is, and our constitutions oblige us to spend so many hours in prayer. Yet only what we ourselves can do in prayer is explained to us; little is explained about what the Lord does in the soul, I mean about the supernatural” (DP I, 2:7).

Session Two: “Who we are” — made in the image of God

Required Reading: Interior Castle: Study Edition *the First Dwelling Places*, ch. 1 and 2

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes.

“Jesus came among us to reveal to us this Trinitarian love and the vocation to participate in a communion of love with the Most Holy Trinity; this is something to which every human person created in God’s image and likeness is called. In the light of this mystery, the true identity and dignity of every human being, and specifically of every member of the church, is revealed. Being spiritual in nature, the human person grows and matures by being in an authentic relationship with God and with others”
(OCDS Const. Art. 24a).

Explanatory note: “Teresa begins on a positive note, speaking of the beauty and dignity of the soul. Actually, ‘soul’ and ‘castle’ are the same in the symbolic language of the work. And in our language today, the soul refers to the human person. So, Teresa begins by speaking of the beauty and dignity of the human person” (Interpretive notes, pg. 42; second edition, pg. 16). We are not merely a spark of God, but God actually *lives* in us and makes us beautiful by His light. Throughout the dwelling places, Teresa raises the question of *who we are*, and our marvelous capacity for God. In every step of the dwelling places, Teresa emphasizes the importance of self-knowledge.

“Do you think it matters little for a soul with a wandering mind to understand this truth and see that there is no need to go to heaven in order to speak with one’s Eternal Father or find delight in Him? Nor is there any need to shout. However softly we speak, He is near enough to hear us. Neither is there any need for wings to go to find Him. All one need do is go into solitude and look at Him within oneself, and not turn away from so good a Guest but with great humility speak to Him as to a father. Beseech Him as you would a father; tell Him about your trials; ask Him for a remedy against them, realizing that you are not worthy to be His daughter” (WP, ch. 28.2).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond. We don’t find anything comparable to the magnificent beauty and its marvelous capacity. We are created in His own image and likeness” (DP I, 1:1).
- “In explaining that we are made in the image and likeness of God, Teresa points out how we have the capacity for God that transcends the human person” (Interpretive notes, pg. 42; second edition, p. 16). By raising the question of “who we are,” Teresa reminds her readers that God created mankind in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1:26-27).
- Unfortunately, most do not strive for self-knowledge. Rather, most travel through life disconnected from the deeper sense of awareness that can transcend superficial

existence. Some things are good and necessary for everyday life; however, it is too easy to become preoccupied with business affairs and pleasure seeking. The sense of personhood (“who we are”) is often bound up in physical appearance, social status or professional standing. As Teresa points out, “we limit ourselves to the outer wall of the castle; that is, with these bodies of ours.” Consequently, little effort is made to preserve its beauty (see DP I, 1:2).

- How does one enter the castle from the outer courtyard? “Insofar as I can understand, the door of entry to this castle is prayer and reflection” (DP I, 1:7). “The castle is inhabited by God. To enter it is to enter into relationship with God, who dwells in its inmost dwelling place... To pray is to enter into personal relationship with God” (Interpretive notes, p. 44; second edition, pg. 17).
- Characteristics of persons who enter the first dwelling place: For even though they are very involved in the world, they have good desires to entrust themselves to God and reflect on who they are, although in a rather hurried fashion. They sometimes pray, but their minds are then filled with business matters. However, they have done quite a bit just by entering the lower rooms of the castle (see I, 1:8).
- A central concept of Teresa’s spirituality is the realization that God is immanent — that is, He dwells within the innermost mansion of the human soul. For “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).
- Teresa also reminds her readers that God (“the shining sun”) is always in the center of the soul. Nothing can take away the loveliness of His indwelling presence, even as one struggles with sin. “However, if a black cloth (one’s sin and distractions) is placed over a crystal that is in the sun, obviously the sun’s brilliance will have no effect on the crystal even though the sun is shining on it” (DP I, 2:3). Therefore, one’s journey into this castle is to re-discover this “shining sun” of God that is already within its center — to come to the realization that all are made in the image and likeness of God.
- “You must not think of these dwelling places in such a way that each one would follow in file after the other; but turn your eyes toward the center, which is the room or royal chamber where the King stays...” (DP I, 2:8).

Note: Teresa’s primary focus is the center as opposed to stages of prayer. This concept is clearly stated in the very beginning: “... in the center and middle is the main dwelling place where the very secret exchanges between God and the soul take place” (DP I, 1:3).

- Teresa stresses the importance of spending time in the room where self-knowledge is dealt with rather than flying off to other rooms. “It is very important for any soul that practices prayer, whether little or much, not to hold itself back and stay in one corner. Let it walk through these dwelling places. Don’t force it to stay a long time in one room alone. **Oh, but if it is in the room of self-knowledge!**” (DP I, 2:8).

Note to formator: Emphasize that self-knowledge is not only about sin, but instead more about knowing one’s own personality, one’s motives, weaknesses, tendencies, etc. — all that goes into making the person who he is.

- Teresa's understanding of self-knowledge is rooted in pondering the grandeur and majesty of God. "Here it will discover its lowliness better than by thinking of itself..." (DP I, 2:8). "In my opinion **we shall never completely know ourselves if we don't strive to know God**. By gazing at his grandeur, we get in touch with our own lowliness; by looking at his purity, we shall see our own filth; by pondering his humility, we shall see how far we are from being humble" (DP I, 2:9). The advantage of such activity is that the intellect and will, now with God, become nobler and better prepared for every good (see I, 2:10). True self-knowledge is rooted in the parallel knowledge of God.

Note: Humility is intrinsically connected with both knowledge of self and knowledge of God.

- Teresa further observes that in these first dwelling places, persons are still "absorbed in the world and engulfed in their pleasures and vanities, with their honors and pretenses ..." (DP I, 2:12). If people are to enter the second dwelling places, it is important that they strive to give up unnecessary pre-occupation with worldly affairs. They should do this in conformity with their state in life (see DP I, 2:14).
- Teresa reminds the reader that the wiles of the devil can cause harm to one's prayer life (see I, 2:16-17). Of special interest for Seculars is misplaced "zeal" for noticing others' imperfections while being blind to one's own faults. Also, in Teresa's time people were tempted to do excessive penances; in today's climate, people are more likely to excuse themselves from any penance at all or to do penance with mixed motives.
- "...the local communities of the Secular Order...[are] a place to live and promote personal and communal fellowship with God in Christ and... with other brothers and sisters in accordance with the Teresian charism. ... Teresa is aware of the importance of mutual support on the road of prayer and the importance of friendship with others in the common search for God. She also considers as fundamental to such friendship, culture, the human virtues, gentleness, empathy, prudence, discretion, simplicity, kindness, joy, and availability, as we seek to 'walk in truth before God and people'" (OCDS Const. art. 24 a and b).
- "...true perfection consists in love of God and neighbor; the more perfectly we keep these two commandments the more perfect we will be" (DP I, 2:17).

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Mt. 22:37-40).

"Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. This person is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving of self and entering into communion with other persons..." (CCC 357).

Session Three: Progression in Prayer

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Second Dwelling Places*, ch. 1

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: “Teresa’s castle is a real symbol. It represents human interiority, human struggle, and the call to transcendence. To remain in the castle, especially in these beginnings, Teresa is convinced that it requires struggle. The attractions and pull of the world are extremely powerful. She refers to the struggle as a ‘great war’” (Interpretive Notes, pg. 77; second edition, pg. 49).

Will: The power to make choices, good or bad. The whole aim of the persons who are beginning prayer should be that they work with determination and with every possible effort to **bring their will into conformity with God’s will**. What cannot be done all at once can be done little by little. The soul should bend its will if it wishes that prayer be beneficial to it (Glossary, pg. 465; second edition, 437).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “This stage pertains to those who have already begun to practice prayer and have understood how important it is not to stay in the first dwelling places” (II, 1:2).
- Souls in these dwelling places, unlike the souls in the first dwelling places, recognize the dangers, and are attentive to the voice of the Lord. “So these persons are able to hear the Lord when he calls... in the midst of business affairs, pleasures, and worldly buying and selling, [yet they are] still falling into sin and rising again” (II, 1:2).
- They recognize God’s voice “through words spoken by other good people or through sermons or through what is read in good books...through illness and trials; through a truth that He teaches during the brief moments we spend in prayer” (II, 1:3).
- On the other hand, there are more distractions caused by devils in this dwelling place and **perseverance is most necessary here**. “It is in this stage that the devils represent these snakes (worldly things) and the temporal pleasures of the present as though almost eternal” (II, 1:3).
- “Faith, however, teaches [the soul] about where it will find fulfillment.” Teresa says memory reminds persons of their mortality and inclines the will to love; it especially keeps in mind how this true Lover never leaves us — accompanying and giving us life. The intellect points out all the ways in which life within the castle is superior to life outside. “The intellect tells the soul of its certainty that outside this castle neither security nor peace will be found” (see II, 1:4).
- Teresa warns against thinking about consolations at this beginning stage. To do so, she says, would be like building a foundation on sand. “If the foundation is on sand, the whole building will fall to the ground.” Her advice is to embrace the cross, following the

Lord's example. Teresa promises that if we are determined to undergo exterior trials, God will favor us interiorly (see II, 1:7).

- One must avoid prayer that tries to tell God what one thinks is best. "There's no need for us to be advising Him about what He should give us, for He can rightly tell us that we don't know what we're asking for." Instead, one should walk with great determination, and try in every way to bring one's will into conformity with God's will (see II, 1:8).
- Teresa now offers some reassurance. Failures should not discourage nor keep one from advancing. Trials and even failures can teach self-knowledge. The soul will never have peace outside of the castle. "Well, believe me, if we don't obtain and have peace in our own house, we'll not find it outside. I ask those who have not begun to enter within themselves to do so..." (II, 1:9). Teresa's focus is on prayer, meditation, and recollection.
- Because those in the second dwelling places can have so many disturbances, Teresa believes it is very important to consult experienced Catholic persons for spiritual direction. She further adds that even if they cannot find an experienced person to teach them, the Lord will guide everything to their benefit if they persevere (see II, 1:10).
- Interior prayer, self-knowledge, and reflection on what is owed to God are essential to progression in prayer. "Well now, it is foolish to think that we will enter heaven without entering into ourselves, coming to know ourselves, reflecting on our misery and what we owe God, and begging him often for mercy" (II, 1:11).

"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 carry the cross of accepting God's will revealed in the mission that He has confided to each person"
(OCDS Const. Art.10).

Session Four: Transition

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Third Dwelling Places*, ch. 1 and 2

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: One of the interesting aspects of the relationship between knowledge of self and knowledge of God comes up in Teresa's understanding of the soul in the third dwelling places. The third dwelling is the one in which the soul must move beyond listening and understanding to **loving and doing**. "It is the movement of ethical principles into concrete, loving action; so that devotion to God and others, is not simply theory but a way of putting love and values into practice...This stage represents either a point of entry into deeper, transformative relationship with God or the end of the road for those who equate religion (primarily) with its codes, creeds and rituals" (Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle).

*"For perfection, as well as its reward, does not consist in spiritual delights
but in greater love and in deeds done with greater justice and truth"*

(DP III, 2:10).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Entry into the third dwelling places, according to Teresa, is somewhat of a moral victory for the soul. "...through perseverance and the mercy of God, they have won these battles and have entered the rooms of the third stage...Certainly we are right in calling such a person blessed...The Lord never fails to give a person this 'security of conscience,' which is no small blessing. I said 'security' and I was wrong, for there is no security in this life, so always understand that I mean, 'if he doesn't abandon the path he began on'" (III, 1:1).
- Teresa admires persons in the third dwelling places for "guarding themselves against venial sins; they are fond of doing penance and setting aside periods for recollection; they spend their time well, practicing works of charity toward their neighbors; and they are very balanced in their use of speech and dress and in the governing of their household" (III, 1:5). However, she cautiously reminds about the necessity of progression in prayer: "...since there is need of still more in order that the soul possess the Lord completely, it is not enough to say we want it [life of prayer] just as this was not enough for the young man whom the Lord told what he must do in order to be perfect" (III, 1:5-6).

Note: This state in the third dwelling places, though seemingly good and exemplary, is not the summit of spiritual life. One should have the courage to go beyond the security and delight found in external practices and pious exercises.

- Teresa recalls the young man whom the Lord told what one must do in order to be perfect (Matt. 19:16-22). She observes that many are like him, and ordinarily "the great dryness in prayer" comes from this shift in consciousness (see III, 1:6). Like the young man in the Gospel, one can go away sad or accept the invitation and move forward (see III, 1.7).

- Like the rich young man, the soul is invited to move beyond a methodical relationship with God and enter more deeply into a new, loving relationship with God. “For he must give the reward in conformity with the love we have for him. And this love must not be fabricated in our imaginations but proved by deeds. And don’t think he needs our works; he needs the determination of our will” (III, 1:7).
- “The Lord will give you understanding of them [favors and gifts] so that out of dryness you may draw humility — and not disquiet... Be convinced that where humility is truly present God will give peace and conformity — even though he may never give consolations — by which one will walk with greater contentment than will others with their consolations” (III, 1:9). Accordingly, the soul grows more deeply in self-knowledge.

Note: “We conclude that self-knowledge flows first from this dry night, and that from this knowledge as from its source proceeds the other knowledge of God. Hence, St. Augustine said to God: *‘Let me know myself, Lord, I will know You’*” (The Dark Night 2.12:5).

- Teresa goes on to describe some of the imperfections displayed by these well-ordered and upright souls:
 - “His Majesty will try them in some minor matters, and they will go about so disturbed and afflicted...For everything in their minds leads them to think they are **suffering for God, and so they don’t come to realize that their disturbance is an imperfection**” (III, 2:2).
 - **They worry** about their health, wealth, and prestige. They may experience financial gain, but it’s never been enough, and they seek more and more wealth without satisfaction. Teresa observes that such a person “lacks this freedom of spirit” (see III, 2:4).
 - “They would like everyone to live a life as well ordered as they do” (III 2:5).
- “Let us look at our own faults and leave aside those of others, for it is very characteristic of persons with such well-ordered lives to be shocked by everything. Perhaps we could truly learn from the one who shocks us what is most important, even though we may surpass him in external composure and our way of dealing with others. So, it is better to carry out what our Rule says, to strive to live always in silence and hope” (III, 2:13).

*“We are fonder of consolations than we are of the cross. Test us, Lord — for you know the truth — so that we may **know ourselves**”* (IC, DP III, 1:9).

Session Five: Conversion

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Fourth Dwelling Places*, ch. 1, 2 and 3

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: Teresa begins this stage of the journey with a scriptural reference, Psalm 119:32: “I have run the way of your commandments, *when you have enlarged my heart.*” By means of expansion (awareness/consciousness) the soul is getting closer to the center of God. Teresa also explains the expansion of the soul’s affective capacity; that is, the ability to move beyond personal self-interest and to extend oneself, through compassion and charity, toward others. Such experiences result in a **new kind of self-knowledge:** through the grace of God, one can live in its deepest, created potential, and could experience the previously unknown depth in its own interior personhood (see Entering Teresa’s Interior Castle).

Note: Compared to the Way of Perfection, the description of prayer using different terminologies (vocal, prayer of recollection, quiet prayer, etc.) is kept to the minimum in these dwelling places. Teresa’s primary focus is the soul’s experience in finding the center where God dwells. She entrusts herself to the Holy Spirit as she begins to write about the remaining dwelling places.

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “Since these dwelling places are closer to where the King is, their beauty is great.” To come to this stage is truly a blessing and a gift. “For the Lord gives when He desires, as He desires, and to whom He desires. Since these blessings belong to Him, He does no injustice to anyone” (IV, 1:2).
- Teresa makes a distinction between “**consolations**” that are acquired by one’s own efforts at prayer and virtuous works, and “**spiritual delights**” that are purely a gift from God. It is interesting to note that she points out that similar feelings of “consolation” can come from happy worldly events because they begin in human nature. On the other hand, “The spiritual delights begin in God, but the human nature feels and enjoy them” (IV, 1:4).
- Teresa quotes a line from Psalm 119 “when you enlarged my heart” to give a better sense of spiritual delights. **Spiritual delights** expand the heart (IV, 1:5) because they are infused by God (supernatural). **Consolations** do not expand the heart, because they have their roots in human nature (natural) (see IV, 1:5).

Note to the formator: Be careful not to disparage human effort during prayer. One prays as one is able, while always being ready to let God take the lead. Every stage of prayer is of value and a person will move back and forth continuously. IV, 1:6 gives good advice on flexibility.

- “...in order to profit by this path and ascend to the dwelling places we desire, the important thing is not to think much but to love much... Perhaps we don’t know what

love is. I wouldn't be very surprised, because it doesn't consist in great delight but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything..." (IV, 1:7).

- Teresa uses the image of two water troughs to explain the difference between consolations and spiritual delight (two sources of prayer — acquired and supernatural). One trough is filled with the help of aqueducts from far away (acquired) and the other is filled from an abundant spring whose source is located at the trough itself (supernatural). She says the consolations are like the water coming from the aqueducts; they require human effort in the form of meditation, recollection, etc. Spiritual delights are like the abundant spring. They flow from God (in the center) and are accompanied by peace and quiet in the interior part of the soul (see IV, 2:3-4).
- Thus, in the fourth dwelling places, the soul discovers for the first time its own "center" and participates in its expansion of heart. "I was now thinking, while writing this, that the verse mentioned above, 'when you enlarged my heart,' - says the heart was expanded. I don't think the experience is something, as I say, that rises from the heart, but from another part still more interior, as from something deep. I think this must be the center of the soul... For certainly I see secrets within ourselves that have often caused me to marvel. And how many more there must be!" (IV, 2:5). In finding the center, Teresa bursts out in prayer:

Oh, my Lord and my God, how great are your grandeurs! We go about here below like foolish shepherds, for while it seems that we are getting some knowledge of You it must amount to no more than nothing; for even in our own selves there are great secrets that we don't understand. I say "no more than nothing" because I'm comparing it to the many, many secrets that are in You, not because grandeurs we see in You are not extraordinary; and that includes those we can attain knowledge of through Your works" (IV, 2:5).

- "The very experience of it makes us realize that it is not of the same metal as we ourselves but fashioned from the purest gold of the divine wisdom. Here, in my opinion, the faculties are not united but absorbed and looking as though in wonder at what they see" (IV, 2:6).

Note: Teresa reminds the reader again of the concept of "who we are" and the soul's marvelous capacity for God.

- Teresa adds that the true value of prayer is in the effects and deeds that follow: "It seems clear to me that the will must in some way be united with God's will. But it is in the **effects and deeds** following afterward that one discerns the true value of prayer..." (IV, 2:8). [emphasis added]
- Teresa continues to give practical advice on how to walk in spiritual delight: **First**, practice humility; **second**, one must love God without self-interest; **third**, the authentic preparation for these favors is to prepare oneself for unexpected calamity — ready to accept anything that life brings — and imitate the Lord, rather than to desire or expect spiritual delight. One's own efforts or striving after these delights would be useless anyway, since the favors are a pure gift. Teresa believes the Lord will give spiritual

delight and many other favors to those who humble themselves and are detached (see IV, 2:8-10). “I really believe that whoever humbles himself and is detached (I mean in fact because the detachment and humility must not be just in our thoughts — for they often deceive us — but complete [detachment] will receive this water [contemplation] from the Lord and many more favors that we don’t know how to desire. May He be forever praised and blessed, amen” (IV, 2:10).

- Although the soul can do nothing to initiate the spiritual delights, it can in fact cultivate a place where such prayerful moments with God can happen. Thus, instead of seeking God in external things, the soul begins to seek God within. Like a good shepherd with a whistle so gentle, God calls the soul to make this inward journey, and the soul recognizes the Beloved’s voice and follows (see IV, 3:2). “... It is a great help to seek God within where He is found more easily and, in a way, more beneficial to us than when sought in creatures...” (IV, 3:3).
- This inward searching takes the form of a “gentle drawing inward (like) a turtle drawing into its shell...so that the soul instead of striving to engage in discourse strives to remain attentive and aware of what the Lord is working in it” (IV, 3:3-4).
- Teresa beautifully explains the concept of expansion of the soul with an image of a fount that does not overflow but expands. The more God pours into the soul, the greater its capacity becomes, keeping everything within itself. The soul is not as tied down as it was before in things pertaining to the service of God, but has much more freedom. While the fear of offending God increases, servile fear and worldly fears are gone, and the soul is given great courage (see IV, 3:9).

Summary: To grow in this way (interior prayer and self-knowledge) requires an ongoing dedication to change one’s habits and behaviors. Human growth in the deepest sense is the continuous exploration of human potentiality, especially the capacity to love. Compassion — the impulse to love and serve others as well as self — is possible only through the full integration of wisdom of the heart and dilation of its capacity to feel deeply. Teresa emphasizes that it would be incorrect to think of the “spiritual delights” as merely a set of experiences with no lasting effect in the soul. Having known through experience the healing power of God’s grace, the soul can now move towards joy and true delight in God and others (see Entering Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle).

“The Carmelite Secular will make sure to have special times set apart for prayer, as times of greater awareness of the Lord’s presence and an interior space for a personal and intimate meeting with Him. This will lead to prayer as an attitude of life, that will ‘always and everywhere recognize God..., seek His will in every event, see Christ in all people whether they be a relative or a stranger, and make correct judgments about the true meaning and value of temporal things both in themselves [self-knowledge] and in their relation to humankind’s final goal. Thus, they will achieve a union of contemplation and action in history, integrating faith and life, prayer and action, contemplation and Christian commitment’
(OCDS Const. Art. 20).

Session Six: Transformation in Christ (continued in Session Seven)

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Fifth Dwelling Places*, ch. 1 and 2

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: The expansion of the soul experienced in the fourth dwelling places allows the soul in the fifth dwelling places to explore its own internal depth. Perhaps for the first time, the soul experiences what it is to dwell deeply within itself (in God). Here the space created in it through the process of expansion (progression in prayer) now becomes the location for the powerful form of transformation, which Teresa represents through the metaphor of a caterpillar changing into a beautiful white butterfly (see Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Teresa reminds her readers that all who wear the holy habit of Carmel are called to prayer and contemplation. “This call explains our origin; we are the descendants of men who felt this call, of those holy fathers of Mount Carmel who, in such great solitude...sought this treasure, this precious pearl of contemplation that we are speaking about” (V, 1:2). Teresa encourages the soul to dig until it finds this hidden treasure. “The truth is that the treasure lies within our very selves” (V, 1:2).
- Teresa emphasizes the uniqueness of the union that takes place in the fifth dwelling places between God and the soul. The soul is left with “wonderful blessings because God works within it without anyone disturbing him [God], not even ourselves” (V, 1:5). Thus, “this union is above all earthly joys, above all delights, above all consolations and still more than that” (V, 1:6). Previous unions were felt as if from the surface of the skin, whereas union in the fifth dwelling places is felt in the marrow of the bones (see V, 1:6).
- Although the union is brief, it is intense enough to communicate to the soul immediately that it is indeed true union with God, embedding in the soul the wisdom of God. “God so places himself in the interior of that soul that when it returns to itself it can in no way doubt that it was in God and God was in it” (V, 1:9).
- How does one know for sure that one has reached the prayer of union? For Teresa, the certainty left in the soul is the clear indication of this union. “I don't say that it then saw the truth but that afterward it sees the truth clearly, not because of a vision but because of a *certitude* remaining in the soul that only God can place there” [emphasis added] (V, 1:10). Teresa goes on to explain that “whoever does not receive this certitude does not experience union of the whole soul with God, but union of some faculty, or that he experiences one of the many other kinds of favors God grants souls” (V, 1:11).
- Explaining the subjective experience of this union, Teresa goes on to describe the dynamics of transformation in Christ by using two metaphors, namely, the wine cellar in the Song of Songs and the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly.
- “I understand this union to be the wine cellar where the Lord wishes to place us when he desires and as he desires. But however great the effort we make to do so, we cannot

enter. His Majesty must place us there and enter himself into the center of the soul. And that he may show his marvels more clearly, he doesn't want our will to have any part to play, for it has been entirely surrendered to him" (V, 1:12). God wants to enter the center of the soul without going through any door (the faculties), as he entered the place where his disciples were when he said, "peace to you" (Jn. 20:19).

- Teresa describes the life cycle of a silkworm and makes a comparison to the transformation of souls in this prayer of union. "The worms nourish themselves on the mulberry leaves, until having grown to full size, they settle on some twigs. There with their little mouths, they themselves go about spinning the silk and making some very thick little cocoons in which they enclose themselves. The silkworm, which is fat and ugly, then dies, and a little white butterfly, which is very pretty, comes forth from the cocoon" (V, 2:2).
- In dwelling places 1-4, Teresa dealt with the growth of this silkworm. In the fifth dwelling places, the worm begins to spin the silk and build the house where it will die. This house is Christ, and the soul's life is hidden in Him (see V, 2:4).
- Teresa encourages the soul to be quick (as are these silkworms) to build up this house of Christ by getting rid of self-love, self-will, and inordinate attachments to things of the world. "...the Lord himself will become the reward of this work. ... His Majesty wants to join our little labors with the great ones he suffered so that all the work may become one" (V, 2:5-6). The soul is now sharing in the essence of God through participation.
- The butterfly represents a new and more centered identity of the soul. The soul learns to live with the possibilities and challenges its new identity generates. First and foremost is a completely new understanding of oneself. Teresa describes this **self-knowledge** by writing that, as a result of this union, the soul's very being has been so transformed that it "doesn't recognize itself" (V, 2:6). Thus, the soul in the fifth dwelling places begins to see the world from its new vantage point as a "butterfly."
- The soul's new identity gives birth to a new potential and new insights. It has experienced deep peace and rest in this union. "[The soul] doesn't know where to alight and rest. Since it has experienced such a wonderful rest, all that it sees on earth displeases it... Almost each time it gains new treasures. It no longer has any esteem for the works it did while a worm. It now has wings... Everything wearies it, for it has learned through experience that creatures cannot give it true rest" (V, 2:8).
- Teresa reminds that there must always be a cross while living on earth (see V, 2:9). She explains that the soul who has experienced the prayer of union suffers because it is now transformed and **willing to participate in God's actions** in its life. She compares the soul to wax impressed with a seal. Like the wax, the soul remains still and gives consent to God... Oh, goodness of God...All you want is our will and that there be no impediment in the wax" (V, 2:12). "Oh, great delight, to suffer in doing the will of God! (V, 2:14).

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“Carmelite Seculars accept from the viewpoint of faith, hope and love, the work and suffering of each day, family worries, the uncertainty and limitations of human life, sickness, lack of understanding, and all that makes up the fabric of our earthly existence. They will strive to make all this material for their dialogue with God, in order to grow in an attitude of praise and gratitude to the Lord. In order to live truly, simply, freely, humbly, and completely confident in the Lord”

(OCDS Constitutions, Art. 22).

Session Seven: Transformation in Christ (continued from Session Six)

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition *the Fifth Dwelling Places*, ch. 3 and 4

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: After writing most intimately about the prayer of union, Teresa goes on to describe the importance of fraternal charity. The prayer of union is of little help unless one makes an effort to go “forward in the service of the Lord and self-knowledge” (V, 3:1). The prayer of union is not something that one should be preoccupied about receiving. One must strive with all one’s being to keep the will fixed only on what God wills.

“St. Teresa appreciates the assistance of another in the spiritual life: love grows where there is respectful dialogue; the purpose of which is to know oneself better to be pleasing to God. Community meetings take place in a congenial atmosphere of dialogue and sharing. Prayer, formation, and a joyful atmosphere are essential for deepening friendly relationships and ensuring for everyone mutual support in the daily living-out of the Teresian Carmelite lay vocation in the family, at work, and in other social situations”
(OCDS Const. Art. 24, c).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “...I hold that it is God’s desire that a favor so great not be given in vain; if a person doesn’t herself benefit, the favor will benefit others...it always brings profit to other souls during the time that it continues to live virtuously; and they catch fire from its fire” (V, 3:1).
- Always keep the will fixed only on what is God’s will. “Oh, how desirable is this union with God’s will! Happy the soul that has reached it. Such a soul will live tranquilly in this life, and in the next as well” (V, 3:3).
- Teresa laments that self-love, self-esteem, lack of charity, and other things keep the soul from advancing to what is required for complete union with the will of God (see V, 3:6). The Lord asks only two things: love of His Majesty and love of neighbor. “These are what we must work for. By observing them with perfection, we do his will and so will be united with him” (V, 3:7).
- “The most certain sign, in my opinion, as to whether or not we are observing these two laws is whether we observe well the love of neighbor... And be certain that the more advanced you see you are in love for your neighbor, the more advanced you will be in the love of God” (V, 3:8). “I believe that, since our nature is bad, we will not reach perfection in the love of neighbor if that love doesn’t rise from love of God as its root” (V, 3:9).

- Teresa observes that union does not lie in spiritual delight and devotions, but rather “works are what the Lord wants!” (V, 3:11). She goes on to give concrete examples of true union with His will. “He desires that if you see a Sister who is sick to whom you can bring some relief, you have compassion for her and not worry about losing this devotion; and if she is suffering pain, you also feel it, and that, if necessary, you fast so that she might eat — not so much for her sake as because you know it is your Lord’s desire. This is true union with His will...” (V, 3:11).
- Teresa further observes, “when you see yourselves lacking in this love [love of neighbor], even though you have devotion and gratifying experiences that make you think you have reached this stage, and you experience some little suspension in the prayer of quiet (for to some it then appears that everything has been accomplished), believe me you have not reached union” (V, 3:12). Teresa reminds again that one must be empathetic to the hurts and afflictions of the people in one’s life. The needs and burdens of others should be part of one’s daily prayer, and the heart must open out in compassion to sinners, strangers, and the miserable.

“Our love for our fellow humans is the measure of our love for God. But it is different from a natural love of our neighbor. Natural love goes out to this one or that one, who may be close to us through the bond of blood or through a kinship of character or common interests. The rest are ‘strangers’ who do not concern us, who, it may be, eventually come to be repulsive, so that one keeps them as far away as possible from contact with us. For the Christian, there are no such ‘strangers.’ Rather, he is the ‘neighbor,’ this one who stand before us and who is in greatest need of our help; it doesn’t matter whether he is related to us or not; whether we ‘like’ him or not; whether he is ‘morally worthy’ of help or not. The love of Christ knows no bounds, it never stops, it does not shrink back from ugliness and dirt. He came for the sake of sinners and not for the sake of the just. If the love of Christ lives in us then we will, like Him, go out after the lost sheep”

(St. Edith Stein, *The Mystery of Christmas*. The entire quote is in the Interpretive Notes, pg. 201; second edition, pg. 174.)

- Teresa is setting a stage for the next dwelling places by recalling the life of the butterfly that she introduced previously. “It seems to me you have a desire to see what the little moth is doing and where it rests since, as was explained, it rests neither in spiritual delights nor in earthly consolations. Its flight is higher...” (V, 4:1). “Although it is always bearing fruit by doing good for itself and for other souls, it never stops to rest, because it fails to find its true repose” (V, 4:2). Teresa’s understanding is that the prayer of union does not yet reach the stage of spiritual betrothal (see V, 4:4).
- Before proceeding to the next dwelling places, Teresa shares a few cautionary notes with the reader. She warns that even those who greatly desire to serve God are not immune to temptations (see V, 4:4-6). Hence, one must walk with special attention as

to how one is progressing, especially in love of one another, in the desire to be humble, and in the performance of ordinary tasks (see V, 4:9).

- Teresa concludes “that we strive always to advance. And if we don’t advance, let us walk with great fear. Without doubt the devil wants to cause some lapse... Love is never idle, and a failure to grow would be a very bad sign. A soul that has tried to be the betrothed of God himself, that is now intimate with His Majesty, and has reached the boundaries that were mentioned, must not go to sleep” (V, 4:10).

Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.

(1 Peter 5:8-9. RSV translation)

Session Eight: Awakening to God (continued in Session Nine)

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Sixth Dwelling Places*, chapters 1-5

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: The sixth dwelling places breaks with the pattern Teresa followed in the other dwelling places. Over a third of the book's chapters are in the sixth dwelling places. This is not surprising, given that these chapters refer to a large portion of Teresa's life, lasting about fifteen years. The first subject Teresa discusses in these dwelling places is what St. John of the Cross calls the "dark night." Though Teresa does not use the same term, the purifying reality of the mystical night (darkness, trials, the cross) is the first characteristic she addresses in the sixth dwelling places (see Interpretive notes pgs. 229-232; second edition, pgs. 215-218). Teresa observes that the trials and afflictions experienced at this stage, strengthen the soul so that it will have the courage to be joined to the Lord (see VI, 4:1).

Note: The unitive experiences of the soul in the sixth dwelling places also take the form of visions, locutions, raptures, ecstasies, tears, flight of the spirit and jubilation. Teresa describes them in significant detail. Because they are treated only briefly in these two sessions, candidates may find it useful to read the descriptions with attention for their own enrichment. For further understanding of these communications, please refer to the Glossary: *Locution*, pg. 460 (second edition, pg. 431) and *Supernatural and Visions*, pgs. 464-465 (second edition, pgs. 435-437).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- "Oh, God help me, what interior and exterior trials the soul suffers before entering the seventh dwelling place!" (VI, 1:1). Teresa observes that perhaps not all souls will be led along this path (see VI, 1:2).
- Teresa describes the roller-coaster ride of a soul in the sixth dwelling places where it experiences the lows of many trials and the highs of mystical communications. The trials that she describes are of many kinds, including misunderstandings, ridicule, and being the object of gossip. Even being praised is a trial (see VI, 1:3-4).
- Teresa, however, notes that the soul is not troubled by these trials. "And when the soul reaches the stage at which it pays little attention to praise, it pays much less to disapproval; on the contrary, it rejoices in this and finds it a very sweet music. This is an amazing truth. Blame does not intimidate the soul but strengthens it" (VI, 1:5).

Note: These are the characteristics of the transformed soul in the sixth dwelling places. They are not disturbed by external conditions. As St. Paul proclaims, "I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things, I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and being in need. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (Phil.4:12-13).

- Teresa also speaks about spiritual afflictions and sufferings that one cannot describe. The best aid to endurance is to “engage in external works of charity and to hope in the mercy of God” (VI, 1:13).
- By recalling the little moth, Teresa reassures the reader that these afflictions and sufferings do not affect the moth (soul) in any way at all. “Seemingly we have left the little moth far behind; but we have not, for these are the trials that make it fly still higher” (VI, 2:1).
- She further observes, the circumstances of life, no matter how painful, become a deeper “wound of love” for God (VI: 2:2). “This action of love is so powerful that the soul dissolves with desire, and yet it doesn’t know what to ask for since clearly it thinks that its God is with it” (VI, 2:4).
- Besides the “wound,” Teresa also speaks about the “fire.” “...a spark leapt forth and so struck the soul that the flaming fire was felt by it” (VI, 2:4).
- “These sixth dwelling places represent a region in which immense desires are experienced. Not arising from anything outside the soul, but coming from deep within it, the desires are as though produced by an arrow that wounds the soul. The wound, however, is both painful and delightful...Her many faceted desires are being strongly pulled now in one direction, toward Jesus Christ” (Interpretive Notes, pg. 240; second edition, 215). “The desires are not passing but remain...” (VI, 6:5).
- Mixed in with these trials, sufferings and desires are the ecstatic experiences of the soul — locutions, visions, and raptures. Teresa says that locutions can be from God, from the devil, or from one’s own imagination. She warns that the safest path is to pay little attention to them (VI, 3:2). “All the good comes from how one benefits by these words; and pay no more attention to those that are not in close conformity with Scripture...; it’s necessary to treat them as if they were temptations in matters of faith, and thus resist them always” (VI, 3:4). (Refer to St. John of the Cross in the Ascent for further information: Ascent, Book 2, ch. 11.)

Note: “Teresa brings to the reader two thematic lines of thought. In the first, she gives testimony that the Lord has spoken to her, and her first mission is to testify to this. In the second, she must explain how this comes about. How can we be sure that the words come from God?” (Interpretive notes, pg. 260; second edition, pg. 235).

- There are three signs that indicate locutions may be from God. Discernment and spiritual direction are essential; no one should trust their own judgment:
 - a. First is the power and authority the words carry with them. “... for locutions from God effect what they say... A soul finds itself in the midst of all the tribulation and disturbance..., in darkness of the intellect and in dryness, with one word alone of these locutions from the Lord (‘don’t be distressed’), it is left with calm and free from all distress...” (VI, 3:5).
 - b. “The second sign is the great quiet left in the soul, the devout and peaceful recollection, the readiness to engage in the praises of God” (VI, 3:6).

- c. “The third sign is that these words remain in the memory for a very long time, and some are never forgotten... The certitude is so strong that even in things that in one’s own opinion sometimes seem impossible... there is an assurance in the soul that cannot be overcome.” (VI, 3:7).
- If the locutions come from the imagination, there are none of these signs; neither certitude, nor peace, nor interior delight (see VI, 3:10).
 - “One thing very certain is that, when the spirit is from God the soul esteems itself less...; it has more awareness of its sins; is more forgetful of its own gain, and its will and memory are employed more in seeking only the honor of God...” (VI, 3:17).
 - Teresa describes another kind of rapture that she calls a “flight of the spirit.” She says that while persons are very much in their senses, they can experience a sudden, swift movement of the soul: “With a powerful impulse, a huge wave rises up so forcefully that it lifts high this little bark that is our soul” (VI, 5:1-3). Consequently, the soul is left with great blessings: knowledge of the grandeur of God, self-knowledge and humility, and little esteem of earthly things. Teresa concludes by calling these blessings jewels that the Spouse begins to give to the betrothed (see, VI, 5:10-11).
 - “...for Teresa, these [experiences] are not events that can be explained through one’s ordinary psychological experience — that is, reduced to the plane of one’s natural conscious or unconscious makeup; they come from another, superior plane and **are recognized by their effects**: ‘the favor brings wonderful benefits to the soul, the more customary of which are the determination to suffer for God, the desire to have many trials, and the determination to withdraw from earthly satisfactions and conversations and other similar things’” (VI, 2:6) (Interpretive notes, pg. 242; second edition, pg. 217). [emphasis added]

“O my powerful God, how sublime are your secrets, and how different spiritual things are from all that is visible and understandable here below. There is nothing that serves to explain this favor...” (IC. VI, 2:3).

Summary: In a way, Teresa’s experience of ecstasy as explained in the fourth and fifth dwelling places was an experience of going deeper within herself, where she went beyond herself and entered into the orbit of the Divine. Now in the sixth dwelling places, another kind of ecstasy takes place. The soul is taken out of itself and elevated to the Divine. This “flight of the spirit,” as Teresa names it, is substantially the same as ecstasy, but it is experienced differently (see Interpretive notes, pgs. 290-291; second edition. 264-265). This experience of prayer has the effect, ultimately, of allowing the love of God to enter the world — and touch humanity.

*“Considering the origins of Carmel and the Teresian charism, the fundamental elements of the vocation of Secular Carmelites are 1). to **seek a mysterious union with God**; by way of contemplation and apostolic activity, indissolubly joined together for service to the church; 2).*

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to infuse prayer and life with apostolic zeal in a climate of human and Christian Community; 3). to give importance to the commitment to evangelization; in the ministry of spirituality as the collaboration of the Secular Order, faithful to the Teresian Carmelite identity.”
(OCDS Constitutions, Art. 9).

Session Nine: Awakening to God (continued from Session Eight)

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Sixth Dwelling Places*, ch. 6-11

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes; *Gaudium et Spes*, 22 (Appendix A); St. Teresa of Avila - 100 Themes, nos. 46 (Appendix B) and 98 (Appendix C)

Explanatory note: The progressive shift in the soul's reality is to understand how the soul experiences a radical transformation of its known personhood and a gradual union with God, which the soul will celebrate in the seventh dwelling places. This change is accomplished gradually by means of revelations and ecstasy, what we could call intellectual, emotional and physical experiences of the subjective reality of God. All of these experiences are ways in which a final purification of the soul's desire for union is effected in the soul (see Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle, pg. 89).

Humanity of Christ: In chapter 7 of *The Sixth Dwelling Places* Teresa discusses the vital importance of frequent meditation on the sacred humanity of Christ. "When speaking of the intellectual and imaginative visions of Christ, Teresa pauses to make some firm assertions about the human and divine Christ present throughout one's spiritual pilgrimage. He is the one through whom all blessings come. No state is so sublime that a person must always be occupied with divinity and thus obliged to empty the mind of all reference to the human Christ. **'Life is long, and there are in it many trials, and we need to look at Christ our model, how he suffered them, and also at his apostles and saints, so as to bear these trials with perfection. Jesus is too good of a companion for us to turn away from Him'** [VI, 7:13]. ...The inability of contemplative souls to engage in discursive thought about the mysteries of the Passion and Life of Christ in their prayer is very common, she holds. **But contemplating these mysteries, 'dwelling on them with a simple gaze,' in Teresa's words, 'will not impede the most sublime prayer'** [VI. 7: 6,7,11,12]" (General Introduction, p. 20, second edition, pg. xxxiv). [emphasis added]

"In Jesus Christ, the whole of God's truth has been made manifest. 'Full of grace and truth,' He came as the 'light of the world,' He is the Truth. 'Whoever believes in Me may not remain in darkness.' The disciple of Jesus continues in His word so as to know 'the Truth [that] will make you free' and that sanctifies. To follow Jesus is to live in 'the Spirit of Truth,' Whom the Father sends in His name and Who leads 'into all the Truth.' To His disciples Jesus teaches the unconditional love of Truth: 'Let what you say be simply "Yes or No"' (CCC 2466)" (Interpretive notes, pg. 369; second edition, pg. 240). [capitalization added]

- After explaining her extraordinary experiences in detail, Teresa reminds the readers of the immediate and important task at hand. "Let's not think that everything is accomplished through much weeping but set our hands to the task of hard work and virtue... I consider it better for us to place ourselves in the presence of the Lord and look at his mercy and grandeur and at our own lowliness, and let him give us what he wants, whether water or dryness. He knows best what is suitable for us. With such an attitude we shall go about refreshed, and the devil will not have so much chance to play tricks on us" (VI, 6:9).

- Teresa goes on to explain yet another kind of ecstasy. “In the midst of the experiences that are both painful and delightful together, our Lord sometimes gives the soul feelings of **jubilation** and a strange prayer... It is in my opinion, a deep union of the faculties” (VI, 6:10). [emphasis added]
- The joy of this form of prayer is “so excessive that the soul wouldn’t want to enjoy it alone but wants to tell everyone about it...” Thus, the soul radiates this love outward and draws people to it as if in a communal celebration. “It seems it has found itself and that, like the father of the prodigal son, it would want to prepare a festival and invite all” (VI, 6:10). This jubilation of prayer has the ultimate effect of allowing the love of God to enter the world.
- These lofty prayers and experiences did not deter Teresa from continuously seeking out the most sacred humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ. Contrary to the prevailing practice of her time (to flee from corporeal things when passed beyond the beginning stages), Teresa affirms: “the Lord Himself says that He is the way..., the light and no one can go to the Father but through Him, and ‘anyone who sees Me sees My Father’” (see VI, 7:6).
- Teresa explains the difference between meditation (discursive reflection) and another way of keeping in mind the humanity of Christ. She says that at a certain point many persons will no longer be able to engage in detailed thoughts about Christ’s life. However, they can still dwell on these mysteries of Christ’s life. These thoughts are living sparks that will enkindle more love for our Lord (see VI, 7:10-13).
- Teresa describes the effects of such a habit of contemplation: the soul actually moves into the presence of the incarnate God. “... the further a soul advances the more it is accompanied by the good Jesus” (VI, 8:1). “...it [the soul] will feel Jesus Christ, our Lord, beside it. Yet, it [the soul] does not see him, either with the eyes of the body or with those of the soul. This is called an intellectual vision...” (VI, 8:2). “...this favor [intellectual vision] bears with it a particular knowledge of God” (VI, 8:4).
- “...the vision is represented through knowledge given to the soul that is clearer than sunlight. I don’t mean that you see the sun or brightness, but that a light, without your seeing light, illumines the intellect so that the soul may enjoy such a great good. The vision bears with it wonderful blessings” (Life 27.3) (Interpretive Notes: pg. 344; second edition, pg. 316.)
- However, Teresa points out that persons who have these experiences are not necessarily holier than persons who do not. The important things are practicing virtues and serving God: “One should consider the virtues and who it is who serves our Lord with greater mortification, humility, and purity of conscience; this is the one who will be the holiest” (VI, 8:10).
- As Teresa approaches the last dwelling places, she experiences the omnipresence of God. “How all things are seen in God and how God has them all in Himself” (VI, 10:2). This theological reality remains imprinted in the soul and is recognized as an expression of ultimate Truth; indeed, it is accompanied by the knowledge that “God alone is Truth, unable to lie” (VI, 10:5).

- As Teresa moves into the last pages of the sixth dwelling places, she realizes the importance of “Truth.” The Truth will set you free. Recalling the episode in the gospels where Pilate questions Jesus: “What is Truth?” God is everlasting Truth (VI, 10:5). “Once I was pondering why our Lord was so fond of this virtue of humility, and this thought came to me—in my opinion not as a result of reflection but suddenly: It is because God is supreme Truth; and to be humble is to walk in truth, for it is a very deep truth that of ourselves we have nothing good but only misery and nothingness. Whoever does not understand this walks in falsehood. The more anyone understands it the more he pleases the supreme Truth because he is walking in truth...we will be granted the favor never to leave this **path of self-knowledge...**” (VI, 10:7).

Side note: The experiences of the sixth dwelling places form a stage in the soul’s **growth in self-knowledge**. “In its unitive encounters, the soul is taught more about itself; previously unknown aspects of its life or its nature are revealed to it by a source deeper than itself. While the soul profits tremendously from such insights, it also realizes a deeper human truth: we cannot fully know ourselves on our own; it takes relationality [relationship with God, Jesus] to move us into the fullest forms of self-knowledge...” (Entering Teresa of Avila’s Interior Castle, pg. 87).

- At the end of the sixth dwelling places, Teresa returns to the butterfly image (of the soul) recalling its dilemma: how much it wishes to use its wings to soar toward God and how, even though it may have been receiving these favors for many years, it still sees itself very distant and far from enjoying God (see VI, 11:1). The soul realizes that only the “Creator can console and satisfy it” (VI, 11:10).

Session Ten: Union — Trinitarian Life (continued in Session Eleven)

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Seventh Dwelling Places*, ch. 1 and 2

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes; Gaudium et Spes 22 (Appendix A)

Explanatory note: In the seventh dwelling places, Teresa returns to the metaphor of the butterfly, and she describes how after the waves of trial, sufferings and raptures (which the soul experienced in the sixth dwelling places), it has now found repose in Christ. “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain’ [Phil 1:21]. The soul as well, I think, can say these words now because this state is the place where the little butterfly... dies, and with the greatest joy because its life is now Christ” (VII, 2:5). “The butterfly, we recall, was the new self, freed from the restraints of the cocoon... Now in the seventh dwelling places, the initial metamorphosis of the silkworm into the butterfly undergoes another radical change. Teresa refers to this with two key words: death (it dies with supreme happiness) and life (Christ lives in it) ... that its life is now Christ” (Interpretive notes, pg. 426; second edition, pg. 397).

Word Incarnate: “The ultimate goal, then, of Teresa’s journey, the spiritual marriage, is a union with Christ, now no longer living as the divine Logos but as the Word incarnate, risen and connoted by the attributes of his earthly adventure, especially those of his resurrection. With the passing of time, the soul understands more clearly that its life is Christ” (General Introduction, pg. 23, second edition, pg. xxxvii).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Teresa observes: “when our Lord is pleased to have pity on this soul that he has already taken spiritually as his betrothed, because of what it suffers and has suffered through its desires, he brings it, before the spiritual marriage is consummated, into his dwelling place, which is this seventh [dwelling places]. For just as in heaven, so in the soul His Majesty must have a room where he dwells alone. Let us call it another heaven” (VII, 1:3).
- For, in the seventh dwelling places, all raptures cease. The wisdom of God now flows wordlessly into the soul; union is no longer fleeting; the soul now lives in the ongoing presence of God. Here, instead of experiencing God partially, the soul is brought fully into the Trinitarian nature of God.
- “In this seventh dwelling place the union comes about in a different way: our good God now desires to remove the scales from the soul’s eyes and let it see and understand, although in a strange way, something of the favor he grants it. When the soul is brought into that dwelling place, the Most Blessed Trinity, all three Persons, through an intellectual vision, is revealed to it through a certain representation of the truth ... and through an admirable knowledge the soul understands as a most profound truth that all three Persons are one substance and one power and one knowledge and one God alone” (VII, 1:6).
- “You may think that as a result the soul will be outside itself and so absorbed that it will be unable to be occupied with anything else. On the contrary, the soul is much more

occupied than before with everything pertaining to the service of God; and once its duties are over it remains with that enjoyable company” (VII, 1:8).

- “Clearly, the soul will be truly helped in every way to advance in perfection... Such was the experience of this person, for in everything she found herself improved, and it seemed to her, despite the trials she underwent and the business affairs she had to attend to, that the essential part of her soul never moved from that room” (VII, 1:10).
- Teresa goes on to explain: “Between the spiritual betrothal and the spiritual marriage the difference is as great as that which exists between two who are betrothed [they can be separated] and two who can no longer be separated” (VII, 2:2). “...just as those who are married cannot be separated...” (VII, 2:3).
- “The **spiritual betrothal** is different, for the two often separate. And the union is also different because, even though it is the joining of two things into one, in the end the two can be separated and each remains by itself ... Let us say that the union is like the joining of two wax candles to such an extent that the flame and the wax are all one. But afterward one candle can easily be separated from the other and there are two candles” (VII, 2:4).
- “In the **spiritual marriage**, the union is like what we have when rain falls from the sky into a river or fountain; all is water, for the rain that fell from heaven cannot be divided or separated from the water of the river. Or it is like what we have when a little stream enters the sea; there is no means of separating the two. Or, like the bright light entering a room through two different windows; although the streams of light are separate when entering the room, they become one” (VII, 2:4).
- Two Pauline expressions summarize the thoughts of Teresa: “‘... he that is joined or united to the Lord becomes one spirit’ with him, and is referring to this sovereign marriage, presupposing that His Majesty has brought the soul to it through union” (VII, 2:5). Teresa quotes Paul again: “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (VII, 2:5). It is here that Teresa announces the death of the butterfly which she introduced in the fifth dwelling places. “The soul as well, I think, can say these words now because this state is the place where the little butterfly we mentioned dies, and with the greatest joy because its life is now Christ” (VII, 2:5).
- Thus, in the seventh dwelling places is the realization of St. Paul’s famous passage: “For now we see as in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).
- “For [Teresa], Christian holiness does not consist in an ethical fact of personal perfection; rather, it has as its characteristic the trait of an intimate living together of two persons: Christ and the human person... ‘... this secret union takes place in the very interior center of the soul which must be where God himself is, and in my opinion, there is no need of any door (senses and faculties) for him to enter’” (VII, 2:3; Interpretive notes, pg. 414; second edition, pg. 385).

- “In her *Life*, when Teresa begins to experience visions of Christ, she speaks of him as being beside her. ‘It seemed to me that Jesus Christ was always present at my side’ (L 27:2). Now, in this final stage, the experiences of Christ are not of him at her side but within her, in the deepest center of her being” (Interpretive notes, pg. 415; second edition, pgs. 385-386). “...the soul always remains with its God in that center” (VII, 2:4).
- Teresa further observes that the soul is always at peace in that center even though there are trials and suffering all around it. “The king is in his palace and there are many wars in his kingdom and many painful things going on; ...even though they cause [the soul] some pain, the suffering is not such as to disturb it and take away its peace” (VII, 2:11).

Note: In the innermost chamber there dwells the King — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Initially the soul cannot perceive this center, still less enter it. In the tradition of Carmel, prayer is seen as an inward journey toward the center. The transforming love of the King radiates from the center, drawing the soul towards itself.

“It should be known that the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden by His essence and His presence in the innermost being of the soul... Oh, then, soul, most beautiful among all creatures, so anxious to know the dwelling place of your Beloved so you may go in search of Him and be united with Him, now we are telling you that you yourself are His dwelling and His secret inner room and hiding place. There is reason for you to be elated and joyful in seeing that all your good and hope is so close as to be within you, or better, that you cannot be without Him. ‘The Kingdom of God is within you.’ ‘You are the temple of God’”

(Lk. 17:21 and 2 Cor. 6:16)

(St. John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle Stanza 1: 6-7).

Session Eleven: Effects of Prayer. (continued from Session Ten)

Required Reading: The Interior Castle: Study Edition, *the Seventh Dwelling Places*, ch. 3 and 4

Additional Reading: Interpretive notes

Explanatory note: The seventh dwelling places, as Teresa notes, are really God's dwelling place of sanctity. "Sanctity is a Trinitarian fact which takes place within the soul of the Christian and transforms it. ... Sanctity is something that overflows the strict limits of the subject; it is grace for others, for the human community, for the sake of assuming the condition of 'servant of Yahweh.' This means that Christian sanctity has an ecclesiastical dimension and by that fact entails the charism of service of one's brothers and sisters" (Interpretive notes, pg. 394; second edition, 266).

"The vocation to the Secular Order is truly ecclesial. Prayer and apostolate, when they are true, are inseparable. The observation of St. Teresa that the purpose of prayer is 'the birth of good works' reminds the Secular Order that graces received ought to have an effect on those who receive them. Individually or as a community and above all as members of the Church, apostolic activity is the fruit of prayer" (OCDS Constitutions, Art. 26).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- "Now, then, we are saying that this little butterfly has already died, with supreme happiness for having found repose and because Christ lives in it. Let us see what life it lives, or how this life differs from the life it was living" (VII, 3:1).
- "The first effect is a forgetfulness of self ...it employs all it has in procuring the honor of God...and to be for the service of our Lord" (VII, 3:2-3). Perhaps by finding true rest in Christ, the soul is now able to prioritize not its own interest but its love and service for others without thought of any reward.
- "The second effect is the soul has a great desire to suffer, but not the kind of desire that disturbs it as previously. For the desire left in these souls that the will of God be done in them. ... If he desires the soul suffer, well and good; if not, it doesn't kill itself as it used to" (VII, 3:4).
- "These souls also have a deep interior joy when they are persecuted, with much more peace ... and without any hostile feelings towards those who do, or desire to do, them evil. On the contrary, such a soul gains a particular love for its persecutors ... and eagerly recommends them to God" (VII, 3:5).
- They have a great desire to serve Him, that God be praised through them, and that they may benefit some soul if they can (see VII, 3:6).
- "It has no more fear of death" (VII, 3:7).
- They no longer desire spiritual consolation or spiritual delights, "since the Lord himself is present with these souls and it is His Majesty who now lives" (VII, 3:8).

- “There is a great detachment from everything and a desire to be always either alone or occupied in something that benefits some soul” (VII, 3:8).
- “There are no interior trials or feelings of dryness, but the soul lives with a remembrance and tender love of our Lord” (VII, 3:8).
- “Here, in this dwelling place, these impulses [of love] are experienced most gently, but they do not proceed from the mind or the memory, nor do they come from anything that would make one think the soul did something on its own. [Rather] ... this interior movement proceeds from the center of the soul and awakens the faculties” (VII, 3:8).
- There is no fear of the devil’s deceits (see VII, 3:10).
- The Lord teaches the soul gently “with such quiet and so noiselessly... that the work resembles the building of Solomon’s temple where no sound was heard (1K.6:7) ...So in this temple of God, in this, his dwelling place, he alone and the soul rejoice together in the deepest silence” (VII, 3:11).
- There are no more raptures, visions, transports, or flights of the spirit. “I am amazed as well to see that when the soul arrives here all raptures are taken away” (VII, 3:12).
- “...in this dwelling place, either the soul has found its repose, or has seen so much that nothing frightens it...” (VII, 3:12).
- Teresa uses words and examples from scripture to try to sum up and convey the great blessings and delights of these dwelling places. “These effects...are given by God when he brings the soul to himself with this kiss sought by the bride...” (allusion to Sg.1:2). “Here an abundance of water is given to this deer that was wounded... The dove Noah sent out to see if the storm was over finds the olive branch as a sign of firm ground discovered amid the floods and tempest of this world” (VII, 3:13). This firm ground is the center of God that the soul has found within.
- Teresa cautiously reminds the reader that even this deep peace cannot be considered permanent in this life. We must take care not to lose it through our own fault by withdrawing from God. Souls in this dwelling place have an increased awareness of their sins and failings and fear their own weakness; but in everything they trust in God’s mercy (see VII, 3:13-14).
- Teresa observes that even in this dwelling place, the cross is not lacking, but it doesn’t make souls lose peace (see VII, 3:15).
- Teresa goes on to give important counsels pertaining to the spiritual life in general:
 - She believes that God’s greatest favor is to give us a life that would be an imitation of Christ’s life. “All its concern is taken up with how to please him more and how or where it will show God the love it bears him. This is the reason for prayer... the purpose of this spiritual marriage; the birth always of good works, good works” (VII, 4:6).

- “It benefits me little to be alone making acts of devotion to our Lord, proposing and promising to do wonders in his services, if I then go away and when the occasion offers itself do everything the opposite... Let the soul bend its will if it wishes that prayer be beneficial to it...” (VII, 4:7).
- “Keep in mind that I could not exaggerate the importance of this: Fix your eyes on the Crucified and everything will become small for you” (VII, 4:8).
- Teresa goes on to remind the readers again of the importance of humility: “this whole building, as I have said, has humility as its foundation; ...lay stones firmly that the castle will not fall” (VII, 4:8). The foundation of the spiritual life must consist of more than prayer and contemplation. One must strive for and practice virtues; otherwise, one will not see any growth in prayer (see VII, 4:9).
- “This is what I want us to strive for ... let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment but so as to have this strength to serve... Believe me, Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord...” (VII, 4:12).
- “Apart from the fact that by prayer you will be helping greatly, you need not be desiring to benefit the whole world but must concentrate on those who are in your company, and thus your deed will be greater since you are more obliged toward them... This fire of love in you enkindles their souls, and with every other virtue you will be always awakening them” (VII, 4:14).
- “In sum ... we shouldn’t build castles in the air. The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done ... let us offer the Lord interiorly and exteriorly the sacrifice we can... Thus, even though our works are small, they will have the value our love for him would have merited had they been great” (VII, 4:15).

Prayer of St. Teresa:

May it please His Majesty, my Sisters and daughters,
that we all reach that place where we may ever praise Him.
Through the merit of His Son who lives and reigns forever and ever; may he give me
the grace to carry out something of what I tell you, Amen.

For I tell you that my confusion is great, and thus I ask you through the same Lord
that in your prayers you do not forget this poor wretch
(Interior Castle VII, 4:15).

Prayer:

*Father, by your Spirit you raised up Our Holy Mother, St. Teresa of Jesus
to show your Church the way to perfection.*

May her inspired teachings awaken in us a longing for true holiness.

*Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

Session Twelve: Overall understanding of one's spiritual journey within the context of Church, Order, community, family and work.

OCDS Constitutions 32: *The central object of the process of formation in the Secular Order is to prepare the person to live the charism and spirituality of Carmel in its following of Christ, and in service to its mission.*

In preparation for this session, each participant (the candidates and the formator) is to select a passage from the Interior Castle that spoke to their heart and inspired a positive change. Each is to reflect on: "How has this year of formation affected me — who I am and where I am at in my journey? How has it changed my attitudes and the way I interact with others? What has changed in my prayer and in my relationship with God?" Each person is to prepare a short talk on the passage they chose and share why it was important to them. This is to be done more as a conversation among friends than a formal presentation.

After the personal sharing, and as time allows, the formator guides a discussion of the following concepts and their impact upon the participants' lives. **It is not necessary to discuss every concept or to take them in the order given.**

Note to the formator: The goal for this year has been for the candidates to internalize and try to live these concepts. While mature Carmelites should be able to converse about them, more learning happens through personal example than through spoken word. There is not to be any sort of "oral test" or "final exam."

"Take-away" concepts from this year's exploration of the Interior Castle:

1. The call to contemplation: God's invitation to share His Divine Life with every person is persistent and undeniable.
2. We are the temple of God: God dwells in every person and keeps them in existence (substantial union).
3. Who we are: the human person has a marvelous capacity for God (transformation and union of likeness/participation).
4. The Christ-centeredness found in Teresa means that for her, faith and the Christian life are not founded on abstractions or philosophies but on the special existence of a person in history who is called Jesus Christ. He is the center of life; without Him, the Christian life loses its meaning.
5. Self-knowledge is crucial in every stage of prayer: "...knowing ourselves is something so important that I wouldn't want any relaxation ever in this regard, however high you may have climbed into the heavens..." (IC I.2:9).
6. True self-knowledge is rooted in the parallel knowledge of God. Humility is the virtue that links knowledge of self with knowledge of God.
7. The spiritual journey, although sustained by grace, demands great determination and every possible effort to bring one's will into conformity with God's will. This conformity requires detachment, humility, and perseverance in prayer and virtue.

8. Love does not consist in great delight but in desiring with strong determination to please God in everything.
9. When spending time with God in prayer, the important thing is not to think much but to love much. Discursive prayer is not an end in itself, but a means of lifting the mind, heart, and soul to God, opening oneself to the gift of contemplation, should God choose to give it.
10. Prayer has an ecclesial value: “This is the reason for prayer, my daughters, the purpose of this spiritual marriage: the birth always of good works, good works” (IC VII, 4:6).

Note to the Council: The following needs to be completed well before the discernments begin; it may be divided into two or more sessions, if needed. It is important to have special sessions with the Formation Director for candidates in their third year of Formation II.

Special session with the Formation Director for candidates in their third year of Formation II: Called to holiness — The Definitive Promise in the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites.

Required Reading: OCDS Constitutions, Art. 11-16; Ratio, 59-93; Ritual for the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Chapter III: Rite of Making the Promise

Additional Reading: The Promise and Vows in the Secular Order, Fr Alzinir Debastiani, OCD

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “The Secular Carmelite wants to see God, wants to know God, and recognizes that prayer and meditation now become more important. The Promise is a commitment to a new way of life in which the ‘allegiance to Jesus Christ’ marks the person and the way this person lives” (Ratio Art. 88).
- “For the members of the Secular Order it is an honor to be part of the Carmelite family...The Secular Carmelite seeks intimate union with Christ in the world through the lived experience of the Promise made according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order” (Ratio Art.86).
- “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” (OCDS Const. Art.11).
- “The promise of chastity reinforces the commitment to love God above all else and to love others with the love God has for them...This promise does not prevent a change in state of life” (Const. Art. 13).
- “By the promise of poverty the Secular Carmelite expresses the desire to live in accordance with the Gospel and its values. In evangelical poverty there is a wealth of generosity, self-denial, and interior liberty...” (Const. Art.14).
- “The promise of obedience is a pledge to live open to the will of God...For this reason the Secular Carmelite freely cooperates with those who have responsibility for guiding the community and the Order in discerning and accepting God’s ways: the Community’s Council, the Provincial and the General” (Const. Art. 15).
- “The beatitudes are a plan of action for life and a way to enter into relationship with the world, neighbors and co-workers, families and friends. By promising to live the beatitudes in daily life, Secular Carmelites seek to give evangelical witness as members of the Church and the Order, and by this witness invite the world to follow Christ: ‘the Way the Truth and the Life’ (Jn.14:6)” (Const. Art.16).

- “What is the element that distinguishes those called to be Secular Carmelites? It is not the spirituality, nor the study, nor the devotion to Mary. Simply put, the Secular Carmelite is moved to commit himself or herself to the Order: to commit himself to the service of the Church through collaboration and cooperation with the goal of the Order. This commitment in the form of the **Promise** is an ecclesial event and an event of the Order in addition to being an event in the life of the person who makes the Promise” (Ratio Art. 83).
- Secular Carmelites are called to share in the common vocation to holiness (see, Preface to the OCDS Constitutions). “We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation...* is the vocation to holiness, that is perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony to the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church” (*Christifideles Laici — Call to Holiness*, para. 16). Hence, “... this promise is a pledge to pursue personal holiness...” (OCDS Const. Art. 11).
- “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and their participation in earthly activities. Once again, the Apostle admonishes us: ‘Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ (Colos. 3:17) (*Christifideles Laici — The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II). “... The Secular Order receives new vocations with joy, but also with a feeling of responsibility, so that in them also the charism may be daily understood more deeply, bear fruit and expand...” (Ratio 20).
- “... within the lay state diverse ‘vocations’ are given, that is, there are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a ‘commonly shared’ lay vocation, ‘special’ lay vocations flourish. In this area we can also recall the spiritual experience of the flourishing of diverse forms of secular institutions that have developed recently in the Church. These offer the lay faithful, and even priests, the possibility of professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience through vows or promises while fully maintaining one’s lay or clerical state” (*Christifideles Laici — The Various Vocations in the Lay State*, para. 56).
- “...Our Lord will reward anyone who does more than he [or she] is obliged to do. See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues” (Rule of St. Albert, Art.24).

The Definitive Promise:

I, (name), inspired by the Holy Spirit, in response to God’s call, sincerely promise to the Superiors of the Order of the Teresian Carmel and to you my brothers and sisters, to tend toward evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty,

obedience, and of the Beatitudes, according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites, **for the rest of my life**. I confidently entrust this, my Promise, to the Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel.

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As the candidates prepare for the Definitive Promise, it is helpful to recall the words of Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Letter to the OCDS, March 20, 2020:

... I urge you to know your [legislative] documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.

I ask the Lord to enlighten you so that you may continue to be faithful to the essential elements of your vocation as Secular Carmelites. May the light and strength which come from prayer as friendship with the Lord and fraternal relationship with your brothers and sisters enable you to respond to the challenges and needs of your personal, family and community realities.

May the contemplation of the Risen Christ fill you with peace and joy. May Mary, Queen of Heaven, give you the joy of her Living Son forever.

Fraternally, Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD
Superior General, 2009–2021



St. Teresa's Statue - at the entrance of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome

- S. TERESIA SPIRIT(ualis) MATER / ET FUNDATRIX NOVAE REFORMAT(ionis) ORDINIS /
DISCALC(eatorum) B(eatae) M(ariae) DE MONTE CARMELO

(St. Teresa - Mother of Spirituality and Founder of New Reform Order/Discalced — Blessed
Mary of Mount Carmel)

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<https://www.vatican.va/archive>

Appendix A: Session 9, Excerpt from Gaudium et Spes (22)

PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD

Promulgated by His Holiness, Pope Paul VI, December 7, 1965

(Courtesy: <https://www.vatican.va/archive>)

22. The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come,⁽²⁰⁾ namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.

He Who is “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15),⁽²¹⁾ is Himself the perfect man. To the sons of Adam He restores the divine likeness which had been disfigured from the first sin onward. Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled,⁽²²⁾ by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too. For by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every man. He worked with human hands, He thought with a human mind, acted by human choice⁽²³⁾ and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, He has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin.⁽²⁴⁾

As an innocent lamb He merited for us life by the free shedding of His own blood. In Him God reconciled us⁽²⁵⁾ to Himself and among ourselves; from bondage to the devil and sin He delivered us, so that each one of us can say with the Apostle: The Son of God “loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20). By suffering for us He not only provided us with an example for our imitation,⁽²⁶⁾ He blazed a trail, and if we follow it, life and death are made holy and take on a new meaning.

The Christian man, conformed to the likeness of that Son Who is the firstborn of many brothers,⁽²⁷⁾ received “the first-fruits of the Spirit” (Rom. 8:23) by which he becomes capable of discharging the new law of love.⁽²⁸⁾ Through this Spirit, who is “the pledge of our inheritance” (Eph. 1:14), the whole man is renewed from within, even to the achievement of “the redemption of the body” (Rom. 8:23): “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will also bring to life your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who dwells in you” (Rom. 8:11).⁽²⁹⁾ Pressing upon the Christian to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.⁽³⁰⁾

All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way.⁽³¹⁾ For, since Christ died for all men,⁽³²⁾ and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.

Such is the mystery of man, and it is a great one, as seen by believers in the light of Christian revelation. Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful. Apart from His Gospel, they overwhelm us. Christ has risen, destroying death by His death; He

has lavished life upon us⁽³³⁾ so that, as sons in the Son, we can cry out in the Spirit; Abba, Father⁽³⁴⁾

Footnotes:

20. Cf. Rom. 5: 14. Cf. Tertullian, *De carnis resurrectione* 6: "The shape that the slime of the earth was given was intended with a view to Christ, the future man.": P. 2, 282; CSEL 47, p. 33, 1. 12-13.

21. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:4.

22. Cf. Second Council of Constantinople, canon 7: "The divine Word was not changed into a human nature, nor was a human nature absorbed by the Word." Denzinger 219 (428); Cf. also Third Council of Constantinople: "For just as His most holy and immaculate human nature, though deified, was not destroyed (*theotheisa ouk anerethe*), but rather remained in its proper state and mode of being": Denzinger 291 (556); Cf. Council of Chalcedon: "to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion change, division, or separation." Denzinger 148 (302).

23. Cf. Third Council of Constantinople: "and so His human will, though deified, is not destroyed": Denzinger 291 (556).

24. Cf. Heb. 4:15.

25. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-19; Col. 1:20-22.

26. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:21; Matt. 16:24; Luke 14:27.

27. Cf. Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:10-14.

28. Cf. Rom. 8:1-11.

29. Cf. 2 Cor. 4:14.

30. Cf. Phil. 3:19; Rom. 8:17.

31. Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Chapter 2, n. 16: AAS 57 (1965), p. 20.

32. Cf. Rom. 8:32.

33. Cf. The Byzantine Easter Liturgy.

34. Cf. Rom. 8:15 and Gal. 4:6; cf. also John 1:22 and John 3:1-2.

Appendix B: Session 9, St. Teresa of Avila
100 Themes on Her Life and Work, 46. Christological Formation

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1. Given The centrality of the mystery of Christ in St. Teresa’s life and doctrine, it is important to highlight the most notable milestones in her Christological formation. Certainly the first seeds germinated in her early childhood. Among the household objects in the inventory made by Don Alonso was a larger-than-life oil painting of Jesus seated at the well in Sychar conversing with the Samaritan woman. After the death of Don Alonso, Teresa brought the precious painting with her to the Incarnation. From the time she was young — she assures us — every night before going to bed she spent some time thinking about the scene of Jesus praying in the garden. Probably this custom came from her first Christological readings in the *Flos Sanctorum*, which in the first introductory pages there was a translation of the gospels on the passion of Christ — Monotéssaron — and which were illustrated with a series of twenty drawings, among which figured one, really impressive, of Jesus praying in the garden. Yet even before these readings, Teresa was introduced to the most fundamental truths of the mystery of Christ through the primers and catechisms of her early Christian formation. In them she learned the fourteen articles of the faith, “the seven final ones pertain to the sacred humanity (of the Lord”). They made her memorize them, beginning with the first which is “to believe that the Son of God was conceived by the blessed Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Spirit and not like us: more miraculously!” So they continued until the seventh article, on his return at “the end of the world.” Highlighted in the third article is his passion and death, which Teresa from an early age celebrated with emotion in the Holy Week processions.

2. Nonetheless, the real manual of christological formation was a book from the later middle ages translated from the Latin and known to her with the Castilian designation “the Carthusian.” It was four large volumes written by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony with the title *The Life of Christ*. It spread throughout Europe from its numerous incunabular editions. It was translated into Castilian at the end of the 15th century and adapted for Spanish readers by the Franciscan Ambrosio Montesino, who published the four volumes in Alcalá at the beginning of the 16th century with a total of 1320 pages. The work consisted of two parts, the first of which presented the life of Jesus from his preexistence in the bosom of the Father to the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida. The second part, went from the messianic profession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi up to the sending of the Holy Spirit. Teresa when already a Carmelite nun, had at her disposal in St. Joseph’s the four volumes, and was accustomed to having them with her on days of retreat in the hermitage of Nazareth or that of Christ at the pillar. We do not know if she read the more than a thousand pages of the book by Ludolph-Montesino, but certainly, given the Castilian structure of the work and given its precious content, *The Carthusian* was highly suggested by the contemplative sampling of Teresa the reader.

3. In her Castilian version the book contained a long exposition and meditation of the whole history of Jesus. Always for its basis it included the corresponding biblical text, highlighted by major type to differentiate it from the commentary. The most important section of the work

centered on the steps of the Passion of the Lord (volume 4). The book presents them as a dramatic liturgical sequence, from what occurred at Compline on Holy Thursday, passing through Matins of that night, until what occurred at the hours of Tierce, Sext, and None and Vespers of Friday. Most important for a reader like Teresa was that each episode or each commentary concluded always with a touching prayer to the Lord for the purpose of reaching his person and entering into his mystery. It was the terminal contemplative moment of each section.

4. The entire book was preceded by a preamble of the author in which he imparted to the readers an introductory base with some keys for reading, meditation, and contemplation. These nineteen pages constitute a kind of little, introductory treatise not only for the comprehensive reading of the book but for access to the mystery of Jesus, based on eight premises, which are first stated and then developed at length. It is enough here to repeat this series of the eight premises.

- That in the practice of virtues, and in every perfect life, Jesus Christ alone is the true foundation.
- For people to exercise themselves in the life and contemplation of the Redeemer is something very beneficial for seven reasons.
- The preeminence of the life of Christ contemplated and lived. It is one of the great benefits that those receive who occupy themselves in the contemplation and guarding of it.
- An industriousness about contemplating without error the life of Christ.
- A brief summary of the exterior conditions of Jesus Christ and his properties.
- The perfection and beauty of the arrangement of the face and members of the Son of God.
- The excellence of the holy Gospels over all the other sacred scriptures.
- The discord and difference of some things present between the four evangelists is real concord.

5. We will highlight only a few of the data that undoubtedly influenced Teresa's Christological attitude. Above all, *the industriousness to contemplate*, proposed in the fourth premise. It is summed up in a precious instruction: "With all the affection of your soul, with diligent and delightful fervor, holding yourself in the contemplation of these mysteries with some delay, leaving aside all other cares, be present to these things that were said and done by the Savior as though with your own ears you heard them and with your own eyes saw them; for they are very sweet to the one who thinks of them with desire and more to the one who tastes them. And therefore, even though many of them are counted as past, examine them as though you thought they were all present to you, because in that way you will undoubtedly taste a greater sweetness and read the things that have already taken place as though they were being done now; and fix your eyes on past facts as though they were present; and thus you will find the

mysteries of Christ to be more pleasant. "This was all a program of Christological prayer that Teresa put into practice in her own way of prayer.

6. The introduction insists especially on the beauty of the face of Christ: this is the theme of the sixth premise, which proposes to the contemplative "the face, form, and figure of our Redeemer (in a manner that] you can conjecture his acts deeds, and customs." And with true mime transcribe the portrait of Jesus, taken from the presumed letter of Publius Lentulus ad Tiberium Caesarem, which probably had already been read by Teresa in the preamble to the *Flos Sanctorum*. It is said that she transported it to her mystical experience: "The vision of Christ left upon me an impression of his most extraordinary beauty, and the impression remains today" (L 37.4).

7. Nevertheless, it was not the details but the mass of Christological data contained in the work that gave Teresa an incomparable Christological introduction. The Carthusian brought to the reader one by one all the biblical texts referring to Jesus. This book by the Carthusian is an immense Christological spirituality. Perhaps this is the reason why Teresa includes the book in the list of indispensable books for the libraries of her Carmels (C. 8).

Appendix C, Session 9, St. Teresa of Avila
100 Themes on Her Life and Work, 98. Jesus and His Sacred Humanity

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Teresa is not a theologian by profession. In her writings there is no treatise, not even a sketch, on christology. Yet in her life as in her work we have a case of panchristianity comparable to that of St. Paul or St. Francis of Assisi.

1. Perhaps in no other aspect of her spiritual life did Teresa have the fortune of a formation so rich and complete. As we already noted, in her childhood she had the luck of reading the primer pages of the *Flos Sanctorum*, the Castilian version of Gerson's *Monatésseron*, which offered her the text of the Passion according to the four Gospels, illustrated with a series of vignettes capable of having a strong impact on the sensitivity of the child Teresa. Later, as an adult, she likewise had the fortune of being formed by reading the best and most copious *Life of Christ* by the Carthusian, following step by step the history of Jesus and the biblical texts of both Testaments alluding to him. Each chapter was crowned by an emotive and absorbing prayer. Teresa will follow, moreover, in her religious life the daily course of the liturgy with frequent reading of the Gospels.

2. In the process of her spiritual life there occurred two moments of christological experience. There preceded a period of popular piety. Teresa cultivated a devotion to certain passages from the Passion, such as the prayer in the garden, or she imitates the gestures of the women in the gospels, like the Samaritan woman or the Magdalene, she relives imaginatively the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, she unites with the Blessed Virgin in her transfixion at the foot of the cross. Still at the end of her life, on the occasion of the foundation in Burgos, she pauses before entering the city to venerate an image of the Holy Christ. Her christological piety of popular inspiration endured and coexisted with the most lofty experiences of her mystical life. Nonetheless, this second period is much stronger, all brilliant with experiences of a christological mark. During more than 25 years, Teresa lived a long time of strict personal relationship with Jesus Christ, her model, her Bridegroom and Lord. It is impossible to give the history of Teresa without fixing the outstanding milestones of this christological experience.

3. The mystery of Jesus. For a contemplative like her, Jesus is an unfathomable mystery. He is the thicket of the mystery of God made human. He is the book where she saw the truths. He exceeds her pen in any of her exclamations: "Oh, our Emperor, supreme Goodness, Wisdom itself, without beginning, without end, without any limit to your works; they are infinite and incomprehensible, a fathomless sea of marvels, with a beauty containing all beauty, strength itself! ..." (WP 22.6). It is not easy to follow Teresa in her breakdown of the mystery of Jesus. We can only highlight the more relevant facets.

a) Above all, for her Jesus is the *servant of Yahweh*: she is amazed by the mystery of his lowering of himself. He "had no house but the stable in Bethlehem where he was born and the cross where he died" (WP 2.9). At the end of the *Interior Castle* she will recall his condition of slave (IC 7.4.8): "there is no slave who would willingly say he is a slave, and yet it seems that

Jesus is honored to be one" (WP 33.4). Her hair stands on end with only the thought of the humiliation of His Majesty in the Eucharist (L 38.19). In one of her soliloquies she is amazed at the depth of the Trinitarian mystery and has the boldness to address the Eternal Father and ask him how it is possible that he consented to it: "But you Eternal Father, how is it that you consented?" And again, "O eternal Lord! Why do you accept such a petition? Why do you consent to it? Don't look at his love for us . . . for he allows himself to be crushed to pieces each day" (WP 33.3-4).

b) Servant yet Majesty. The sovereignty of Jesus is something that was not able to be diluted in his abasement, nor in the mystery of the intimacy of his communion with Teresa: "O my Lord! O my King! Who now would know how to represent your majesty! It's impossible not to see that you in yourself are a great Emperor, for to behold your majesty is startling and the more one beholds along with this majesty, Lord, your humility and the love you show. . ." (L 37.6). In one of her autobiographical confidences in the *Way of Perfection* she tells her readers of the "special delight" she feels at the recitation of the words "your kingdom shall have no end" (WP 22.1).

c) He is the absolute beauty. Teresa's christological experience is marked by this aesthetic factor. She doesn't tire of proclaiming his beauty (L 28.1-3). Only in seeing him "left upon me an impression of his most extraordinary beauty, and the impression remains today" (L 37.4). She dedicates one of her poems to singing of it: "Oh Beauty exceeding/ all other beauties."

d) He is the Master. Teresa not only tastes each word pronounced by him in the Gospel, but in her mystical experience relives this discipleship. "There is no knowledge or any kind of gift that I think could amount to anything when placed alongside of what it is to hear just one word spoken from that divine mouth" (L 37.4). Teresa had written in her breviary the words of the Master: "Learn of me for I am meek and humble!" They served as a permanent reminder each time she opened the book for prayer that Jesus is the absolute model.

e) Yet above all, he is the Bridegroom. She identified him with the Bridegroom of the *Song of Songs*. He is the *Christ of love*. And she was enamored of him as the biblical bride who dares to repeat: "Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth." "O my Lord and my God, and what words are these that a worm speaks them to its Creator! . . . But who will dare, my King, utter these words without your permission? The thought is frightening" (M 1.10). Yet at the same time Teresa dares to write a poem of loving power: "If the love You have for me,/ Is like the love I have for You. . ." Precisely for this reason, in the *Interior Castle* she presents the height of the Christian life as a bridal fact! The summit of the Christian life is the supreme love on the part of both lovers, Christ and the soul.

4. The problem of the Humanity of Christ Dramatically lived by Teresa, it served to put to the test her gospel realism. Through *the Humanity of Jesus* she understands his gospel history, his Passion, his works and words, divine and human joined, yet historically realized in his human condition, including his body, first capable of suffering and then risen. It happened that there reached her the old spiritualist current, of neo-platonic origin, according to which high contemplation, that is, the perfect life of the Christian, became so spiritual, even to the point of excluding or passing beyond everything corporeal, so that only the spirit remained: to the exclusion as a result of the humanity of Jesus. Teresa after a brief period of wavering in which,

badly counseled, she ceded to this doctrine, but then reacted against it with all her energy. “I cannot endure it,” she exclaims. She couldn’t bear that there be even a moment in the spiritual life in which one intends to avoid the humanity of Jesus. This time she reasons her thesis like a theologian by profession and arrives at the certain conclusion that all our good comes to us through the humanity of Christ. She dares to propose it as an irrevocable postulate to the theologian reader of the *Life* (22.18), and years later she repeats it with energy in the *Interior Castle* (IC 6.7.15). This is undoubtedly is the strongest position taken theologically by Teresa.

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Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites
Formation II
Year C
Story of a Soul
(The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux)



"I feel how powerless I am to express in human language the secrets of heaven, and after writing page upon page I find that I have not yet begun. There are so many different horizons, so many nuances of infinite variety that only the palette of the Celestial Painter will be able to furnish me after the night of this life with the colors capable of depicting the marvels He reveals to the eye of my soul."

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Manuscript B. pg. 296

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**California-Arizona Province of St. Joseph · Oklahoma Semi-Province of St. Thérèse
Washington Province of the Immaculate Heart of Mary**

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Introduction to Formation II

(Members who have made the First Promise)

Formation II is in preparation for the Definitive Promise and takes a minimum of three years, and in some instances, due to discernment by the candidate and the community's council, may take longer. The purpose of this period of formation is to prepare the candidate to maturely make a lifetime commitment to living the Discalced Carmelite charism as expressed in the OCDS Constitutions. Deepening union with God in interior prayer should lead the candidate to grow in virtue, in the desire to serve others, and in faithfulness to the Evangelical Counsels and Beatitudes. Growth in community life continues to be an important aspect of formation. Because this period leads to the Definitive Promise, serious ongoing discernment of the vocation by the Council and the candidate is crucial during this time.

Candidate responsibilities:

- The candidate will strive to be consistent in the practices begun in earlier stages of formation and be faithful to the Promise made at the end of Formation I. (The noted references are not exhaustive; there are many others throughout the Constitutions, Provincial Statutes, and Ratio.)
- Attend and participate in monthly community meetings and formation sessions. (see Const. 24.b,c)
- Be conscientious in the study and internalization of assigned material and topics. (see Const. 24.d and 32-34)
- Continue to study and strive to live the OCDS Constitutions and Statutes. (see Const. Preface)
- Develop the habit of reading Church documents, especially those addressed to the laity. (see Const. 19 and Ratio 80)
- Read and reflect on Sacred Scripture regularly. (see Const. 19 and Ratio 15)
- Practice silent prayer (remain in God's presence with loving attention) daily for at least half an hour. (see Ratio 20-21, 90)
- Pray Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. Pray Night Prayer if possible. (see Const. 6.d and 23-24)
- Participate in daily Mass as far as possible. (see Const. 6.d and 23-24)
- Continue the habit of daily examination of conscience (commonly included as part of Night Prayer).
- Fast on the vigils of the Carmelite feasts listed in the Provincial Statutes.
- Participate in the community apostolate. (see Const. 26)
- Share in the duties and responsibilities of the community as assigned by the local council. (see Const. 15)
- Participate in community retreats and days of recollection. (see Const. 24.d)
- Most importantly, continue to strive for Christ-like charity toward all in the community, in the family, and in daily life. (1 Cor. 13)

The Specific Guidelines for Formation

It is important to keep clearly in mind the purpose of formation in Carmel and to strike a balance between “head” and “heart.”

- “Number 32 of the Constitutions states that the purpose of formation is ‘to prepare the person to live the [charism and] spirituality of Carmel.’ This sentence of the Constitutions gives a very important emphasis to the purpose of formation, indicating those elements that are not the priorities in the progress of Carmel of formation. The purpose of the formation program is not to produce experts in Carmelite spirituality, nor to obtain a university degree in spirituality or spiritual theology” (Ratio Institutionis 4).
- “The purpose is to ‘prepare the person.’ The stress on the person who is to be prepared helps the formation community understand that the process must be directed to the individual in a concrete way. The people who come to the Secular Order of Carmel are, with few exceptions, people who have many commitments, especially with families and with work. The program of formation must be flexible enough to adapt to the circumstances of each person who is to become a member” (Ratio 5).
- “...The primary role of the person responsible for formation ... is to **accompany** those in formation, to help them put into practice what they learn through the process of formation. The information they are given through reading and classes is meant to be a help to the person’s spiritual growth” (Ratio 7). [emphasis added]
- “...With a progression suitable to the various stages, the candidate should get a clearer idea of how important, indeed necessary, our charism is for [one’s] personal life...” (Ratio 23).
- “The spirituality of the Discalced Carmelites has a sound intellectual foundation. As members of the Order, Secular Carmelites are called to represent and give witness to a mature and authentic spirituality. Any person who wants to be a Discalced Carmelite must be a person with interest in learning from the teachers of Carmel. There are three Doctors of the universal Church, Teresa, John of the Cross, and Therese” (Ratio 78).
- “There is an intellectual aspect to the formation of a Discalced Carmelite. There is a doctrinal basis to the spirituality and identity of one who is called to the Order. As the friars and nuns, the seculars too ought to have a good intellectual and doctrinal formation since as members of the Order they represent and witness to a mature and profound spirituality” (Ratio 79).

“The directors [formators] should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls in this matter, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one. Thus, the whole concern of the directors [formators] should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one...”

(The Living Flame of Love, Stanza 3:46)

Introduction to Year C

Note: Unless otherwise stated, all page numbers refer to Story of a Soul, Study Edition, published by ICS, 2005.

This year the candidates are expected to learn how to integrate Carmelite spirituality into their lives as lay persons. They give daily witness in their family and social life to “an integrated approach to life that is fully brought about by the inspiration and strength of the Gospel” (Epilogue — OCDS Constitutions).

The teachings of St. Thérèse and her Gospel message exemplify the spirit of an integrated approach to holiness in one’s daily life. “I understand and I know from experience that: ‘The kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21). Jesus has no need of books or doctors to instruct souls; He, the Doctor of doctors, teaches without the noise of words. ... I find just when I need them certain lights that I had not seen until then, and it isn’t most frequently during my hours of prayer that these are most abundant but rather **in the midst of my daily occupations**” (pg. 276-277). [emphasis added]

In Year C of Formation II, candidates are introduced to “the greatest Saint of modern times,” St. Thérèse of Lisieux, OCD. Her Story of a Soul is read and studied as the central document from Thérèse’s own hand describing her life and spirituality. The autobiography contributed to her cause for canonization and helped establish her as a Doctor of the Church. The Study Edition provides additional background and context. “Story of a Soul has a power to enkindle devotion in the will because Thérèse’s pen was guided by the living spirit of God” (pg. 36).

“If we read Story of a Soul carefully, we can see the inner process of Thérèse’s mind at work. ... the topic imperceptibly shifts from one subject to another... We should not interpret this linking of thoughts that we see in Story of a Soul as merely a process of free association. Rather it is a stream of consciousness guided by the mind of God [cf. pg. 276-277]” (pg. 34-35).

Early in her community life, Thérèse fervently read and practiced the ascetical teachings of Our Holy Father, St. John of the Cross. She writes, “Ah! How many lights have I not drawn from the works of our holy father, St. John of the Cross! At the ages of seventeen and eighteen I had no other spiritual nourishment” (pg. 276). In the Ascent of Mount Carmel, John counsels on how to overcome inordinate attachments and begin to make progress on the path to spiritual maturity. He teaches, “**First**, have a habitual desire to imitate Christ in all your deeds by bringing your life into conformity with His. You must then study his life in order to know how to imitate Him and behave in all events as he would” (A.I.13:3). **Second**, in order to be successful in this imitation, renounce and remain empty of any sensory satisfaction *that is not purely for the honor and glory of God*. Do this out of love for Jesus Christ (see A. I, 13:4). [emphasis added]

Following the tradition of Carmel and the teachings of St. John of the Cross, Thérèse embraced the life of Jesus. This encounter with the person of Jesus gave her a new horizon and a decisive direction. Thérèse discovered that “The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain *little* and become this more and more” (pg. 329). The soul that places itself in the hands of Jesus will receive the graces it needs to carry out its daily tasks according to God’s will.

Every encounter in her daily life, whether in the laundry room or in the chapel, was an encounter with Jesus. “Thérèse shows us that within our ordinary life — going to work in our cars or on the subway, doing our taxes, getting our children ready for school, fixing meals — we can find the mysterious exchanges between ourselves and God in prayer and meditation, no matter how brief or hurried. She reveals the hidden works of love that go on daily, not in some special precious time, but in the ordinary everyday time. Thérèse poses a tremendous threat because she brings hidden mystic life out into the open and says, in effect, here it is for the taking, for all of us, not just the specially gifted, but all of us, each with our own gifts” (Experiencing Saint Thérèse Today, pg. 141).

In this respect, Thérèse follows the teachings of Our Holy Mother St. Teresa. “Know that if it is in the kitchen, the Lord walks among the pots and pans helping you both interiorly and exteriorly” (The Foundations, 5:8).

Thérèse’s life clearly demonstrates that there cannot be two parallel lives in one’s existence: “on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture. The branch, engrafted to the vine, which is Christ, bears its fruit in every sphere of existence and activity” (Christifideles Laici, 57).

Thérèse’s teachings show clearly that “every area of the lay faithful’s lives, as different as they are, enters into the plan of God, who desires that these very areas be the ‘places in time’ where the love of Christ is revealed and realized for both the glory of the Father and service of others. Every activity, every situation, every precise responsibility—as, for example, skill and solidarity in work, love and dedication in the family and the education of children, service to society and public life and the promotion of truth in the area of culture—are **the occasions ordained by Providence for a ‘continuous exercise of faith, hope and charity’**” (Christifideles Laici, 57). [emphasis added]

“Thérèse, the serious teenager, did not think like a dualist. Spontaneously, naturally, somehow, she perceived the unity of the complex condition of the human being; and she knew that Christic redemption addressed the whole ‘ball of wax’ in a hopeful way...Grace builds on nature. Grace is for the personal integration of nature with the theological and moral virtues so that the human being, fully alive, might become the ‘glory of God... Deep down Thérèse was an optimist, a synthesist, and an **integrationist**. Jesus Christ, God and man, is the ultimate model of all **integration**” (*Thérèse and Maturity: Prophetess of the Shift from the Perfection Model to the Integration Model*, Sam Anthony Morello, OCD, Appendix A). [emphasis added]

Consequently, “the world becomes the place and the means for lay faithful to fulfill their Christian vocation, because the world itself is destined to glorify God the Father in Christ... They are not called to abandon the position that they have in the world. Baptism [or vocation to Carmel] does not take them from the world at all, as the apostle Paul points out: ‘So, brethren, in whatever state each was called, there let him remain with God’ (1 Cor 7:24)” (Christifideles Laici, *The lay faithful and their secular character*, 15).

Mission

From the beginning, Carmelite spirituality has had an apostolic side that overflows with missionary fervor. Carmel has never separated the apostolic from the contemplative life.

The Prophet Elijah “who was afire with zeal for the Lord of hosts” had never ceased to lead the people of Israel to believe in the true God. St. John of the Cross sings his heart out in the joy of spreading the Good News: “I’ll go and tell the world/spreading the Word of your beauty/and sweetness and of your sovereignty” (The Poetry. *Romance* 9, 7. *The Incarnation*, pg. 67. The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross) “The observation of St. Teresa that the purpose of prayer is ‘the birth of good works’ reminds the Secular Order that graces received ought to have an effect on those who receive them. Individually or as a community and above all as members of the Church, apostolic activity is the fruit of prayer” (OCDS Constitutions, 26).

Following the tradition of Carmel, St. Thérèse took the missionary spirit to a new level. She burned with the desire to be a doctor, a missionary, a priest, an apostle and more. Can one person be **all** in Thérèse’s vocabulary? Thérèse shows the way. She goes on to describe the marvelous discovery of her vocation that overflows from the touch of a contemplative fervor of “love.” “Charity gave me the key to my vocation. ... I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS, THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING... O Jesus, my Love...my vocation, at last I have found it...MY VOCATION IS LOVE! ... **Thus I shall be everything, and thus my dream will be realized**” (pg. 302). [emphasis added]

Thérèse’s discovery of “love” demonstrates that all the soul’s desires are fulfilled within the context of the life-giving waters of contemplation and union with God. “Taking into account the origins of Carmel and the Teresian charism, [one of] the fundamental elements of the vocation of Teresian Secular Carmelites [is] **‘to seek mysterious union with God’** by way of contemplation and apostolic activity, indissolubly joined together, for service to the Church ...” (see OCDS Constitutions, 9). [emphasis added]

“THE SCIENCE OF DIVINE LOVE, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom, hidden from the learned and the wise. Shining brightly among the little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way in Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, a professed Nun of the Order of Discalced Carmelites.”

Apostolic Letter of His Holiness Pope St. John Paul II
Divini Amoris Scientia

About the Syllabus

Required Reading:

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Story of a Soul, Study Edition. Prepared by Marc Foley, OCD, ICS Publications, 2005

Selected passages from The Context of Holiness (in the appendices)

Additional Reading:

The Context of Holiness. Marc Foley, OCD, ICS Publications, 2008

The Love That Keeps Us Sane: Living the Little Way of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Marc Foley, OCD, Paulist Press, 2000

Carmelite Studies: Experiencing St. Thérèse Today. John Sullivan, OCD, Editor. ICS Publications, 2002

The Poetry of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Translated by Donald Kinney, OCD, ICS Publications, 1996

The Prayers of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux. Translated by Aletheia Kane, OCD, ICS Publications, 1997

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Her Last Conversations. Translated from the original manuscripts by John Clarke, OCD, ICS Publications, 1977

Biography/Books on St. Thérèse of Lisieux:

The Story of a Life: St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Guy Gaucher, OCD, Ignatius Press, 2020,

With Empty Hands, the Message of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Conrad de Meester, OCD, ICS Publications, 2002.

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux: Doctor of the Universal Church. Steven Payne, OCD, Alba House, 2002.

Note: “Additional reading” is intended for personal enrichment and is not required.

Note to the formator regarding “Essential points to discuss”: The candidates and formator are expected to read and reflect on the materials and ponder the essential points prior to the monthly formation sessions. **However, it would not be practical to try to discuss every point during the session. It is preferable to choose several points for in-depth discussion.** It is good practice to discuss those points which make a personal impression on the participants.

Because formator participation is crucial to the candidates’ formation, good preparation is indispensable. After the opening prayer and the discussion of the legislations, formators are encouraged to take about 10-15 minutes at the beginning of the session to talk about the session theme, the assigned reading, and a brief review of the points to be discussed before moving on to the discussion itself.

Studying the OCDS Legislations: Unless the community is studying these materials together, it is appropriate for each session to begin with ten minutes of discussion on some selection of the OCDS legislations or documents of the Order, as determined by the local Council.

Session One: The Mercies of the Lord

Required Reading: Prologue, pg. 1-9; Chronology, pg. 439-450; Story of a Soul, Chapters I and II (pg. 34-45 and 67-79 are not required)

Additional Reading: Introduction pg. viii-xxiii; Story of a Soul interpretive notes pg. 34-45 and 67-79. Homily of Pope Pius XI at the Canonization of St. Thérèse on May 17, 1925 (Appendix B); Bull of Canonization (Appendix C)

Explanatory note:

Thérèse does not give a systematic presentation on prayer. Rather, she teaches by telling stories of her life. In sharing her life, she is writing a personal treatise on grace and the human heart's longing for God. Hence, she moves chronologically from childhood to young womanhood, reflecting on the merciful love that shaped her ongoing years. In Story of a Soul, Thérèse identifies three separate periods of her life prior to her entrance to Carmel. The **first period** extends from the dawn of her reason until her mother's passing when Thérèse was four (see pg. 17). The **second period** of her life — which she describes as the most painful of the three — covers separation from her sisters, her timid and sensitive personality, and her illness and eventual cure. The **third period** of her life begins with her "Christmas conversion" just after midnight Mass 1886. She describes this period as the "most beautiful and most filled with graces from heaven" (pg. 153).

Thérèse chooses to look at her life through the lens of what God has done for her rather than what she has done or failed to do: "I am going to write about my thoughts on the graces God deigned to grant me" (pg. 15). Throughout Story of a Soul, Thérèse muses upon her life from the vantage point of how God has graced it. Hence, she chooses to do only one thing: "I shall begin to sing what I must sing eternally: The mercies of the Lord" (pg. 13). "The truth contained in Thérèse's words is not that God sends more blessings when we are grateful **but rather that we become more aware of the abundant blessings** that we have" (pg. 37). [emphasis added]

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Thérèse's concept of God is a God of Merciful Love, of Fatherly kindness. The French Catholic practice of offering oneself as a "victim soul" to God's justice for the sake of holding back His wrath from sinners was very familiar to Thérèse. In the opening pages of Story of a Soul, God is symbolized as the sun who gazes down lovingly upon His people: "Just as the sun shines simultaneously on the tall cedars and on each little flower as though it were alone on the earth, so our Lord is occupied particularly with each soul as though there were no others like it" (pg. 15).
- "To me the Lord has always been 'merciful and good, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love'" (Ps. 102:8). Thérèse knows that nothing in herself is capable of attracting the divine glances, and His mercy alone brings about everything that is good in her (see pg. 16).
- "Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be" (pg. 15). This concept of perfection is in no way related to "perfectionism" which is the state of *being*

driven to achieve a standard of perfection for the sake of others' approval or a fear of failure. "Perfectionism" is rooted in the ego, whereas the perfection God calls souls to is rooted in love of Him and a desire to conform only to what pleases Him (see pg. 40-41). As Our Holy Father says, in his life Jesus had no other gratification, nor desired any other, than the fulfillment of his Father's will, which he called his meat and food (Jn. 4:34) (Ascent, I, 13:4).

- One can come to peace when one accepts the unique person that God has called one to be. Thérèse conveys this truth in her analogy of the garden. "I understood how all the flowers He has created are beautiful, how the splendor of the rose and the whiteness of the Lily do not take away from the perfume of the little violet or the simplicity of the daisy. I understood that if all flowers wanted to be roses, nature would lose her springtime beauty. And the fields would no longer be decked out with little wildflowers. And so it is in the world of souls, Jesus' garden. He wills to create great souls comparable to Lilies and roses, but he has created smaller ones and these must be content to be daisies or violets destined to give joy to God's glances when He looks down at his feet. Perfection consists in doing His will, in being what He wills us to be" (pg. 14-15).
- Of the several incidents from her childhood that Thérèse recounts in chapter 1, the most significant is the time Thérèse took the whole basket that her elder sister Leonie put before her and Celine. "This little incident of my childhood is a summary of my whole life; later on when perfection was set before me, I understood that to become a *saint* one had to suffer much, seek out always the most perfect thing to do, and forget self. I understood, too, there were many degrees of perfection and each soul was free to respond to the advances of Our Lord, to do little or much for Him, in a word, to choose among the sacrifices He was asking. Then, as in the days of my childhood, I cried out: My God 'I choose all!' I don't want to be a *saint by halves*. I am not afraid to suffer for You. I fear only one thing: to keep my *own will*; so take it, for 'I choose all' that you will" (pg. 30). Choose! Thérèse emphasizes this word several times in the above passage because choosing is a central reality of life.
- **Describing the first period of her life:** "Oh, everything truly smiled upon me on this earth: I found flowers under each of my steps and my happy disposition contributed much to making life pleasant, but a new period was about to commence for my soul. I had to pass through the crucible of trial and to suffer from my childhood in order to be offered earlier to Jesus. Just as the flowers of spring begin to grow under the snow and to expand in the first rays of the sun, so the little flower whose memories I am writing had to pass through the winter of trial" (pg. 33).
- **Describing the second period of her life:** "I must admit, Mother [Pauline], my happy disposition completely changed after Mama's death. I, once so full of life, became timid and retiring, sensitive to an excessive degree. One look was enough to reduce me to tears, and the only way I was content was to be left alone completely. I could not bear the company of strangers and found my joy only within the intimacy of the family" (pg. 49).

Passages for meditation and points for personal reflection:

Thérèse puts John of the Cross' teachings on meditation into practice: The following passage from the Ascent is closely related to Thérèse's meditations below:

In order to advance, spiritual persons should divest themselves from sensory satisfaction — for the pure spirit is bound to none of these objects but turns only to interior recollection and mental communion with God. Although they derive profit from images and oratories, this is very transitory, for their spirit is immediately elevated to God in forgetfulness of all sensory objects.

(see Ascent III, 39:1)

“They were beautiful days for me, those days when my ‘dear king’ [her father] took me fishing with him. I was very fond of my countryside, flowers, birds, etc. Sometimes I would try to fish with my little line, but I preferred to go alone and sit down on the grass bedecked with flowers, and **then my thoughts became very profound indeed! Without knowing what it was to meditate, my soul was absorbed in real prayer.** I listened to distant sounds, the murmuring of the wind, etc. At times, the indistinct notes of some military music reached me where I was, filling my heart with a sweet melancholy. **Earth then seemed to be a place of exile and I could dream only of heaven**” (pg. 52). [emphasis added]

“When we were on the way home, I would gaze upon stars that were twinkling ever so peacefully in the skies and the sight carried me away. There was especially one cluster of golden pearls that attracted my attention and gave me great joy because they were in the form of a -T-. I pointed them out to Papa and told him my name was written in heaven. Then desiring to look no longer upon this dull earth, I asked him to guide my steps; and not looking where I placed my feet, I threw back my head, **giving myself over completely to contemplation of the star-studded firmament!**” (pg. 59). [emphasis added]

“I was six or seven years old when Papa brought us to Trouville. Never will I forget the impression the sea made upon me; I couldn't take my eyes off it since its majesty, the roaring of its waves, **everything spoke to my soul of God's grandeur and power...**When the sun seems to bathe itself in the immensity of the waves, leaving a *luminous trail* behind... I contemplated this luminous trail for a long time. **It was to me the image of God's grace** shedding its light across the path the little white-sailed vessel had to travel. ... **I made a resolution never to wander far away from the glance of Jesus in order to travel peacefully toward the eternal shore!**” (pg. 65-66). [emphasis added]

Private Reflection: Is there some unrealistic or unhealthy goal that you are pursuing that is depriving you of happiness and peace? (pg. 42)

Private Reflection: Like Thérèse, every day we are confronted with choices either to love or not to love; we too are “free to respond to the advances of the Lord, to do little or much for Him.” Like Thérèse, the choices that are set before us in daily life summarize who we are, for each of us is a composite of the choices that we make.

What made Thérèse a saint was that she chose to love the people whom God placed upon her path, those to whom she was attracted and those who repelled her.

Who are the people in your life who are difficult to love? In what ways can you choose to love these people whom God has entrusted to your care? (pg. 43).

Private Reflection: Like all of us, Thérèse was afraid of leaving the safe harbor of her life, but as we will see, she chose to do God's will in spite of her fears [and losses]. When you look back upon your life, have you ever stood in amazement that you survived a devastating loss? Have you ever experienced God's love in the midst of your deepest darkness? (pg. 77).

Session Two: Separation and transition

Required Reading: Story of A Soul, Chapters III and IV, including the explanations on pp. 99-111 and 140-148.

Explanatory note:

Chapters III and IV of the Story of a Soul cover Thérèse's school years; the entrance of Pauline (whom Thérèse considered a second mother) into the monastery of Lisieux; Thérèse's First Communion, Confirmation; and finally, another separation — Marie's decision to enter Carmel.

Pauline's departure was a traumatic experience for Thérèse. "It was as if a sword were buried in my heart" (pg. 87). She fell sick and was bedridden with nervous tremblings, followed by seizures of fright and hallucinations.

On Pentecost Sunday, while she was gazing at a statue of Our Lady, she was miraculously cured by the Blessed Virgin but remained fragile.

Adding to her misery was the nuns' misinterpretation of the Virgin's "smile." "It was her **countenance alone** that had struck me, and seeing that the Carmelites had imagined something else entirely (my spiritual trials beginning already with regard to my sickness), I thought I had lied...I was unable to look upon myself without a feeling of profound horror. Ah, what I suffered I shall not be able to say except in heaven" (pg. 98).

Thérèse could observe later in her life that through these painful daily encounters, her soul matured "like a flower strengthened by the storm... I find myself at a period in my life when I can cast a glance on the past; my soul has matured in the crucible of exterior and interior trial" (pg. 15).

"... my soul was FAR from being mature, and I was to pass through many crucibles of suffering before attaining the end I so much desired" (pg. 89).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- When Thérèse was eight years old, she began attending the Benedictine boarding school for girls in Lisieux. School was a painful experience for Thérèse because she had to leave the familiar surroundings of her home and face the real world of children. She was not too happy dancing quadrilles with children. Instead, she was happy playing "hermits" with her cousin, Marie Guerin.
- When Thérèse overheard the news that Pauline was about to leave her home, she was overwhelmed by the sadness of the human condition. It was a devastating blow to Thérèse. "Pauline was going to leave me... I was about to lose my second Mother! Ah! How can I express the anguish of my heart! In one instant, I understood what life was; until then, I had never seen it so sad; but it appeared to me in all its reality, and I saw it was nothing but a continual suffering and separation" (pg. 88). Pauline's departure is a real "Dark Night" experience for Thérèse.

- "... there are flaws in every human connection; that our status on this planet is implacably impermanent; and that we are utterly powerless to offer ourselves, or those we love protection — protection from danger and pain, from the inroads of time, from the coming of age, from the coming of death; protection from our necessary losses. These losses are a part of life — universal, unavoidable, inexorable. And these losses are necessary because we grow by losing and leaving and letting go" (pg. 103). [emphasis added]
- A year after her cure, when Thérèse was preparing to make her First Holy Communion, her sister Marie "explained the way of becoming holy through fidelity in little things" (see pg. 117) which became an important element of Thérèse's "little way."
- "Fidelity in little things is attending to the life as we find it and loving the people that God has placed upon our path. ... Thérèse was aware of the temptation to flee from the hard work that love demands by escaping into dreams of glory, of which St. Teresa of Avila writes: 'The devil gives us great desires so that we will avoid setting ourselves to the task at hand, serving our Lord in possible things, and instead be content with having desired the impossible'" (IC. VII. 4:14; pg. 146).
- Thérèse had great desire to serve God by means of heroic deeds like Joan of Arc; but she came to understand that her "own glory would not be evident to the eyes of mortals, that it would consist in becoming a great saint" (pg. 115) through a life of love lived out in the shadows — practicing the ordinary virtues. Such is the call of every Christian.
- Thérèse's reception of First Communion was an experience of profound union with God. "I felt that I was loved...for a long time now Jesus and poor little Thérèse looked at and understood each other. That day, it was no longer simply a look, it was a fusion; they were no longer two, Thérèse had vanished as a drop of water is lost in the immensity of the ocean" (pg. 121).
- One expression of God's mercy that Thérèse became conscious of (after her First Communion) was the realization of God's protective love in her life (see pg. 140). "I know that without Him, I could have fallen as low as St. Mary Magdalene... but I also know that Jesus has forgiven me more than St. Magdalene since He forgave me in advance by preventing me from falling" (pg. 128).
- Because of some sermons she had heard describing how easy it is to offend God and to stain one's purity of conscience, Thérèse developed a terrible case of scruples, from which she suffered deeply for almost 18 months. The stern image of God painted by Jansenism was in stark contrast to the "God of merciful love" that Thérèse had experienced at her First Communion. But nevertheless, the fear of accidentally offending God lurked in the shadows of her mind. She says: "All of my most simple thoughts and actions became the cause of trouble for me, and I had relief only when I told them to Marie" (pg. 129).
Explanatory note: "Jansenism was a heresy that emphasized the depravity of human nature and its inclination toward sin. It preached a divine justice that was so stern and exacting that only a few people were saved. It taught that sacramental absolution did

not forgive sins but only declared them forgiven to the person who already possessed the perfect love of God. ... Jansenism held that the possibility of committing a mortal sin was an ever-present and constant danger” The Context of Holiness (p 102-103).

- It was during this time (October 1886) that Marie entered Carmel. Marie’s departure was not as traumatic for Thérèse as Pauline’s departure had been. Nevertheless, it was still heart-wrenching: “Marie was the only support of my soul. It was Marie who guided, consoled, and aided me in the practice of virtue; she was my sole oracle. Pauline, no doubt, had remained well ahead in my heart, but Pauline was far, very far from me! ... And so in reality, I had only Marie, and she was indispensable to me, so to speak... It was from a child such as this that God was taking away the only support which attached me to life!” (pg. 133-136).
- By the grace of God, Thérèse was able to turn unexpected events into serious meditations: “When I was sad and sick, I repeated these words that always gave rise to a new peace and strength in my heart: ‘Life is your barque not your home!’ Doesn’t Wisdom say, ‘life is like a ship that plows the restless waves and leaves after it no trace of its rapid passage’? When I think of these things, my soul is plunged into infinity, and it seems to me it already touches the eternal shore” (pg. 133). “I really made a big fuss over *everything*! I was just the opposite of what I am now, for God has given me the grace not to be downcast at any passing thing. When I think of the past, my soul overflows with gratitude... They have made such a change in me that I don’t recognize myself” (pg. 137).
- Thérèse was graced with the experiential knowledge of God’s presence in the world: She was given to understand the **transitory nature** of earthly realities.

O Lord, in Your house I am a passing guest, a pilgrim...

Ps. 39:12

Points for personal meditation and private reflection:

Reflection: Like Thérèse, have you ever felt that life is nothing but a continual suffering and separation? What gave you the strength to bear the sadness of loss at these times? (pg. 104)

Reflection: Picture yourself in your daily life. Do you see your duties simply as tasks to be checked off a list, or do they express the holiness of God’s divine love? (For further understanding of this question, see pg. 147).

Reflection: Reflect upon the crossroads of your life. Think of how different your life would be if God had not prevented you from making a disastrous choice (pg. 148).

Session Three: The grace of Christmas and a vocation to Carmel

Required Reading: Story of a Soul, chapter V; and The Context of Holiness: The battle of bearing her emotions, pg. 92-96 (Appendix D)

Additional Reading: *Signs of Spiritual Maturity* (Appendix E)

Explanatory note:

After describing the pain and suffering caused by her over-sensitivity and scruples, Thérèse goes on to describe her progression on the path to spiritual maturity. Chapter V is one of the most well-known and frequently quoted sections of Thérèse's writings. It contains the story of her Christmas conversion, her adoption of her "First Child," the criminal Pranzini, and her desire to enter Carmel.

"The 'third period' of Thérèse's life dawned on December 25, 1886. When God gave her the grace to control her 'extreme touchiness.' Thérèse said that it was the greatest grace that had ever received. It restored her strength of soul that she had lost when her mother died. The centrality of Thérèse's Christmas conversion cannot be overemphasized. It was the event that changed the entire course of her life. It was the moment when she 'received the grace of leaving ... childhood'" (The Context of Holiness, *The Battle of Bearing Her Emotions*).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- "I was really unbearable because of my extreme touchiness... I really don't know how I could entertain the thought of entering Carmel when I was still in the swaddling cloth of a child" (pg. 151-152). "God would have to work a little miracle to make me grow up in an instant, and this miracle He performed on that unforgettable Christmas day" (pg. 152).
- On Christmas day, it was a French tradition to fill the shoes for the baby of the family with little gifts and this custom continued in the Martin household. When the Martin family returned home after attending midnight Mass, Thérèse's father, Louis, was somewhat annoyed to notice Thérèse's shoes in front of the fireplace; and sighed to Celine: "Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!" In her father's mind, Thérèse was getting too old for this sort of thing, and he hoped this would be the last time. Thérèse overheard her father's remark:
- "I was going upstairs at the time, to remove my hat and Celine, knowing how sensitive I was and seeing the tears already glistening in my eyes...She said, 'Oh, Thérèse, don't go downstairs; it would cause you too much grief to look at your slippers right now.' But Thérèse was no longer the same; Jesus had changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling my pounding heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa and withdrew all objects joyfully. I had the happy appearance of a queen! Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing; Celine believed it was all a dream! Fortunately, it was a sweet reality; Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a

half, and she was to preserve it forever! On that night of light began the third period of my life” (pg. 152-153).

- A seemingly insignificant event, yet it was the turning point in Thérèse’s life. “The source of my tears was dried up, [and I received] the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion” (pg. 152). “What does it mean to leave childhood? What does it mean to become an adult? It means having the strength not to be ruled by one’s emotions or allowing one’s feelings to dictate one’s choices, and possessing the determination to stand upright in the face of an emotional storm. This was the grace given to Thérèse” (The Context of Holiness, *ibid.*).
- God did not remove Thérèse from the battle of her emotions but gave her the fortitude to remain in the battle. Subsequent pages of the Story of a Soul reveal that Thérèse was given the grace of fortitude to face the unexpected encounters in Carmel.
- “I have often told people who come to me for spiritual direction to never make it a goal to conquer their faults. Simply ask for the grace to resist the temptation of the moment. Take it for granted that you will always have tendencies toward certain sins and self-destructive behavior, which will always be opportunities to grow in virtue” (The Context of Holiness, *ibid.*).
- On that night, Therese was transformed: “I felt *charity* enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I’ve been happy!” (pg. 153-154).
- Thérèse also understood the cry of Jesus on the Cross: “*I thirst!*” These words ignited within me an unknown and very living fire. I wanted to give my Beloved to drink and I felt myself consumed with a thirst for souls” (pg. 154).
- As Thérèse described, it was not the souls of the priests that attracted her, “but those of *great sinners; I burned* with the desire to snatch them from the eternal flames” (pg. 154). Thus, Henri Pranzini (a condemned criminal) became her first “adopted child.” Thérèse prayed fervently for his repentance and conversion. Her desires were fulfilled when Pranzini, moments before he was executed, turned to the priest who was holding out a crucifix and “*kissed the sacred wounds three times!*” (pg. 155). “I experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners, a desire I hadn’t felt so intensely before” (pg. 153). Since then, Thérèse’s missionary spirit continued to grow even after her death: “I will spend my heaven by doing good on earth.”
- Another important aspect of her conversion is the greater understanding of herself (self-knowledge). “God was able in a very short time to extricate me from the very narrow circle in which I was turning without knowing how to come out. When seeing the road He made me travel, my gratitude was great; but I must admit, if the biggest step was taken, there still remained many things for me to leave behind. Freed from its scruples and its excessive sensitiveness, *my mind developed*” (pg. 156).
- During this period, Thérèse also showed “extreme desire for learning” (pg. 156). She knew almost all the chapters of The Imitation of Christ by heart. Abbé Arminjon’s conferences “plunged her soul into a state of joy not of this earth.” (pg. 158). Much to

her delight, Thérèse also found “Jesus’ footprints” in the writings of John of the Cross. And she confessed: “The way I was walking was so straight, so clear, I needed no other guide but Jesus” (pg. 160).

- The night of Christmas Grace also made Thérèse to think seriously of her religious vocation. John’s poem, *The Dark Night*, led her to see the place to which God was guiding her:

*“On that glad night
in secret, for no one saw me
nor did I look at anything
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart
This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
— him I knew so well —
there in a place where no one appeared.”*

Thérèse proclaimed: “**This place is Carmel!**” (pg. 161). [emphasis added]

- Thérèse was faced with many trials and disapproval from different quarters before her entrance into Carmel. One of the memorable moments of the Story of a Soul was that of Thérèse receiving approval from her dear father to enter Carmel: “I chose the feast of Pentecost as the day to break the news...Through my tears, I confided my desire to enter Carmel and soon his tears mingled with mine. He didn’t say one word to turn me from my vocation, simply contenting himself with his statement that I was still very young to make such a serious decision...I defended myself so well that he was soon convinced my desire was God’s will” (pg. 164).
- In a deeply symbolic gesture, her father plucked some *little white flowers* in the garden and gave them to Thérèse “explaining the care with which God preserved her to that very day” (pg. 161). Thérèse accepted the flowers as a relic. By giving her the little flowers, M. Martin was giving (unconsciously) his daughter the name “little flower” by which she would be known and loved throughout the world. Thérèse’s identity was shaped by her father’s act of handing her over to herself, so to speak. Is it any wonder that she begins her autobiography by referring to herself as “*a little white flower*” (see pg. 187).

Private Reflection: How many times have you struggled to overcome a fault in your life but have failed only to wake up one morning to discover that God had removed it? Or have you ever “worked on yourself” in trying to overcome a fault, only to discover that your main fault was that you were taking yourself too seriously? (pg. 184).

Session Four: Determined determination — pursuit of a vocation in Carmel

Required Reading: *Story of A Soul*, chapter VI, *Determined Determination* by Rudolf V. D'Souza, OCD (Appendix F), and CCC 2710

St. Teresa of Avila states unequivocally: “To those who want to journey on this road and continue until they reach the end, which is to drink from this water of life, I say that how they are to begin is important — in fact, all important. They must have a great and very determined determination to persevere until reaching the end, come what may, happen what may, whatever work is involved, whatever criticism arises, whether they arrive or whether they die on the road, or even if they don’t have courage for the trials that are met, or if the whole world collapses” (*The Way of Perfection* 21:2).

The following explanation is essential to the overall understanding of Thérèse’s vocation:

Overjoyed by her father’s consent, Thérèse was making plans for her future in Carmel and her sister Celine supported her. All her plans came up against major obstacles: Uncle Isidore, M. Delatroette (the ecclesiastical Superior of Lisieux Carmel), and the Bishop of Bayeux. Her uncle Isidore, however, changed his mind after receiving a letter from Thérèse’s sister Pauline in support of Thérèse. Her uncle was no longer the same. “Without making any allusion whatsoever to ‘human prudence,’ he told me I was a little flower God wanted to gather and he would no longer oppose it!” (pg. 167). Thérèse’s joy was short-lived. M. Delatroette would not hear of her entering before she was twenty-one. Her visit in person was a great disappointment: “Nothing would change the Superior’s attitude. He told me there wasn’t any danger in staying at home, I could lead a Carmelite life there, and if I didn’t take the discipline all was not lost, etc., etc. He ended by saying he was only the Bishop’s delegate, and if the latter wished me to enter Carmel, he himself would have nothing to say” (pg. 168).

She left the rectory in tears. However, Thérèse was determined: “...I was determined to do all within my power, even saying I would go to the Holy Father if the Bishop did not want to allow me to enter at fifteen” (pg. 168).

“I was growing in love for God; I felt within my heart certain aspirations unknown until then...” (pg. 168). “‘Love never finds impossibilities, because it believes everything is possible, everything is permitted.’ It was surely only love of Jesus that could help me surmount these difficulties and the ones that followed, for it pleased Him to have me buy my vocation with very great trials” (pg. 172).

On October 31, 1887, fourteen-year-old Thérèse put her hair up for the first time in an attempt to look older and went with her father to meet the Bishop of Bayeux. When the Bishop inquired about her vocation, Thérèse replied: “... I wanted to be a religious since the dawn of my reason, and I wanted Carmel as soon as I knew about it. I find all the aspirations of my soul are fulfilled in this Order” (pg. 174). Though the Bishop was very cordial and fatherly toward Thérèse, he had to inform her that he could not give his permission until he discussed the matter with the ecclesiastical Superior of the Lisieux Carmel (M. Delatroette). Thérèse was disappointed; but did not give up. “The more I approached the goal, the more I saw my affairs all mixed up. My soul was plunged into bitterness but into peace too, for I was seeking God’s will” (pg. 176).

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Thérèse continues to seek God's will in prayer. "The choice of the time and duration of the prayer arises from a determined will, revealing the secrets of the heart. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter. One cannot always meditate, but one can always enter into inner prayer, independently of the conditions of health, work, or emotional state. The heart is the place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith" (CCC 2710).
- Determined determination means accepting the daily crosses without complaint. What actually strengthens the soul on its journey towards God is not hard penances but determination in growing the "interior virtues" (see Way 15:2). When the goal is set and one strives after the goal, there is no looking back. "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk.9:62. For further understanding, see *Determined Determination*, D'Souza, OCD, Appendix F).

Side note: Three days after the trip to the Bishop's house, Thérèse and Celine joined their father on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Rome. It was organized by the Bayeux diocese to celebrate the golden jubilee of Leo XIII's ordination to the priesthood. The pilgrimage was an excursion of the rich, a sightseeing tour sprinkled with religious overtones. The group stayed in "princely hotels" and dined in the finest restaurants; and seventy-five of the total one hundred and ninety-seven pilgrims were priests (see pg. 217).

- "I crossed the city of Lisieux which was still wrapped in sleep; many impressions passed through my soul at that moment. I had a feeling I was approaching the unknown, that great things awaited me out there" (pg. 191). "The great things that waited Thérèse were not to be found in shrines or museums but in an inner healing and new found realizations" (pg. 217).
 - a. As the pilgrims were journeying toward the intended destination, Thérèse meditated upon the excursion of the rich, princely hotels and finest restaurants: "Ah! far from dazzling us, all these titles ... appeared to us as nothing but smoke... I saw that 'all that glistens is not gold,' and I understood the words of The Imitation [of Christ]: 'Be not solicitous for the shadow of a great name, not for acquaintance with many, nor for the particular love of individuals.' I understood true greatness is to be found in the soul, not in a name..." (pg. 190).
 - b. The second experience was related to priests and the Carmelite vocation of prayer. "Having never lived close to them, I was not able to understand the principal aim of the Reform of Carmel. To pray for sinners attracted me, but to pray for the souls of priests whom I believed to be pure as crystal seemed puzzling to me!" (pg. 190). The future Carmelite was about to make an important discovery: "I lived in the company of many saintly priests for a month and I learned that, though their dignity raises them above the angels, they are nevertheless weak and fragile men... [and] in extreme need of prayers!" (pg.

190). "How beautiful is the vocation, O Mother... the sole purpose of our prayers and sacrifices is to be the apostle of the *apostles*" (pg. 191).

- Thérèse's main purpose for going to Rome was to obtain permission from Pope Leo XIII to enter Carmel at the age of fifteen. But much to her disappointment, all she received from him was the encouragement to practice obedience and faith: "Well, my child...do what the Superiors tell you!..." Thérèse made one more attempt and the Holy Father responded by saying: "Go...go...You will enter if God wills it" (pg. 205). Bitterness filled her soul, but Thérèse was also at peace with herself because she knew that she had done everything God had asked her to do.
- In pondering the incident later, Thérèse realized that the Holy Father spoke in a prophetic way. God's will cannot be stopped by anyone; not even those who have much authority. A letter from the prioress of Carmel informed Thérèse that the Bishop had approved her entrance into Carmel. Thérèse was delighted to hear the good news: "But after the trial, what a reward! The water was changed into wine...Lazarus was raised from the dead! Thus Jesus acted toward His little Thérèse: after having tried her for a *long time*, He granted all the desires of her heart" (pg. 214).
- Thérèse was disappointed when her entrance to Carmel was delayed until the end of Lent. However, she did not waste her time lamenting over her misfortune. True to her character, Thérèse embraced these interruptions as opportunities to grow in virtue: "...soon I understood the value of the time I was offered. I made a resolution to give myself up more than ever to a *serious* and *mortified* life. When I say mortified, this is not to give the impression that I performed acts of penance. Alas, *I never made any*. Far from resembling beautiful souls who practiced every kind of mortification from their childhood, I had no attraction for this... My mortifications consisted in breaking my will, always so ready to impose itself on others, in holding back a reply, in rendering little services without any recognition, in not leaning my back against a support when seated, etc., etc. It was through the practice of these *nothings* that I prepared myself to become a fiancée of Jesus" (pg. 215-216).
- Early in her life, Thérèse was graced with the cardinal virtue of prudence to direct her life in accordance with God's will.

"A **Virtue** is an habitual and firm disposition to do the good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself. The virtuous person tends toward the good with all his sensory and spiritual powers; he pursues the good and chooses it in concrete actions. The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God" (CCC. 1803).

"**Prudence** is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; 'the prudent man looks where he is going' (Prov 14:15) 'Keep sane and sober for your prayers' (1 Pt 4:7). Prudence is 'right reason in action.' (Aquinas)... It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience" (CCC. 1806).

Private Reflection: During the various times when Thérèse's plans were frustrated, she did not put her life on hold, but rather embraced these interruptions as opportunities to grow in virtue. In your life, where are you faced with similar opportunities? (pg. 256).

Session Five: Entrance into Carmel — climbing Mount Carmel.

Required Reading: Story of A Soul, chapters VII and VIII

Explanatory note:

The day chosen for Thérèse's entrance into Carmel was April 9, 1888. "On the morning of the great day, casting a last look upon Les Buissonnets, that beautiful cradle of my childhood which I was never to see again, I left on my dear King's arm to climb Mount Carmel" (pg. 230). Thus, Thérèse became a postulant in the Lisieux Discalced Carmelite Monastery when Mother Marie de Gonzague was the elected Prioress. Two months after Thérèse entered Carmel, her beloved father suddenly disappeared from Les Buissonnets and was found after four days. It was during this time of her father's illness that Thérèse took real interest in the devotion to the "Holy Face." She signed her name for the first time as "Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face" the day she received the habit, Jan. 10, 1889. She saw the God of merciful love in the suffering face of her father.

Her father was able to attend the clothing ceremony. Thérèse called this day "his day of triumph" (pg. 239). However, the "triumph" was short lived. "I didn't know that on February 12, a month after my reception of the Habit, our dear Father would drink *the most bitter and most humiliating* of all chalices" (pg. 241). M. Martin's health was rapidly deteriorating and on Feb. 12, 1889, her beloved father left Lisieux to enter a mental institution, Bon Sauveur, at Caen. Thérèse's profession took place on September 8, 1890, without her father by her side. Throughout her ordeal, Thérèse retained her peace: "...everything was sadness and bitterness. And still *peace*, always *peace*, reigned at the bottom of the chalice" (pg. 262). This interior peace allowed her to embrace the Cross with all its uncertainties.

"Those who have no other goal than the perfect observance of the Lord's law and carrying of the cross of Christ will be true arks, and they will bear within themselves the real manna, which is God..." (A.I.5:8).

"Night" is an encounter of God's presence — purifying and transforming one's life.

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Upon entering Carmel, Thérèse was thrust into the real world. However, she was not surprised by the conflicting daily encounters: "*Illusions*, God gave me the grace *not to have* a SINGLE ONE when entering Carmel... When one wishes to attain a goal, one must use the means; Jesus made me understand that it was through suffering that He wanted to give me souls..." (pg. 231).
- "Never, whether in adversity or in prosperity, cease to quiet your heart with deepest love, so as to suffer whatever comes along...It is impossible to advance without doing and suffering virtuously, all enveloped in silence" (St. John of the Cross, Letter 10).
- Early in her life as a religious, Thérèse understood that Jesus was her Director to guide her soul during the unexpected daily encounters with the Sisters. "I have said that Jesus was 'my Director.' ... my heart quickly turned to the Director of directors, and it was He

who taught me that science hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to *little ones*" (pg.234- 235).

- The hiddenness that stemmed from the virtue of humility is one of the characteristics of Thérèse's teaching: "I understood what *real glory* was. He whose Kingdom is not of this world showed me that true wisdom consists in 'desiring to be unknown and counted as nothing,' ... Ah! I desired that, like the Face of Jesus, 'my face be truly hidden, that no one on earth would know me.' I thirsted after suffering and I longed to be forgotten" (pg. 235-236).
- Thérèse continued to show her profound wisdom in understanding her daily encounters at the monastery. On one occasion, a sister accidentally took Thérèse's oil lamp from her shelf, leaving Thérèse without light in her cell. Instead of complaining about it, Thérèse surrendered to the true wisdom of God: "Instead of feeling annoyed at being thus deprived of it, I was really happy, feeling that Poverty consists in being **deprived not only of agreeable things but of indispensable things too**. And so, in this *exterior darkness*, I was interiorly illumined!" (pg. 243) [emphasis added]. Each small sacrifice that Thérèse made became the source of an increase in virtue.
- Thérèse was not attracted to physical penances. She knew that her path to union with God was the *little way*. "I applied myself to practicing little virtues, not having the capability of practicing the great. For instance, I loved to fold up the mantels forgotten by the Sisters and render them all sorts of little services...The penances they [the superiors] did allow me consisted in mortifying my self-love, which did me much more good than corporeal penances" (pg. 244).
- Thérèse's writings consistently show that she was not attracted to any stark spirituality of a wrathful God. She always believed in a loving God. For instance, she didn't show any guilt about falling asleep during prayer. "...well, I am not desolate. I remember that *little children* are as pleasing to their parents when they are asleep as well as when they are wide awake; I remember, too, that when they perform an operation, doctors put their patients to sleep. Finally, I remember that: '*The Lord knows our weakness, that he is mindful that we are but dust and ashes*'" (pg. 259-260).
Private Reflection: In the light of this truth, Thérèse transformed false guilt into gratitude. Are there areas in your life (besides falling asleep during prayer) where you can do the same? (pg. 287).
- Every encounter in Carmel is an opportunity for transformation and purification of one's desires and motives. The journey goes on without pointing to an "end" in this life. "I learned very quickly... that the more one advances, the more one sees the goal is still far off. And now I am simply resigned to see myself always imperfect and in this I find my joy" (pg. 243).

"It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ [Jesus]...I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead" (Phil. 3:12-13).

- As previously noted, Thérèse was guided by the light of faith that imparted the “loving knowledge” of God Himself to her: “I have frequently noticed that Jesus doesn’t want me to lay up *provisions*; He nourishes me at each moment with a totally new food; I find it within me without my knowing how it is there. I believe it is Jesus Himself hidden in the depths of my poor little heart; He is giving me the grace of acting within me, making me think of all He desires me to do at the present moment” (pg. 260).

“Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul... It brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. As a result, the excessive light of faith bestowed on a soul is darkness for it” (A.2.3:1).

- Thérèse’s Profession took place on the morning of September 8, 1890. “...I felt as though I were flooded with a river of peace, and it was in this peace ‘which surpasses all understanding’ that I pronounced my Holy Vows. My union with Jesus was effected not in the midst of thunder and lightning, that is, in extraordinary graces, but in the bosom of a light breeze similar to the one our Father St. Elijah heard on the Mount” (pg. 261).
- In the year that followed her Profession, Thérèse encountered a retreat director who decisively guided her in the right direction. Thérèse had been suffering from “great interior trials of all kinds.” Fr. Alexis Prou assured her that her “faults caused God no pain....” “Oh! how happy I was to hear those consoling words! Never had I heard that our faults *could not cause God any pain*, and this assurance filled me with joy... My nature was such that fear made me recoil; with *love* not only did I advance, I actually *flew*” (pg. 269).

Note: Thérèse’s observation reflects the teaching of St. John of the Cross that the involuntary appetites — certain scattered acts of different desires and failures — are not such a hindrance to spiritual growth, because one will fall into imperfections and venial sins without having knowledge or control in the matter. “It is written of these semi-voluntary and inadvertent sins that the just will fall seven times a day and rise up again” (see A.1. 11:3).

Epilogue:

On May 10, 1892, M. Martin was brought into the Lisieux Carmel. It was the last time that Thérèse ever saw her father. It was a heartrending encounter for Thérèse. Louis, once so handsome and dignified, was now gaunt and his faculties were diminished. He was almost mute; when he spoke, he did so only in phrases, “My little queen”, etc. As he left in tears, Louis pointed upwards and said, “*Au ciel!*” (“In heaven!”). It was the last word that she ever heard her father speak (pg. 251).

Thérèse, however, was at peace. She was given the gift of finding peace and happiness in the midst of her daily darkness: “... I always find a way to be happy and to profit from my miseries...” (pg. 268). M. Martin died on July 29, 1894, and Thérèse’s sister Celine, who had cared for their father in his illness, entered Carmel less than two months later, on September 14, 1894.

Session Six: My Vocation is Love

Required Reading: Story of a Soul, chapter IX

Explanatory note:

On September 13, 1896, Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart (Thérèse's eldest sister Marie) asked Thérèse, (while she was making her personal retreat) to jot down a summary of her "little way of confidence and love." Thérèse responded: "I am going to stammer some words even though I feel it is quite impossible for the human tongue to express things that the human heart can hardly understand" (pg. 294). "I feel how powerless I am to express in human language the secrets of heaven, and after writing page upon page I find that I have not yet begun" (pg. 296). Thérèse wrote a beautiful note to Sister Marie and included a reflection she had written during her ten-day retreat. This letter and her reflection on her vocation resulted in what would become Manuscript B (Chapter IX) of Story of a Soul. Upon reading, Sister Marie wrote back to Sister Thérèse expressing her gratitude and awe. "Oh! I wanted to cry when I read these lines that are not from earth but an echo from the Heart of God.... Do you want me to tell you? Well, you are possessed by God, but what is called... absolutely possessed, just as the wicked are possessed by the devil" (Letters of St. Therese of Lisieux, Vol. II. LC 170, pg. 997). Manuscript B is considered to be one of the most well-known and influential writings in Christian spirituality.

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Thérèse indicated numerous times in her writings that her sole teacher was Jesus Himself. "Without showing Himself, without making His voice heard, Jesus teaches me in secret...[and] I understand so well that it is only love that makes us acceptable to God... Jesus deigned to show me the road that leads to this Divine Furnace, and this road is the *surrender* of the little child who sleeps without fear in its Father's arms" (pg. 294). "Jesus does not demand great actions from us but simply *surrender* and *gratitude*...He has no need of our works but only of our *love*..." (pg. 295).
Note: In this respect, Thérèse follows the teachings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross: "...we shouldn't build castles in the air. The Lord doesn't look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done....let us offer the Lord interiorly and exteriorly the sacrifice we can...Thus even though our works are small, they will have the value our love for him would have merited had they been great" (Interior Castle, VII.4:15). Thérèse quotes from the Spiritual Canticle: "...*the smallest act of PURE LOVE is of more value to her [the Church] than all other works together*" (pg. 305).
- As she journeyed through spiritual maturity, Thérèse earnestly searched to find clarity of her vocation. She discovered within herself an infinite longing to love God in countless ways: "To be Your Spouse, to be a Carmelite, and to be a mother of souls — should not this suffice me? And yet it is not so...I feel the vocation of the WARRIOR, THE PRIEST, THE APOSTLE, THE DOCTOR, THE MARTYR...*Crusader*, the *Papal Guard*...; if I wanted to write all my desires, I would have to borrow Your Book of Life..." (pg. 299-301). Thérèse felt the real dilemma of choosing and so continued to search the

Scriptures for direction.

Thérèse opened the Epistles of St. Paul to find an answer.

- When reading 1 Corinthians, she was not quite satisfied with the words of the Apostle: "...that all cannot be apostles, prophets, doctors, etc." Thérèse desired to see herself in them **all**. However, she was not discouraged. She continued to search and much to her delight, she tumbled into the words of St. Paul: "*Yet strive after THE BETTER GIFTS, and I point out to you a yet more excellent way. All the most PERFECT gifts are nothing without LOVE. That charity is the EXCELLENT WAY that leads most surely to God*" (pg. 302). It is within the context of "Love" that Thérèse finally found the profound understanding of her vocation.
- "*Charity gave me the key to my vocation. ... I understood that the Church had a Heart and that this Heart was BURNING WITH LOVE. I understood it was Love alone that made the Church's members act, that if Love ever became extinct, apostles would not preach the Gospel and martyrs would not shed their blood. I understood that LOVE COMPRISED ALL VOCATIONS THAT LOVE WAS EVERYTHING, THAT IT EMBRACED ALL TIMES AND PLACES...IN A WORD IT WAS ETERNAL!*
Then, in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: O Jesus, my Love...my vocation, at last I have found it...MY VOCATION IS LOVE! Yes, I have found my place in the Church and it is You, Oh my God, Who has given me this place; in the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be Love. **Thus I shall be everything, and thus my dream will be realized**" (pg. 302). [emphasis added]
- Much to her delight, Thérèse had discovered that her vocation is "love." But how did Thérèse prove her love? How could she attain this high calling? By continuously responding with charity to whatever came her way, however small: "I have no other means of proving my love for you other than that of strewing flowers, that is, not allowing one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love" (pg. 304-305). Poem PN34 — *Strewing Flowers*: "Strewing Flowers is offering you as first fruits/My slightest sighs, my greatest sufferings/My sorrows and my joys, my little sacrifices/Those are my flowers!..." (Appendix G).
- "...Thérèse's *little sacrifices* were true deeds of love that they were *extraordinary* deeds." What makes a deed extraordinary is not the deed itself, but the love that is contained in the deed. "It is easy for us to miss the magnitude of this statement because love has been reduced to an emotion or trivialized to 'being nice.' But love is neither of these watery realities; it is the deepest reality of life, for God is love. Thus, when we love with love of charity, our actions are the actions of God. St. John of the Cross writes that each action of a soul in union with God 'is more meritorious and valuable than all the deeds a person may have performed in the whole of life without this transformation, however great they may have been... [because] all the acts of the soul are divine, since both the movement of these acts and their execution stem from God.' It is this mystical reality that is behind Thérèse's words 'I shall be Love'" (pg. 316- 317).

- As noted previously, Thérèse was not troubled by her imperfections and shortcomings. She continues to see herself as an imperfect, *weak little bird*. “What then will come of it? Will it die of sorrow at seeing itself so weak? Oh no! the little bird will not even be troubled” (pg. 306). By pondering her imperfections, Thérèse realized that the key to the fulfillment of her calling of love is to depend on the mercies of God. In short, Thérèse is saying that by patiently bearing the pain that follows in the wake of committing some fault or failure, souls are confiding themselves to the mercy of God (who came to call not the just but sinners) and “it is by the mercy of God alone that we are purified” (pg. 318).
- “Our sins can make us feel that we are beyond the reach of God’s mercy. Thérèse believed just the opposite. ‘I feel [that] even though I had on my conscience all the sins that can be committed, I would go, my heart broken with sorrow, and throw myself into Jesus’ arms, for I know how much He loves the prodigal child who returns to Him’” (pg. 319).

Private Reflection: Whenever we act with the love of charity, God loves through us and is made manifest in this world. Have you ever considered your “strewing of flowers,” your daily acts of charity, from this perspective? (pg. 317).

Private Reflection: Think of times when you have felt that your sins have put you beyond the reach of God’s mercy. During these times, what has helped you to believe in God’s merciful love? (pg. 319).

Session Seven: The trial of faith (her dark night of the soul) (continued in Session Eight)

Required Reading: Story of a Soul, chapter X, pg. 325-342

Additional Reading: Story of a Soul, pages 355-371

Explanatory note:

The first eight chapters of the Story of a Soul (Manuscript A) were written when Thérèse was only twenty-two years old, from January 1895 until January 20, 1896. As previously noted, it was dedicated to her sister Pauline (Mother Agnes of Jesus) while she was a prioress at Lisieux Carmel. Upon reading the manuscript, Sister Agnes realized that Thérèse's life as a nun was not included in her story. Since Sister Agnes was no longer prioress, she approached Mother de Gonzague (who was the elected prioress at the time) and asked her to order Thérèse to continue her writings, this time focusing on her life as a religious sister. The very next day, Mother de Gonzague commanded Thérèse to write about her experience in Carmel and the result was Manuscript C of the Story of a Soul. Given her failing health, this was a difficult task. In June 1897, prior to Thérèse's death at the age of twenty-four, she took up the pen again and continued with her writings. She stopped writing at the beginning of July. She was so weak that she had to use a pencil for the last pages. Manuscript C deals with several aspects of Thérèse's spiritual life but emphasizes her trial of faith, charity and most importantly, her understanding of "the Little Way."

Essential Points to Discuss:

The Little Way:

- Thérèse began to observe the progression of prayer in a totally different manner. She wrote: "He [Jesus] has no doubt found her sufficiently watered, for now it is the *sun* that aids her growth" (pg. 327). She spent the last two years of her life discovering and sharing the deepest wisdom of God. One of the gifts that she discovered was her desire to become a saint. She was not discouraged by the difference between her and the saints (an obscure grain of sand compared to a mountain whose summit is lost in the clouds). In her mind, Thérèse was convinced that: "God cannot inspire unrealizable desires. I can, then, in spite of my littleness, aspire to holiness" (pg. 328). Thérèse realized that she was too small to climb the rough stairs to perfection. While meditating on the Scriptures, she made a profound discovery of her "little way": "... I want to seek out a means of going to heaven by a little way, a way that is very straight, very short, and totally new" (pg. 328).
- In the process of finding a definite path (the little way) for herself, Thérèse discovered an elevator: "The elevator which must raise me to heaven is Your arms, O Jesus! And for this I had no need to grow up, but rather I had to remain *little* and become this more and more" (pg. 329). Thérèse's new way is to embrace her God-given identity with all its weakness, littleness and nothingness. Like a child trusting in its mother's arms, Thérèse had decided to grow in complete trust and confidence in the "arms of Jesus." She reaffirms this is the simplest and surest way for her to grow in holiness.

- “I discovered: ‘As one whom a mother caresses, so will I comfort you; you shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you’” (Is. 66:12,13; pg. 329).
- Thérèse observed that God had blessed her with wisdom beyond her years. “... for having hidden His secrets from the wise and prudent and for revealing them to the *little ones*” (Mt.11:25. pg. 230). “I have had understanding above old men, because I have sought your will” (Ps.118:100. pg. 331).

Trial of Faith:

- Having gained the Wisdom of God, Thérèse now could speak about her “trial of faith” in vivid detail. On the eve of Good Friday, Thérèse threw up blood for the first time. The second attack on the following night convinced her of impending death. Most people would have reacted differently — denial, fear, anxiety. But Thérèse was consumed by the love of God: “*It was like a sweet and distant murmur that announced the Bridegroom’s arrival*” (pg. 332). Thérèse, however, went on to struggle with her “living faith.”
 - a. “At this time I was enjoying such a living faith, such a clear *faith*, that the thought of heaven made up all my happiness...” (pg. 333).
 - b. “He permitted my soul to be invaded by the thickest darkness, and the thought of heaven, up until then so sweet to me, be no longer anything but the cause of struggle and torment” (pg. 333).
 - c. “...it seems to me that darkness, borrowing the voice of sinners, says mockingly to me: ‘you are dreaming about the light, about a fatherland...; you are dreaming about the *eternal* possession of the Creator... Advance, advance; rejoice in death which will give you not what you hope for but a night still more profound, the night of nothingness’” (pg. 335).
 - d. Thérèse was travelling through a “dark tunnel” ... “a country that is covered with thick fog” (p.333); “...a wall which reaches right up to the heavens and covers the starry firmament” (pg. 336).
- How did Thérèse conduct herself during her trial of faith? She didn’t have the joy of faith. Nevertheless, she carried on with her daily life, doing more acts of faith. “At each new occasion of combat, when my enemies provoke me, I conduct myself bravely...I turn my back on my adversaries without deigning to look them in the face; but I run toward my Jesus” (pg. 335).
- As she was going through the interior darkness, Thérèse made an important observation of herself: “... He [God] did not send me this trial until the moment I was **capable of bearing** it. A little earlier I believe it would have plunged me into a state of discouragement. Now it is taking away everything that could be a **natural satisfaction** in my desire for heaven” (pg. 336). Thérèse discovered that the “dark night” of deep interior suffering was the greatest gift from God because it was through suffering that her soul was **purified**. [emphasis added]

This act of faith was a true martyrdom of spirit. Thérèse did not turn away from God as a result of this interior suffering. Instead, she opened herself and willingly shared the pain

of all unbelievers and sinners. She describes it in these words, “She is resigned to eat the bread of sorrow as long as You desire it; she does not wish to rise up from this table filled with bitterness at which poor sinners are eating until the day set by You” (pg. 334).

- Thus, Thérèse accepted her darkness for the sake of others: “May all those who were not enlightened by the bright flame of faith one day see it shine. O Jesus! If it is needful that the table soiled by them be purified by a soul who loves You, then I desire to eat this bread of trial at this table until it pleases you to bring me into Your bright Kingdom. The only grace I ask of You is that I never offend You!” (pg. 334).

“...when someone desires to suffer, it is not merely a pious reminder of the suffering of the Lord. Voluntary expiatory suffering is what truly and really unites one to the Lord intimately. When it arises, it comes from an already existing relationship with Christ. For, by nature, a person flees from suffering. And the mania for suffering caused by a perverse lust for pain differs completely from the desire to suffer in expiation. Such lust is not a spiritual striving, but a sensory longing no better than other sensory desires, in fact worse, because it is contrary to nature. Only someone whose spiritual eyes have been opened to the supernatural correlations of worldly events can desire suffering in expiation, and this is only possible for people in whom the spirit of Christ dwells...”

(The Collected Works of Edith Stein: The Hidden Life, pg.92).

- “Here we are confronted with the mystery of our participation in the work for redemption. *How* uniting ourselves to Jesus on the Cross makes our suffering redemptive for others it indeed is a mystery of our faith, but the fact that it *does* is one of the great consolations of our faith, for what makes suffering unbearable is the belief that it has no purpose” (pg. 364). Hence, Thérèse became a true believer. She used her trial of faith as an opportunity to participate in the work of salvation and continued her journey in trust and confidence.
- “...I no longer have any great desires except that of loving to the point of dying of love...” (pg. 337). “... I do not have any fears of a long life and I do not refuse the fight, for the Lord is the Rock to which I am raised. *‘He teaches my hand to fight, and my finger to make war. He is my protector, and I have hoped in him!’*” (pg. 337-338). Thus, in the midst of her interior darkness, Thérèse was illumined by the grace of abandoning herself to Divine Providence. Consequently, she gained freedom of spirit. “Thérèse’s doubts of faith were not *antithetical* [contrary] to faith but the context in which her faith matured” (pg. 137, The Context of Holiness).

“It remains to be said, then, that even though this happy night darkens the spirit, it does so only to impart light concerning all things; and even though it humbles individuals and reveals their miseries, it does so only to exalt them; and even though it impoverishes and empties them of all possessions and natural affection, it does so only that they may reach out divinely to the enjoyment of all earthly and heavenly things, with a general freedom of spirit in them all”

(The Dark Night, Book two, ch. 9:1).

Note: “What we see in chapter ten [X] of Story of a Soul is one of the main reasons why Thérèse became a saint; she continued in her struggle to do God’s will in the midst of emotional desolation” (pg. 362).

Private Reflection: When in your life have you felt devoid of the joy of faith yet experienced God’s strength that enabled you to do His will? (pg. 363).

Session Eight: Charity — Manuscript C, Chapter X (continued from Session Seven)

Explanatory note: Charity, which is the very life of God, came to perfection in Thérèse during her night of faith. Without the support of the living faith, Thérèse chose to love her sisters in the community with what she called “unfelt love,” which is love that arises from the will alone. It was during her last years of life, while her body was consumed by tuberculosis that she volunteered to work with Sr. Marie of St. Joseph in the linen room. At the lowest point in her life, Thérèse was given the strength to freely love the most difficult person in her community. “This year, dear Mother, God has given me the grace to understand what charity is; I understood it before...but in an imperfect way” (see [The Context of Holiness](#), pg. 137). As it was with other manuscripts, Thérèse quoted a wide array of Bible verses to teach about charity. She paid particular attention to the New Testament, and the appropriate quotations simply flowed from her pen with amazing clarity.

Required Reading: [Story of a Soul](#), chapter X, pg. 342-354

Additional reading: commentary on pages 355-371; OCDS Constitutions, 24a-24e *Fraternal Communion*

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Thérèse was impressed by the new commandment of Jesus. “... ‘A new commandment I give that you love one another: THAT AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’” (pg. 343).
- Thérèse knew that she was not capable of showing such an intensity of love. However, since her discovery of her “little way” she allowed Jesus to act in her. “Ah! Lord, I know you don’t command the impossible. You know better than I do my weakness and imperfection; You know very well that never would I be able to love my Sisters as You love them, unless *You, O my Jesus, loved them in me...* Yes, I feel it, when I am charitable, it is Jesus alone who is acting in me, and the more united I am to Him, the more also do I love my Sisters” (pg. 344).
- “Dear Mother, when meditating upon these words of Jesus... I understand now that charity consists in bearing with the faults of others, in not being surprised at their weakness, in being edified by the smallest acts of virtue we see them practice. But I understood above all that charity must not remain hidden in the bottom of the heart. Jesus has said: *‘No one lights a lamp and puts it under the bushel basket, but upon the lampstand, so as to give light to ALL in the house.* It seems to me that this lamp represents charity which must enlighten and rejoice not only those who are dearest to us but *‘ALL who are in the house’* without distinction” (pg. 343-344).

*“In this house...all must be friends, all must be loved,
all must be held dear, all must be helped”
(St. Teresa, *The Way of Perfection*, 4:7).*

- Recalling an incident (bringing a Christmas tree through the convent gate), Thérèse deliberately took time to give another sister the opportunity to get up first and assist the other sister. However, the nun who asked for help noticed Thérèse and said, “‘Ah! I thought as such, that you were not going to gain this pearl for your crown, you were going too slowly.’ Certainly, the whole community believed I had acted through selfishness...” Thérèse wisely observes, “since one can take my little acts of virtue for imperfections, one can also be mistaken in taking for virtue what is nothing but imperfection. Then I say with St. Paul: *‘To me it is a very small thing to be judged by you, or by any human tribunal, but neither do I judge myself. He who judges me is THE LORD.’*” (pg. 345).

Side note: “This was a painful experience for Thérèse to bear, but it bore good fruit. It taught her how easy it is to misjudge the motives of others and to misconstrue even the best and purest motives of our neighbor” (pg. 365).

- Thérèse took this lesson to heart: “In order that this judgment be favorable or rather that I be not judged at all, I want to be charitable in my thoughts toward others at all times, for Jesus said: *‘Judge not, and you shall not be judged’* (pg. 345).
- Thérèse describes another incident where there was a Sister in her community who had the habit of displeasing her in everything. However, Thérèse reminded herself, “charity must not consist in feelings but in works” (pg. 346). She prayed for this Sister as she prayed for the people that she loved the most. Thérèse quickly realized that she wasn’t content simply praying for this Sister, but instead decided to render her all the services possible. “... when I was tempted to answer her back in a disagreeable manner, I was content with giving her my most friendly smile... for the Imitation [the Imitation of Christ III, 44:1] says: *‘It is better to leave each one in his own opinion than to enter into arguments’*” (pg. 346). Thérèse continues: “Ah, what attracted me was Jesus hidden in the depths of her soul; Jesus who makes sweet what is most bitter” (pg. 347).
- Another time Thérèse quickly realized (when describing the incident involving a key with another sister and waking up the Prioress from her sleep) that if she began to justify herself, she would not be able to retain the peace of her soul. “There was no bravery there, Mother, however, I believe it was much better for me not to expose myself to combat when there was certain defeat facing me” (pg. 348). Instead of defending herself, she left the place “without fuss.” Thus, Thérèse regained her peace of mind that Jesus described: “The peace that the world cannot give” (Jn. 14:27). These are occasions to open one to deeper self-knowledge, self-surrender and transformation. Transformation does not occur just in the chapel, but always in the midst of one’s daily life.

Side note: “For most people, daily life in the secular world is the place transformation in Christ is worked out. Like the Pharisee, one can be in religious life and not be transformed. So, what is it that makes the difference between the daily transformed life and the religious untransformed life? It is the hidden action of the Kingdom of God that works not so much through external circumstances **as through a radical change in our attitudes**. This is what transformation is. It is not going on pilgrimage or entering a special state of life. It is how we live where we are and

what we do with them...What Thérèse called the 'Little Way' is quite simply the circumstances of everyday life and what to do with them" (St. Thérèse of Lisieux: A transformation in Christ, pg. 11-12. Rev. Thomas Keating).

- Self-knowledge, as taught by Teresa and John, is an important practice for one's spiritual growth. Thérèse was able to observe in herself the progression of her spiritual outlook and thank God for guiding her soul to its maturity: "Alas! when I think of the time of my novitiate, I see how imperfect I was, I made so much fuss over such little things that it makes me laugh now. Ah! How good the Lord is in having matured my soul, and in having given it wings. ... Later on, no doubt, the time in which I am now will appear filled with imperfections, but now I am astonished at nothing. I am not disturbed at seeing myself [as] *weakness* itself. On the contrary, it is in my weakness that I glory, and I expect each day to discover new imperfections in myself. Remembering that '*charity covers a multitude of sins,*' (Lk. 6:32) I draw from this rich mine that Jesus has opened up before me" (pg. 348).

Note: The "Little Way" of Thérèse is that holiness is not a state of perfection but a faithful striving each day with trust in God's mercy. This is the heart of the Promise made by Secular Carmelites — "to strive."

- Thérèse, continues to discover life-changing teachings in the Gospel. "He says in St. Matthew: 'You have heard that it was said, 'you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 'But I say to you, love your enemies...pray for those who persecute you.' No doubt, we don't have any enemies in Carmel, but there are feelings. One feels attracted to this Sister, whereas with regard to another, one would make a long detour in order to avoid meeting her. And so, without even knowing it, she becomes the subject of persecution. Well, Jesus is telling me that it is this Sister who must be loved, she must be prayed for even though her conduct would lead me to believe that she doesn't love me: 'If you love those who love you, what reward will you have? For even sinners love those who love them.' St. Luke, VI" (pg. 349).
- "And it isn't enough to love, we must prove it. We are naturally happy to offer a gift to a friend; we love especially, to give surprises; however, this is not charity, for sinners do this too. Here is what Jesus teaches me also: *Give to EVERYONE who asks of you, and from HIM WHO TAKES AWAY your goods, ask no return*" (pg. 349).
- Thérèse further observes that charity enlarges the heart and makes one's task easier. "Although it is difficult to give to one who asks, it is even more so *to allow one to take what belongs to you, without asking it back.* O Mother, I say it is difficult; I should have said that this *seems* difficult, for the *yoke of the Lord is sweet and light.* [However], when one accepts it, one feels its sweetness immediately, and cries out with the Psalmist: '*I have run the way of your commandments when you enlarged my heart*' [Ps. 118:32]. It is only charity that can expand my heart." (pg. 350).
- "Ah! What peace floods the soul when she rises above natural feelings. No, there is no joy comparable to that which the truly poor in spirit experience. If such a one asks for something with detachment, and if this thing is not only refused but one tries to take

away what one already has, the poor in spirit follow Jesus' counsel: *'If anyone take away your coat, let go your cloak also.'* To give up one's cloak is, it seems to me, renouncing one's ultimate rights...When one has left his cloak, it is much easier to walk, to run and Jesus adds: *'And whoever forces you to go one mile, go two more with him...'* Dear Mother, I am very far from practicing what I understand, and still the desire alone I have of doing it gives me peace" (pg. 351).

Point for reflection: "Ah! How contrary are the teachings of Jesus to the feelings of nature! Without the help of His grace, it would be impossible not only to put them into practice but to even understand them" (pg. 354).

Session Nine: Those whom you have given me — final hours (continued in Session Ten)

Explanatory note: At the beginning of July 1897, Thérèse was moved from her cell to the infirmary that was situated on the ground floor of the monastery. She was so weak that she could no longer hold a pen, so she used a small pencil to write her last letter (dated August 10, 1897, to Maurice Belliere, a young seminarian) and the final pages of Story of a Soul. Thérèse continued to write down her spiritual insights despite her poor health.

Required Reading: Story of a Soul, chapter XI, pg. 373-393

Additional Reading: Commentary pages 405-417; Epilogue and Appendices, pg. 419-436

Essential Points to Discuss:

- Thérèse discovered a new form of attachment (gift of the intellect) which demanded a new form of detachment. In the monastery, she shared her spiritual wisdom freely with her sisters. At times she noticed that another sister passed off Thérèse's spiritual insights as her own. Thérèse said nothing to try to reclaim her insights because "... Jesus has given me the grace of not being any more attached to the goods of the mind and heart than to those of the earth...This thought belongs to the Holy Spirit and not to me... He is therefore free to use me to give a good thought to a soul; and if I think this inspiration belongs to me, I would be like 'the donkey carrying the relics' who believed the reverence paid to the saints was being directed to him." She received "the grace of not being any more attached to the goods of the mind and heart than to those of earth" (pg. 374). "The reason Thérèse was able to be detached from her spiritual insights is that she possessed the knowledge that her insights could only nourish her soul if she were detached from them" (pg. 405).
- Within this context, Thérèse follows the teaching of St. John of the Cross. It is John's teaching that all the goods of **earth** and **heaven** are meant to help us on the way to salvation, but they can become obstacles if we relate to them with possessiveness. This is true even of the most spiritual gifts. For example, John tells us that God will often shower a soul with sensible consolations in prayer for the sake of weaning it away from the things of the world. Thus, a consoling experience of God's presence can be beneficial to our spiritual growth, but if a person becomes attached to consolation, then it becomes an obstacle on the path, for the person begins to seek a consoling experience and ceases to seek God, who granted the experience. As John writes, "Some [people] let themselves be encumbered by the very consolations and favors God bestows on them for the sake of advancing, and they advance not at all" (Ascent, Prologue, 117; Story of a Soul, *Reflection*, pg. 407).
- "I do not hold in contempt beautiful thoughts which nourish the soul and unite it with God; but for a long time I have understood that we must not depend on them and even make perfection consist in receiving many spiritual lights. The most beautiful thoughts are nothing without good works" (pg. 374).

- “...whenever we feed our ego, we starve our spirit in the process, for it is only the love of God, not the approval and applause of the world, that can nourish our spirits” (pg. 410).
- Consequently, Thérèse saw herself as an instrument of God by using an image of a little paint brush. “My dear Mother, I am a little brush that Jesus has chosen in order to paint His own image in the souls you entrusted to my care” (pg. 376). At first, Thérèse found the task difficult because she feared that her novices might judge her to be too severe. Nevertheless, she did not allow her fear to stand in the way of doing her duty. “... but I did this with such tender expressions and showed her such a great affection that very soon her tears were mingled with mine. She acknowledged with great humility that what I was saying was true, and she promised to commence a new life, asking me as a favor always to let her know her faults... ‘A brother who is helped by a brother is like a strong city’” (Proverbs 18:19, pg. 377-378).
- “There is much to reflect upon here. For Thérèse, fraternal correction was always an act of love. May it be the same with us, for there is always the danger that we can use truth as a blunt instrument, under the guise of ‘tough love.’ Honesty and telling the truth are not synonymous: truth is a statement of fact; but honesty is a virtue guided by love. We need to examine our motive before we speak. We need to be sure that we are not using truth in the service of evil” (pg. 413).
- From 1893 to 1896, Thérèse was assigned to watch over the postulants in the novitiate and help them to adapt to the Carmelite life in a community setting. Her immediate thought was that the task would be impossible. However, the moment she realized that God is the “Master Artist,” the task no longer seemed difficult. Hence, Thérèse (like the rest of us) learned valuable lessons when she was helping postulants.
 - a. “From a distance it appears all roses to do good to souls, making them love God more and molding them according to one’s personal views and ideas. At close range it is totally the contrary, the roses disappear; one feels that to do good is as impossible without God’s help as to make the sun shine at night” (pg. 380).
 - b. “One feels it is absolutely necessary to forget one’s likings, one’s personal conceptions, and to guide souls along the road which Jesus has traced out for them without trying to make them walk one’s own way” (pg. 380).
 - c. “With the grace of Jesus, never have I tried to attract their hearts to me; I understood that my mission was to lead them to God...” (pg. 381).
 - d. “It is impossible to act with all in the same manner. With certain souls, I feel I must make myself little, not fearing to humble myself by admitting my own struggles and defects; seeing I have the same weakness as they, my little Sisters in their turn admit their faults and rejoice because I understand them *through experience*. With others, on the contrary, I have seen that to do them any good I must be very firm and never go back on a decision once it is made. To abase oneself would not then be humility but weakness. God has given me the grace not to fear the battle; I must do my duty at all costs” (pg. 381).

- e. "... I am very happy to be able to follow the inclination of my heart and not serve up a bitter dish. Yes, but I notice quickly that I must not advance too far, one *word* could destroy the beautiful edifice constructed in tears" (pg. 382).
- f. By the grace of God, Thérèse understood: "Ah! it is prayer, it is sacrifice which give me all my strength; these are the invincible weapons which Jesus has given me. They can touch souls much better than words, as I have frequently experienced" (pg. 382).
- "For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus" (pg. 384).
- Thérèse continues to observe the community life with a keen eye of wisdom: "I have noticed (and this is very natural) that the most saintly Sisters are the most loved. We seek their company; we render them services without their asking...On the other hand, imperfect souls are not sought out. ... [I realized,] I must seek out in recreation, on free days, the company of Sisters who are least agreeable to me in order to carry out with regards to these wounded souls the office of the good Samaritan... He [Jesus] gives in the Gospel in almost these words: *'When you give a dinner or a supper do not invite your friends, or your brethren, or your relatives, or your rich neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite you in return...But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shall you be, because they have nothing to repay you with, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt. 6:4)*" (pg. 388-389).
- Thérèse recalls another blessed opportunity she was given to show an ongoing act of charity toward one of the elderly Sisters — Sister St. Pierre. Thérèse volunteered to take Sister St. Pierre to the refectory as she was unable to do so on her own: "It cost me very much to offer myself for this little service because I knew it was not easy to please Sister St. Pierre... However, I did not want to lose such a beautiful opportunity for exercising charity, remembering the words of Jesus: *Whatever you do to the least of my brothers, you do to me*" (pg. 390). "When I was guiding Sister St. Pierre, I did it with so much love that I could not possibly have done better had I been guiding Jesus Himself" (pg. 392).

Session Ten: those whom you have given me — final hours (continued from Session Nine)

Required Reading: Story of a Soul, chapter XI, pg. 393-404

Additional Reading: Epilogue and Appendices, pg. 419-436;

His Holiness Pope John Paul, II, Homily — Proclamation of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face as a “Doctor of the Church,” October 19, 1997 (Appendix H);

His Holiness Pope John Paul, II, *Apostolic Letter, Divini Amoris Scientia* — Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face — Proclaimed a Doctor of the Universal Church, October 19, 1997 (Appendix I);

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2746-2751, Article 3 — *The prayer of the hour of Jesus* — Gospel of John chapter 17 (Appendix J)

Note: While reading over Thérèse’s final manuscript, the reader would find it hard to believe that Thérèse had been seriously ill for several weeks. On Thursday, September 30, 1897, Thérèse died as an ordinary Discalced Carmelite after being in agony for two days. She was buried in the Lisieux cemetery on October 4, 1897. “While in the infirmary, she had written these lines to Father Belliere on June 9: *‘I am not dying; I am entering into life!’*” (pg. 431).

*“Soon I’ll hear that sweet harmony.
Soon I’ll go to beautiful Heaven to see you.
You who came to smile at me in the morning of my life,
Come smile at me again...Mother...It’s evening now.”*

Why I Love You, O Mary! Poetry of St. Thérèse PN54.

Essential Points to Discuss:

Note: Thérèse continued to meditate on her vocation of love and the mission of Carmel in the midst of her failing health.

- Thérèse admits that at times the practice of charity was not so sweet and easy for her. She recounts another story of one sister with considerable charm and wit: “For a long time at evening meditation, I was placed in front of a Sister... As soon as this Sister arrived, she began making a strange little noise which resembled the noise one would make when rubbing two shells, one against the other... Mother, it would be impossible for me to tell you how much this little noise wearied me. I had a great desire to turn my head and stare at the culprit who was very certainly unaware of her ‘click.’ This would be the only way of enlightening her” (pg. 393). However, Thérèse realized “it was much better to suffer this out of love for God and not to cause the Sister any pain...” While making a prayer of suffering, a bright idea came to her mind: “I searched for a way of doing it without annoyance and with peace and joy, at least in the interior of my soul. I tried to love the little noise which was so displeasing; instead of trying not to hear it (impossible), I paid close attention so as to hear it well, as though it were a delightful

concert, and my prayer (which was not the *Prayer of Quiet*) was spent in offering this concert to Jesus” (pg. 393).

- Another sister, with whom she did laundry regularly, splashed Thérèse with dirty water. Again, she was tempted to show her displeasure by wiping her face with a stern look. Instead, she let go of her annoyance and rejoiced in offering God “*very little things*” (pg. 393-394).
- When reading about these incidents, one cannot simply assume that Thérèse adapted to a “coping mechanism” that made the best out of minor difficulties caused by the sisters in the community. But she did more than that: she recognized the God-given choices in the present moment to practice her “little way” of offering little sacrifices to God. She transformed temptations into a source of prayer and grace.

*“... this is how my life will be consumed. I have no other means of proving my love for you [my God] than that of strewing flowers, that is, not allowing one little sacrifice to escape, not one look, one word, profiting by all the smallest things and doing them through love. I desire to suffer for love and even to rejoice through love; and in this way I shall strew flowers before Your throne. I shall not come upon one without **unpetalling** it for You. While I am strewing my flowers, I shall sing, for could one cry while doing such a joyous action? I shall sing even when I must gather my flowers in the midst of thorns, and my song will be all the more melodious in proportion to the length and sharpness of the thorns”* (pg. 304-305).

- Thérèse always had a deep love for priests. She often used to think that if her little brothers had not gone to Heaven, she could have had the happiness of seeing them at the Altar. However, much to her surprise and delight, she was asked to correspond with two missionary priests to render support and prayers for their vocation. She writes: “Mother, it would be impossible for me to express my happiness. My desire, answered in this unexpected way...I felt my soul was renewed; it was as if someone had struck for the first time musical strings left forgotten until then” (pg. 395).
- Thérèse cautiously reflected upon the importance of her mission of caring for the souls entrusted to her (novices and the missionary priests) and her handling of this delicate task. Pondering the pitfalls, she writes “[what if] instead of uniting her to God, this exchange of letters (even at long intervals) would occupy her mind, and imagining herself to be doing great marvels, she would be simply procuring useless distraction for herself under the cover of zeal. As for me, it is exactly the same with this matter as with all others...For example, when I interview a novice, I try to do this as a mortification, and I refrain from asking questions simply to satisfy my curiosity...For it seems to me we can do no good when we seek ourself” (pg. 396).
- Thérèse continues to meditate on the mission of Carmel in general: “*“the zeal of a Carmelite embraces the whole world,”* I hope with the grace of God to be useful to more than *two* missionaries and I could not forget to pray for all... Finally, I want to be a daughter of the Church as our holy Mother St. Teresa was and to pray for the Holy

Father's intentions which I know embrace the whole universe. This is the general purpose of my life..." (pg. 398).

- Thérèse was looking for a simple means to accomplish her mission without going into grandiose plans and complicated ways. "He made me understand these words of the Canticle of Canticles: 'DRAW ME, WE SHALL RUN *after you in the odor of your ointments...* This simple statement: 'Draw me' suffices; I understand, Lord, that when a soul allows herself to be captivated by *the odor of your ointments*, she cannot run alone, all the souls whom she loves follow in her train; this is done without constraint, without effort, it is a natural consequence of her attraction for You" (pg. 398-399).
- As she comes closer to the end of her manuscript, Thérèse sees herself in the great prayer of Jesus Himself, found in the Gospel of John (John 17:4).

Note: The entire chapter 17 of John's Gospel is a long prayer directed by Jesus to the Father. "Christian Tradition rightly calls this prayer the "priestly" prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer of our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly 'consecrated'" (CCC, 2747).

With a certain degree of boldness, Thérèse prayed to the Father recalling chapter 17 of John's Gospel. "Lord, You know it, I have no other treasures than the souls it has pleased You to unite to mine; it is You who entrusted these treasures to me, and so I dare to borrow the words You addressed to the heavenly Father...

I have glorified you on earth; I have finished the work you gave me to do. And now do you, Father, glorify me with yourself, with the glory I had with you before the world existed.

I have manifested your name to those whom you have given me out of the world. They were yours, and you have given them to me, and they have kept your word. Now they have learned that whatever you have given me is from you; because the words you have given me, I have given to them. And they have received them, and have known of a truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me.

I pray for them, not for the world do I pray, but for those whom You have given me, because they are yours; and all things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep in your name those whom you have given to me.

But now I am coming to you; and these things I speak in the world in order that they may have joy made full in themselves. I have given them your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world, I do not pray that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Yet not for these only do I pray; but for those who through their word are to believe in me.

Father, I will that where I am, these also whom you have given me may be with me, that they may see my glory which you have given me, because you loved me from the foundation of the world. And I have made known your name to them, and will make it known, that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I in them.

Yes, Lord, this is what I would like to repeat after You before flying into Your arms” (pg. 399-400).

Therese’s last manuscript ends with this thought: “Yes, I feel it; even though I had on my conscience all the sins that can be committed, I would go, my heart broken with sorrow, and throw myself into Jesus’ arms, for I know how much He loves the prodigal child who returns to Him. It is not because God, in His anticipating Mercy has preserved my soul from mortal sin that I go to Him with confidence and love...” (pg. 404).

“For the soul, like a true daughter of God, is moved in all by the Spirit of God, as St. Paul teaches in saying that those who are moved by the Spirit of God are children of God Himself (Rom. 8:14). Accordingly, the intellect of this soul is God’s intellect; its will is God’s will; its memory is the memory of God; and its delight is God’s delight; and although the substance of this soul is not the substance of God, since it cannot undergo a substantial conversion into Him, it has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in Him, as it is in this state”

(St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*. Stanza 2:34).

At the end of this year’s exploration of the *Story of a Soul*, the candidates should have a grasp of the following, appropriate to this level of formation:

- An overview of Thérèse’ life
- The influence of her family in Thérèse’ spiritual development
- The influence of the Imitation of Christ and the writings of St. John of the Cross
- The importance of the Gospel as the foundation of the Christian life
- An appreciation of Thérèse’ virtues as lived in her daily routine
- An appreciation of her contribution to the understanding and practical application of Carmelite spirituality
- The essence of the “Little Way” is that holiness is not the result of one’s own efforts but of divine action, which requires nothing more than absolute confidence in God’s loving mercy.

- The fruit of Thérèse' "Little Way" is ever-growing fraternal charity, especially towards those who are the most difficult. "When I am charitable it is Jesus alone who acts in me; the more I am united to Him the more do I love all my Sisters" (ch. IX).
- An appreciation of the influence of Our Holy Mother St. Teresa on the missionary spirit of St. Thérèse: Toward the end of her life, Thérèse wrote, "I want to be a daughter of the Church as Our Holy Mother St. Teresa was" (p.398).
- The connection between Thérèse' spiritual life and the life of the OCDS today

The candidates' personal growth should reflect:

- Increasing confidence in God's merciful love and providence
- Increasing fraternal charity within the context of the OCDS Constitutions (Art. 24. Fraternal Communion)
- Ongoing commitment to the service of the Church, especially the salvation of souls, and to the local community
- Faithfulness to their responsibilities as OCDS members (refer to page 2 above)

"The lay faithful precisely because they are members of the Church, have the vocation and mission of proclaiming the Gospel...The spirituality of Carmel will awaken in Secular Carmelites a desire for greater apostolic commitment, in becoming aware of all that their call to Carmel implies. Aware of the need of the world has of witnesses to God's presence, they will respond to the invitation the church directs to all Associations of the faithful followers of Christ, committing them to human society by means of active participation in the apostolic goal of the church's mission, within the framework of their own charism. As a fruit of this participation in evangelization, Carmelite Seculars will share a renewed taste for prayer, contemplation, and the liturgical and sacramental life" (OCDS Constitutions, Art.25).

Session Eleven: The local Council: understanding the function of the Council within the context of the community

(This session revisits concepts discussed in Year B of Formation I).

Note to the Council: It would be appropriate to use parts of this session for community formation periodically, especially in the months before the triennial elections. Sessions Eleven and Twelve may be done at any time during the year; it is permissible to change the order of the sessions if needed.

Note to the Formator: Definitively professed members are eligible to serve on the Council as President and Formation Director. Given the lasting harm caused by a dysfunctional Council, it is extremely important that the candidates thoroughly understand the points discussed in this session.

Required Reading: Const. art. 46-55; Welcome to the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites, How Ought the Council Function? pg. 81-96; Letter to OCDS Communities nos. 3-8, Sup. Gen. Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, OCD, March 6, 2019 (Appendix K); Ratio 11, on the Council's role in formation; and Ratio 59-69, on discernments

Additional Reading: Entire Letter to OCDS Communities, Fr. Cannistrà; Ratio 70-93, an in-depth description of what a Secular Carmelite is

Essential Points to Discuss:

Duties, Responsibilities and Characteristics of the Local Council:

"...always keep in mind and put into practice what our Lord said in the Gospel: Whoever has a mind to become a leader among you must make himself servant to the rest..." (Rule of St. Albert, Art. 22).

- The Council is comprised of the President, Formation Director and three Councilors. The authority of the Council is shared among these five members. The entire Council shares responsibility for the community, not just one or two members of the Council. "It should be an authority lived 'with a mother's love' and with 'discretion'... Its exercise requires active co-responsibility, both within the Council itself in the choices and decisions to be taken, and in encouraging the active and responsible participation of each member of the community in decisions concerning the good of the community" (*Letter to OCDS* no. 4).
- In Carmel — as in Christian life — authority is not about control, it is about service to the community. "Control is not service. Guidance, instruction, leadership — that is service, but not controlling" (Welcome pg. 94).
- "The primary responsibility of the Council is the formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community" (Const. art. 46). Every member of the Council is expected to get to know the candidates as individuals in order to aid their formation and properly discern for the Promise. "Today more than ever, in the face of

social and ecclesial reality, a solid formation is necessary that leads to practice of discernment in community. The community is then the fertile sphere of this; it should lead each member to be co-responsible for the community, its formation and its mission” (Letter to OCDS, no. 4).

- Council members are obliged to respect the confidential nature of meetings and of council business.

President (or whoever serves as the group’s leader):

- The President is not the superior of the community or of the Council. He or she is a spokesperson and is at the service of the community. The President:
 - a. convokes and presides over meetings of the community and the Council; shows fraternal service to all the members of the community.
 - b. is careful to avoid any demonstration of preference for some members over others.
 - c. aids the Formation Director and Spiritual Assistant in carrying out their responsibilities (See Const. art. 51).

Formation Director:

- “The Director of Formation ...has the responsibility of preparing the candidates for first and definitive promises” (Const. art. 53).
- The formators cooperate as a team with the Formation Director to carry out the directions decided by the Council. (Const. art. 47; Ratio 8, 29, 31)

Fills in for the President if he/she is absent.

The three Councilors:

- a. share responsibility for the community equally with the President and Formation Director.
 - b. attend and participate in the council meetings, taking an **active role** in the discussions and decision-making.
 - c. participate in implementing the formation program.
 - d. take an active interest in the wellbeing and formation of the community and the individual members.
 - e. participate in discernments for the Promises. (see Ratio 11)
- “From these duties, we see that the Council carries out a fundamental role of accompanying and leading the Community in its mission. For this reason, it ought to walk together towards it, encouraging the communal character of the Christian Carmelite vocation and look upon each of the members with God’s eyes” (Letter to OCDS 3).
 - In the practical exercise of dialogue, all must have the patience of listening — which requires humility, patience, willingness to understand, and an effort to respond in new ways. So, it is not a question of tenaciously defending one’s ideas, but of seeking the truth together with others in humility. In this form of dialogue, conflicts in the

community are harmonized by the unity of the spirit. There is a need for training in communion which helps to move from the selfish “I” of the old person to the “we” of the new person (see Letter to OCDS 6).

- “Humility also requires having our eyes fixed on God, the true center of each and every one, not considering oneself the center of the world and of oneself... Only with humility and detachment from self can we overcome the temptations of factions, rivalries and vainglory in the community” (Letter to OCDS 7).
- Fellowship is an integral part of the community meetings and the Council is responsible for fostering the sense of “togetherness” in the community. While study and prayer are important, meetings also need to include time to relax together as friends (see Welcome pg. 94-95).
- “...the members of the Council must know well the documents that govern the OCDS and let themselves be guided by them... To carry out this service, the members of the Council must look to Jesus, who came to serve and give his life for others. This leads authority to be respectful towards the community, understanding it as a gift from above that must be guarded and as a place where the Risen One is present” (Letter to OCDS nos. 4-5).

Session Twelve: OCDS members' responsibilities to the community and the Order

(This session is a review of the previous Formation I, Year B, Session Eleven.)

Note to the Council: Community responsibilities should be shared among the members as much as possible. Every professed member should be responsible for some ongoing service to the community (unless excused by reason of age or illness). Continuously nurturing leadership skills and experience in all the members ensures that most will be equipped and confident to take a turn on the Council. It is unhealthy for a community to always rely on just a few individuals, however gifted they may be.

Required Reading: Constitutions 15, 24a-d.; Ratio 24-29, 69-93; local Statutes and policies on roles and responsibilities in the community; Community policies (if any) on community roles and responsibilities.

Additional Reading: Our First Duty as Carmelites, Fr. David Centner, OCD.

Essential Points to Discuss:

- The need for mutual support in the spiritual life
- The need for shared responsibility and cooperation in community life
- Developing interpersonal skills and attitudes

Further Points to Cover:

- All members have the responsibility to:
 - a. Attend the meetings — prepared for the discussions, on time, and present for the entire meeting (unless excused by the local Council for valid reasons)
 - b. Help with various tasks during the meeting, as the need arises
 - c. Foster an attitude of charity toward the other members
 - d. Develop an attitude of cooperation toward the local Council and the Superiors of the Order
 - e. Pay dues to the community and the province (unless excused by the local Council for valid reasons)
 - f. Professed members *also* have the responsibility to:
 - g. Take an active interest in the wellbeing of the community and the other members
 - h. Safeguard the harmony of community life by their friendliness and charity toward all members
 - i. Take turns with the roles of the Liturgy of the Hours
 - j. Cooperate with the local Council when asked to take on extra responsibilities — e.g., Secretary, Treasurer, infirmarian, librarian, liturgist, webmaster, retreat coordinator, assistant, etc. (every member has a job unless excused by the local Council for valid reasons)

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- k. Actively participate in the community apostolate (unless excused by the local Council for valid reasons)
- l. Take an interest in activities of the Order beyond the local community
- m. Be willing to serve on the Council (see Const. 52)
- Definitively professed members have the added responsibility to be willing to:
 - a. serve as President or Formation Director
 - b. serve as formators or council members
 - c. commit to their own ongoing formation, **which is life-long**
 - d. help with community and ongoing formation sessions
 - e. promote vocations to the OCDS

Note to the Formator: Be especially clear about points “a” and “b” for the Definitively Professed.

Note to the Council: The following needs to be completed well before the discernments begin; it may be divided into two or more sessions, if needed. It is important to have special sessions with the Formation Director for candidates in their third cycle of Formation II.

Special session with the Formation Director for candidates in their third year of Formation II: Called to holiness — The Definitive Promise in the Secular Order of the Discalced Carmelites.

Required Reading: OCDS Constitutions, 11-16; Ratio, 59-93. Ritual for the Discalced Carmelite Secular Order, Chapter III: Rite of Making the Promise

Additional Reading: The Promise and Vows in the Secular Order, Fr Alzinir Debastiani, OCD (included in the F2 Yr B appendices)

Essential Points to Discuss:

- “The Secular Carmelite wants to see God, wants to know God, and recognizes that prayer and meditation now become more important. The Promise is a commitment to a new way of life in which the ‘allegiance to Jesus Christ’ marks the person and the way this person lives” (Ratio 88).
- “For the members of the Secular Order it is an honor to be part of the Carmelite family...The Secular Carmelite seeks intimate union with Christ in the world through the lived experience of the Promise made according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order” (Ratio 86).
- “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” (Const. 11).
- “The promise of chastity reinforces the commitment to love God above all else and to love others with the love God has for them...This promise does not prevent a change in state of life” (Const. 13).
- “By the promise of poverty the Secular Carmelite expresses the desire to live in accordance with the Gospel and its values. In evangelical poverty there is a wealth of generosity, self-denial, and interior liberty...” (Const. 14).
- “The promise of obedience is a pledge to live open to the will of God...For this reason the Secular Carmelite freely cooperates with those who have responsibility for guiding the community and the Order in discerning and accepting God’s ways: the Community’s Council, the Provincial and the General” (Const. 15).
- “The beatitudes are a plan of action for life and a way to enter into relationship with the world, neighbors and co-workers, families and friends. By promising to live the beatitudes in daily life, Secular Carmelites seek to give evangelical witness as members of the Church and the Order, and by this witness invite the world to follow Christ: ‘the Way the Truth and the Life’ (Jn.14:6)” (Const. 16).

- “What is the element that distinguishes those called to be Secular Carmelites? It is not the spirituality, nor the study, nor the devotion to Mary. Simply put, the Secular Carmelite is moved to commit himself or herself to the Order: to commit himself to the service of the Church through collaboration and cooperation with the goal of the Order. This commitment in the form of the **Promise** is an ecclesial event and an event of the Order in addition to being an event in the life of the person who makes the Promise” (Ratio 83).
- Secular Carmelites are called to share in the common vocation to holiness (see, Preface to the OCDS Constitutions). “We come to a full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider *the prime and fundamental vocation...* is the vocation to holiness, that is perfection of charity. Holiness is the greatest testimony to the dignity conferred on a disciple of Christ. It is possible to say that this call to holiness is precisely the basic charge entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church. This charge is not a simple moral exhortation, but an undeniable requirement arising from the mystery of the Church” (*Christifideles Laici — Call to Holiness*, para. 16). Hence, “... this promise is a pledge to pursue personal holiness...” (Const. 11).
- “The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and their participation in earthly activities. Once again, the Apostle admonishes us: ‘Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him’ (Colos. 3:17) (*Christifideles Laici — The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People*, Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II). “... The Secular Order receives new vocations with joy, but also with a feeling of responsibility, so that in them also the charism may be daily understood more deeply, bear fruit and expand...” (Ratio 20).
- “... within the lay state diverse ‘vocations’ are given, that is, there are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a ‘commonly shared’ lay vocation, ‘special’ lay vocations flourish. In this area we can also recall the spiritual experience of the flourishing of diverse forms of secular institutions that have developed recently in the Church. These offer the lay faithful, and even priests, the possibility of professing the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience through vows or promises while fully maintaining one’s lay or clerical state” (*Christifideles Laici — The Various Vocations in the Lay State*, para. 56).
- “...Our Lord will reward anyone who does more than he [or she] is obliged to do. See that the bounds of common sense are not exceeded, however, for common sense is the guide of the virtues” (Rule of St. Albert 24).

The Definitive Promise:

I, (name), inspired by the Holy Spirit, in response to God’s call, sincerely promise to the Superiors of the Order of the Teresian Carmel and to you my brothers and sisters, to tend

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toward evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, obedience, and of the Beatitudes, according to the Constitutions of the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites, **for the rest of my life**. I confidently entrust this, my Promise, to the Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel.

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As the candidates prepare for the Definitive Promise, it is helpful to recall the words of Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Letter to the OCDS, March 20, 2020:

... I urge you to know your [legislative] documents more and more, especially the Constitutions, both in initial and ongoing formation. Always remember that a charism in the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit; it is a living and dynamic reality which must be constantly cultivated and made to bear fruit, otherwise it rots. It is there, in the documents of the OCDS, that you find the essential elements of the charism of the Teresian Carmel adapted to your lay life. Faced with the many commitments and rapid changes in our post-modern world, many times we risk losing our roots and we forget who we are. Returning from time to time to the Constitutions and the writings of our Saints will confirm you in a solid doctrine that allows you to walk with firmness and enthusiasm on the streets of the world.

I ask the Lord to enlighten you so that you may continue to be faithful to the essential elements of your vocation as Secular Carmelites. May the light and strength which come from prayer as friendship with the Lord and fraternal relationship with your brothers and sisters enable you to respond to the challenges and needs of your personal, family and community realities.

May the contemplation of the Risen Christ fill you with peace and joy. May Mary, Queen of Heaven, give you the joy of her Living Son forever.

Fraternally, Fr. Saverio Cannistra, OCD

Superior General, 2009–2021

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Appendices

Appendix A: Introduction to Year C, Thérèse and Maturity, Sam Anthony Morello, OCD

Prophetess of the Shift from the Perfection Model to the Integration Model

Where did St. Thérèse of Lisieux get her insight into the close relation between emotional and spiritual maturity? Of that she had no doubt. She probably would have used different terms from our own; her paradigms would not have matched ours, I suppose. But how did she know about the substance of what we are talking about? She did not live in a “psychological age” as we do.

Thérèse did not have Adrian van Kaam of the last quarter of the twentieth century feeding her the best of the insights of Freud and Jung, measured up against the experiential wisdom of the monastic ages and of classical spirituality. Thérèse had no input from the modern dialogue between psychology and spirituality.

Remarkably self-aware since her mother died when she was but four and a half, Thérèse simply had her consciousness and conscience, her sensibilities, honesty, family relations, family-faith culture, and her inner Spirit of direction to help discern progress in grace. The beauty of it all is that Thérèse, the serious teenager, did not think like a dualist. Spontaneously, naturally, somehow, she perceived the unity of the complex condition of the human being; and she knew that Christic redemption addressed the whole “ball of wax” in a hopeful way. Deep down Thérèse was an optimist, a synthesist, and an integrationist. In all this she was a *prophetess*.

The question posed at the opening of this article has often crossed my mind. But now a growing issue in Catholic-Christian spirituality is the “shift from the *perfection model* to the *integration model*.” One of the main-recovered and truly workable perceptions of Vatican II was that the *God of Salvation* is one and the same as the *God of Creation!* Grace builds on nature. Nature is at its best when graced. Grace has no field of operation without nature. The human being can only be sanctified by faith as a human being. Grace stabilizes nature, and nature comes into its full potential under grace. And again, grace without nature to work on has no agenda. Grace is for the personal integration of nature with the theological and moral virtues so that the human being, “fully alive,” might become the “glory of God” (St. Irenaeus). Jesus Christ, God and man, is the ultimate model of all integration. He is the model of the perfect convergence of the natural and the supernatural. Who has any problem with the genuineness of the humanity of Christ? It fascinated the big Teresa of Avila and the little Thérèse of Lisieux as well. And with supremely good reason! As John Paul II has tried to demonstrate, the best basis of a workable anthropology is an authentic Christology.

Whenever I happen upon a discussion on contemporary *theological anthropology* I immediately think of Thérèse. I think of her with the wonder already expressed. For a number of reasons she anticipated this subject. Her *Little Way* is definitely a spirituality of integration, among other things. This is truly an additional credit to the Little Doctor. Again, she was ahead of her time. The one episode that clinches the argument in favor of her prophetic anticipation of the spirituality of integration is her account of what she calls her “conversion.” You already know

what I am referring to. It is the story of the “Grace of Christmas” (1886), found in Chapter V of the Story of a Soul (See Translation by John Clark, OCD [ICS/1996/pp 97ff.]). There you remember she rehearses her “extreme touchiness.”

She confesses that she was given to habitual crying. She would even cry because she cried. She considered herself “unable to correct this terrible fault.” Reasoning with her hypersensitivity was “useless.” She was so aware of the immaturity of her condition that she knew it was a hindrance to “entering Carmel,” her one great *project in life*. As she put it, she “was still in the swaddling clothes of a child,” so, how could she enter the cloister? And she knew she needed nothing less than a “little miracle” of deliverance.

That *little miracle* (not really so *little*) would be given her by the Lord of Christmas, but not without flexing new muscle and crossing a new finish line at great cost to herself! She would have to measure up to a big surprise provided by her weary father one Christmas Eve. But since that night she was made “strong and courageous.” Since that unexpected challenge she “walked from victory to victory,” running “like a giant.” The “source of her tears was dried up” and was to reopen “rarely and with great difficulty.” And this eventful experience she named her “conversion.”

So significant was that Christmas grace that Thérèse calls it the “*night of light* [that] began the third period of my life, the most beautiful and the most filled with graces from heaven.” It directed her outside herself and ushered in an infusion of “charity” for others, especially for the “conversion of sinners.” Her successful prayers for a hardened criminal followed shortly upon her Christmas conversion. And the Lord was to lead her into the garden of Carmel to mother many other children into eternal life, after having received her “first child” just alluded to, the convict Pranzini.

I dutifully want to conclude this brief reflection by copying Thérèse’s own story of her “conversion.” It was a grace for you and me as well. She is the “little doctor” reassuring us that the cost of emotional maturity pays off in supernatural advancement. As a matter of fact, to remain infantile and unreasonable while aspiring to transcendent rapport with God and his Kingdom is unrealistic. It is an aspiration perhaps, but not a real desire, more of an illusion. Sure, God can do anything; nothing is impossible for him. But grace is never cheap. And God does not save us without us (Augustine). So off to the evangelical gymnasium of maturity we must go, that is, to the *Beatitudes* of the *Sermon on the Mount*. There we become genuine; we become *little children* of the kingdom. “Working out” there is arduous effort in humility and generosity. We will need to stretch and strain to redirect and evangelize our emotional energies and childish attachments. And as well as “bite the bullet” with strength of soul, we will have to call out to God, for *our help is in the Name of the Lord*. And yes, the selfish ego will give us a fight to remember!

St. Thérèse, thank you for being the little warrior that you became. Your grace is our grace. Your insights are now ours. Your flight of charity to God and neighbor is now more clearly our own possibility in Christ Jesus. Bless us with your prayers as we buckle down with seriousness and re-read once more your story of personal emergence.

“It was December 25, 1886, that I received the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion. We had come back from Midnight Mass where I had the happiness of receiving the *strong and powerful* God. Upon arriving at Les Buissonnets, I used to take my shoes from the chimney corner and examine the presents in them; this old custom had given me so much joy in our youth that Celine wanted to continue treating me as a baby since I was the youngest in the family. Papa had always loved to see my happiness and listen to my cries of delight as I drew each surprise from the *magic shoes*, and my dear King’s gaiety increased my own happiness very much. However, Jesus desired to show me that I was to give up the defects of my childhood and so he withdrew its innocent pleasures. He permitted Papa, tired out after the Midnight Mass, to experience annoyance when seeing my shoes at the fireplace, and that he speak those words which pierced my heart: “Well, fortunately, this will be the last year!”

“I was going upstairs at the time to remove my hat, and Celine, knowing how sensitive I was and seeing the tears already glistening in my eyes, wanted to cry too, for she loved me very much and understood my grief. She said, ‘Oh, Thérèse, don’t go downstairs; it would cause you too much grief to look at your slippers right now!’ But Thérèse was no longer the same; Jesus had changed her heart! Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa, and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I had the happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing; Celine believed it was all a *dream!* Fortunately, it was a sweet reality; Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to preserve it forever!”

**Appendix B: Session 1,
Homily at the Canonization of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux,
by Pope Pius XI, 17 May 1925**

Blessed be God and the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies, and God of all consolation; who in the midst of the countless cares of our apostolic ministry, has granted Us the joy of inscribing as our first Saint in the calendar the Virgin who was also the first to be beatified by Us, at the beginning of our Pontificate. This maiden became a child in the order of grace, but her spirit of childhood was united to such greatness of soul that, in accordance with the promises of Christ, she merited to be glorified before the Church upon earth, as well as in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

We give thanks to God likewise for permitting Us, who hold the place of His Only Son, to repeat insistently today from this chair of Truth and during this solemn ceremony the salutary teaching of the Divine Master. When the disciples asked: “Who will be the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven?” calling a child and setting him in their midst, He pronounced these memorable words: “Amen, I say to you, unless ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 18:2).

The new Saint Thérèse had learned thoroughly this teaching of the Gospels and had translated it into her daily life. Moreover she taught the way of spiritual childhood by word and example to the novices of her monastery. She set it forth clearly in all her writings, which have gone to the ends of the world, and which assuredly no one has read without being charmed thereby, or without reading them again and again with great pleasure and much profit. For this simple child, this flower that blossomed in the walled garden of Carmel, not content with adding to Thérèse the name of the “Child Jesus,” retraced in herself His living image, so that it may be said that whosoever honors Thérèse honors the Divine Model she reproduced.

Therefore We nurse the hope today of seeing springing up in the souls of the faithful of Christ a burning desire of leading a life of spiritual childhood. That spirit consists in thinking and acting, under the influence of virtue, as a child feels and acts in the natural order. Little children are not blinded by sin, or disturbed by the passions, and they enjoy in peace the possession of their innocence. Guiltless of malice or pretense, they speak and act as they think, so that they show themselves as they really are. Thus Thérèse appeared more angelic than human in her practice of truth and justice, endowed as she was with the simplicity of a child. The Maid of Lisieux had ever in memory the invitation and the promises of her Spouse: “Whosoever is a little one, let him come to Me” (Prov. 9:4). “You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you; as one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you.” (Is. 64:12-13)

Conscious of her weakness she abandoned herself entirely to God, and leaning upon Him she labored to acquire — at the cost of every sacrifice, and of an utter yet joyous abdication of her own will — the perfection she arrived at. We need not be surprised if in Thérèse was accomplished the word of Christ: “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt 18:4). In her catechism lessons she drank in the pure doctrine of Faith, from the golden book of The Imitation of Christ she learned asceticism, in the writings of Saint John of the Cross she found her mystical theology. Above all,

she nourished heart and soul with the inspired Word of God on which she meditated assiduously, and the Spirit of Truth taught her what He hides as a rule from the wise and prudent and reveals to the humble. Indeed, God enriched her with a quite exceptional wisdom, so that she was enabled to trace out for others a sure way of salvation.

That superabundant share of divine light and grace enkindled in Thérèse so ardent a flame of love, that she lived by it alone, rising above all created things, till in the end it consumer her; so much so that shortly before her death she could candidly avow she had never given God anything but Love.

Evidently it was under the influence of that burning charity that the Maid of Lisieux took the resolution of doing all things for love of Jesus, with the sole object of pleasing Him, of consoling His Divine Heart, and of saving a multitude of souls who would love Him eternally. We have proof that on entering into Paradise she began at once, there also, this work among souls, when we see the mystical shower of roses which God permitted her, and still permits her to let fall upon earth, as she had ingenuously foretold.

Therefore do We desire earnestly that all the Faithful of Christ should render themselves worthy of partaking in the abundant profusion of graces resulting from the intercession of "little Thérèse." But We desire much more earnestly that all the faithful should study her in order to copy her, becoming children themselves, since otherwise they cannot, according to the oracle of the Master, arrive at the Kingdom of Heaven.

If the way of spiritual childhood became general, who does not see how easily would be realized the reformation of human society which We set ourselves to accomplish at the commencement of our Pontificate, and more especially in the promulgation of this Jubilee. We, therefore, adopt as our own the prayer of the new Saint Thérèse with which she ends her invaluable autobiography: "O Jesus, we beseech Thee to cast Thy glance upon the vast number of little souls, and to choose in this world a legion of little victims worthy of Thy love." Amen.

**Appendix C: Session 1,
Bull of Canonization of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face.
(Vehementer exultamus hodie)**

Source: Taylor, Rev. Thomas N., *Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, The Little Flower of Jesus*.
New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1930, 279 - 289.

Vehemently do We exult this day, and We are filled with the greatest joy, because it is granted to Us who beatified the daughter of Carmel — Thérèse of the Child Jesus, and proposed her as a model, to celebrate now her canonization, under the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the holy Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, and under our own authority.

This Virgin, truly wise and prudent, walked in the way of the Lord in the simplicity of her soul, and being made perfect in a short space, fulfilled a long time. Thereafter while still in the flower of her years, she was called to Paradise to receive the crown which her heavenly Spouse had prepared for her. During her lifetime she was known only to a few, but immediately after her saintly death her fame spread abroad in marvellous fashion throughout the whole Christian world, on account of the innumerable wonders wrought by Almighty God at her intercession. Indeed, it seemed as if, in accordance with her dying promise, she were letting fall upon earth a shower of Roses. Hence it came to pass that Holy Church decided to bestow upon her the high honors reserved for the Saints without observing the statutory delays.

The child was born at Alençon in the diocese of Séez, in France, on January 2, 1873, of a father and a mother remarkable for their piety — Louis Stanislaus Martin and Marie Zélie Guérin. [They were declared Venerable on 26 March 1994. *Addendum*: They were canonized by Pope Francis on Oct. 18, 2015.] On January 4 she was baptized, receiving the name of Marie Françoise Thérèse.

Scarcely had she passed the age of four years and a half when she was bereft of her mother, and so became a prey to the deepest sorrow. Her education was thenceforth entrusted to her sisters, Marie and Pauline, whom she strove to obey perfectly in all things, the while she lived under the watchful care of her well-beloved father. Thanks to her teachers, Thérèse hastened like a giant along the way to perfection. From her earliest years it was her chief delight to talk frequently of God, and she always kept before her mind the thought that she must not inflict the slightest pain on the Holy Child Jesus.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit she longed to lead a most holy life and promised earnestly that she would refuse God nothing He should seem to ask of her, a resolution she endeavored to keep until death. As soon as she had reached the age of nine she was given into the charge of the Benedictine nuns of Lisieux, with whom she spent the day, returning home at nightfall. Though younger than the other scholars, she outstripped them all in progress and piety, studying the mysteries of our Faith with such zeal and insight that the chaplain of the convent styled her his “theologian,” or the “little doctor.” As time passed she learned by heart the whole of that admirable book, *The Imitation of Christ*, while the Sacred Scriptures became so familiar to her, that in her writings she used them aptly, frequently, and with authority.

In her tenth year, she was long afflicted by a mysterious and deadly disease from which, as she herself narrates, she was freed through Our Blessed Lady, to whom she had been making a novena under the invocation of Our Lady of Victories, and who appeared to her with a smile upon her lips. Thereafter, filled with angelic fervor, she made her soul ready for the sacred Banquet in which we partake of the Body of Christ.

As soon as she had tasted of the Eucharistic Bread, she felt an insatiable hunger for that heavenly Food, and, as if inspired, she begged of Jesus, her sole delight, to “change for her into bitterness all human consolation.” Then, all aflame with love for Christ and His Church, she had a most keen desire to enter among the Discalced Carmelites, so that by her self-denial and continual sacrifices “she might bring help to priests and missionaries and the entire Church,” and might gain innumerable souls for Jesus Christ. At the approach of death she promised that when with God she would continue this work.

While yet but fourteen years old, on account of her tender age, she met with serious opposition on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities regarding her vocation to the cloister. These difficulties she surmounted with a strength of soul well-nigh incredible, and in spite of her natural shyness, she revealed her intention to our predecessor, Leo XIII of happy memory. The Pontiff remitted the matter to the decision of the Superiors. Though balked of her desire, and stricken with grief, nevertheless she was perfectly submissive to the divine will.

After this stern trial of her patience and her vocation, on the night day of April 1888, with the approval of her Bishop, she entered the Carmelite Monastery of Lisieux. In Carmel God wonderfully trained the heart of Thérèse, who, imitating the hidden life of Our Lady at Nazareth, like a well-watered garden put forth the flowers of every virtue, but most of all those of a burning love for God and most ardent charity of her neighbor, inasmuch as she had thoroughly understood that commandment of the Lord: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

In order more and more to give pleasure to Jesus Christ, having dwelt upon the invitation given in Scripture: “If anyone is little, let him come unto Me,” she desired to be a little one in spirit, and thenceforth with a childlike and perfect trust she surrendered herself entirely and for ever to God, as to a most loving Father. This way of spiritual childhood, in keeping with the doctrine of the Gospel, she taught to others, especially to the novices, whom out of obedience she had undertaken to train in the exercise of the virtues of the religious life, and then filled with a holy and apostolic zeal [by her writings] she enthusiastically opened up the way of evangelical simplicity to a world puffed up with pride, “loving vanity and searching after falsehood.”

Jesus, her Spouse, set her completely on fire with a longing to suffer both in body and in soul. Realizing with the utmost sorrow how Divine Love was on all sides forgotten, two years before her death she offered herself wholeheartedly as a victim to “God’s Merciful Love.” Then, as it is reported, she was wounded by a flaming dart, so that, consumed by the divine fire, rapt in ecstasy, with the cry of “My God, I love Thee!” upon her lips, she went to her reward at the age of twenty-four. It was on September 30, 1897, that she took flight to her Spouse, and thus, according to the well-known eulogy of Holy Scripture: “having been made perfect in a short space, she fulfilled a long time.”

The funeral rites were duly carried out, and she was buried in the cemetery of Lisieux. From there her fame spread throughout the world and her sepulcher became glorious. Scarcely had she entered Paradise than she began to fulfill by innumerable miracles — as she still continues to fulfill — her promise of sending down to earth a perpetual shower of Roses, that is, of graces. The high esteem which she enjoyed among those who knew her in life was wonderfully increased after her death.

Urged by her great reputation for holiness, many Cardinals, Bishops, and Religious Superiors sent petitions to Pope [St.] Pius X, begging that her cause of canonization would be introduced. The Holy Father hearkened to the many prayers, and on the ninth of June, 1914, signed the decree of the Commission of the Introduction of the Cause, which was entrusted to the Postulator-General of the Discalced Carmelites, Reverend Father Rodrigo of St. Francis of Paula.

The Process having been carried through its various stages, and the heroic nature of the virtues practiced by Thérèse having been duly inquired into, the General Congregation was held on August 2, 1921, in presence of Pope Benedict XV. His Eminence, Cardinal Vico, Ponent of the Cause, submitted for discussion the question of the heroism of the Servant of God in practicing the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity, as also the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, and Temperance. The Cardinals and Consulters present gave their vote, and after delaying in order to obtain further light from God, Our Predecessor promulgated his decision on the eve of the Assumption, to the effect that the Venerable Thérèse had practiced the above virtues to an heroic degree.

So rapid and triumphant was the progress of the Cause that at once two miracles were proposed for examination, chosen out of a multitude of prodigies said to have been wrought throughout the Christian world by the powerful intercession of the Venerable Thérèse. The first concerned Sister Louise of St. Germain, of the Daughters of the Cross, victim of an organic disease, namely, a grave ulcer in the stomach, of hemorrhagic nature. On having recourse to the intercession of Thérèse, she was restored to perfect health, as three eminent doctors have unanimously testified at the request of the Sacred Congregation of Rites. The second miracle, somewhat similar to the first, was the cure of the young seminarist, Charles Anne, victim of pulmonary haemoptysis, of the cavitary stage. He confidently invoked the aid of the Servant of God and was perfectly cured. This is clear from the testimony of the three doctors, and from the reasons on which they based their decisions.

After the Antepreparatory and Preparatory Congregation, the General Congregation, on January 30, 1923, discussed in our presence the miraculous nature of three cures. According to custom, We reserved our decision in order to obtain further assistance from God, and on Quinquagesima Sunday, February 11, 1923, Feast of the Apparition of Our Lady at Lourdes, and eve of the first anniversary of our coronation, We decided to make it known. In the presence of Cardinal Vico, Prefect of the Congregation of Rites, and others of its members, We solemnly declared the above instantaneous and complete cures to be beyond doubt miraculous, and We gave orders for the promulgation of a Decree to that effect.

Shortly after, on March 6, Cardinal Vico, at another general reunion of the Congregation of Rites, put the question: “The virtues of the Venerable Servant of God and the two miracles required having been formally recognized, can the Beatification safely be proceeded with?” The

decision was unanimously in the affirmative. After a brief delay, on the Feast of St. Joseph, We solemnly declared that in all safety Sister Thérèse of the Child Jesus could receive the honors of Beatification, and We ordained the publication of the Brief for the ceremony in the Vatican Basilica. In the same Patriarchal Basilica of the Prince of the Apostles amid an outpouring of universal joy, the Servant of God became Blessed Thérèse.

Hearing of the fresh prodigies accomplished by Thérèse of the Child Jesus, We commissioned the Sacred Congregation of Rites on July 27, 1923, to take up anew the Cause of the Beata. On July 11, 1924, We ratified a decree of the Sacred Congregation which declared that the examinations in the dioceses of Parma [Italy] and Malines [Belgium], concerning miracles attributed to Blessed Thérèse were valid processes.

Gabriella Trimusi, who at the age of twenty-three had entered the Convent of the Poor Daughters of the Sacred Heart in Parma, began in 1913 to suffer in her left knee. She was in the habit of breaking the firewood across her knee, and this caused a lesion at the joint which prepared the way for a tuberculous infection. The trouble began with a dull pain, then the knee became swollen, and finally loss of appetite brought about emaciation. She was attended by two physicians, but without success, so that three years later she was sent to Milan, where injections, sunbaths, and various other forms of treatment were tried in vain; at the end of four years the spine itself became affected. The invalid returned to Parma, where several doctors diagnosed it as a case of tuberculous lesion, and prescribed general remedies. A radiograph of the knee revealed at this period the existence of periostitis at the head of the tibia. Taken to the hospital, she was once more subjected to X-rays, but while there was attacked by Spanish influenza, and began to suffer fresh and constantly increasing pain in the vertebral column. All remedies proving ineffective, she was recommended by a priest on June 13, 1923, to join in a public novena in honor of Blessed Thérèse. She joined in the prayers, more concerned, however, over the health of the other nuns than her own. The close of the novena coincided with the close of a triduum in a neighboring Carmel, and several of the nuns — Gabriella among the rest — sought permission to attend the ceremony. On her return, after slowly and painfully effecting the short journey, she entered the chapel of the Community, where the others were already assembled. The Superioress exhorted her to pray with confidence, and bade her go to her place. Strange to say, the invalid knelt down unconsciously on her knee without feeling the slightest pain, nor did she realize what she had done, on account of the increase of suffering at the moment in the spine. She next went to the refectory with others, and, the meal finished, slowly mounted the stairs. Going into the first room she saw, she took off the apparatus she wore to support the spine, and cried out loudly: "I am cured, I am cured!"

Sister Gabriella Trimusi returned at once to her labors and the exercises of religious life, without either pain or fatigue. The doctors appointed by the Sacred Congregation discussed the miracle at great length, and decided that the lesion at the knee was chronic arthrosynovitis and the spinal trouble was chronic spondulitis. These two lesions, rebellious to all other treatment, yielded to God's power, and Sister Gabriella by a miracle recovered the health which she still enjoys.

The story of the second miracle is more brief. In October 1919, Maria Pellemans was a victim of pulmonary tuberculosis, and this was followed by gastritis and enteritis, both of them likewise

of a tuberculous nature. She was medically attended at home, then in a sanatorium. In August 1920, she went to Lourdes, but all to no purpose. In March, 1923, she accompanied a small band of pilgrims to Lisieux, and while kneeling at the tomb of the Blessed Thérèse she was suddenly restored to perfect health. Three specially appointed doctors made a favorable report to the Sacred Congregation on both miracles.

In these cures, the reality of the miraculous nature admitted of no doubt whatsoever, indeed it shone with unwonted splendor on account of the special circumstances in which the prodigies occurred. For that reason, on March 17, 1925, in a General Congregation, Cardinal Vico sought the verdict of the Cardinals and Consulters, based on the unanimous decision of the medial experts. We ourselves reserved our opinion until March 19, Feast of St. Joseph, when in the presence of the Cardinal Prefect and other dignitaries of the Sacred Congregation of Rite We solemnly proclaimed the two cures to be of a certainty miraculous. On March 29, after having received the unanimous vote of the Cardinals and the Consulters, We solemnly declared the Canonization of the Blessed Thérèse could be proceeded with in safety.

After all these preliminaries, in order to comply with the prescriptions laid down by our Predecessors, and to enhance the splendor of the august ceremony, We convoked a Secret Consistory of the Cardinals on March 30, to ask their advice on the question of the solemn canonization. Cardinal Vico spoke eloquently on the life and miracles of Blessed Thérèse of the Child Jesus, and warmly begged that she be raised to the highest honors. Each of the Cardinals expressed his opinion on the matter in question. On April 2 We held a Public Consistory, at which after an able discourse by the Consistorial advocate, John Gusco, all the Cardinals exhorted Us to give a final decision. We, however, invited by special letters not merely the neighboring Bishops, but also those most remote to come to Us and pronounce their opinion. Many came from various countries, and on April 22 took part in a semi-public Consistory, after having acquainted themselves — by means of an abridgment — with the life and miracles of the Beta, and all the process gone through by the Congregation of Rites. Patriarchs, Archbishops, and Bishops united themselves to the Cardinals, urging upon Us to celebrate this canonization.

We therefore decided to celebrate it on May 17, in the Vatican Basilica, and exhorted the faithful to redouble their prayers, both for their own spiritual benefit and for our guidance by the Spirit of God.

On this most happy and desired day, the secular and regular clergy of Rome, the Prelates and Officials of the Curia, and finally all the Patriarchs, Bishops and Abbots then in the Eternal City gathered in the Vatican Basilica, the same being magnificently decorated. We ourselves brought up the rear of the procession. Then our Venerable Brother, Anthony Cardinal Vico, after a speech by Virgil Jacoucci, Consistorial advocate, set forth to Us the desire of the Episcopate, and the Order of Discalced Carmelites, that We should place among the Saints Blessed Thérèse of the Child Jesus, whom already We had proclaimed the patroness of the Missions and Noviciates of the Order. A second and third time they renewed their petition. Then after earnest prayers for light: "In honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the glory of the Catholic Faith, by the authority of Jesus Christ, of Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, after mature deliberation and at the request of the Cardinals, Patriarchs and Bishops, We

declared that the professed nun of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, was a Saint and was to be inscribed in the calendar of the Saints, memory of her to be kept on October the third of each year. [With the change of the liturgical calendar, St. Thérèse's feast day was moved to October 1st.] Finally, We returned fervent thanks to God for so great a favor, celebrated the Holy Sacrifice, granted a Plenary Indulgence, and ordained the publication of the Decree, to be signed by all the Cardinals and by ourselves.

Today, faithful flock of Christ, the Church offers a new and most noble model of virtue for all of you to contemplate unceasingly. For the peculiar characteristic of the sanctity to which God called Thérèse of the Child Jesus lies chiefly in this, that having heard the Divine call she obeyed with the utmost promptness and fidelity. Without going beyond the common order of things, in her way of life she followed out and fulfilled her vocation with such alacrity, generosity, and constancy that she reached an heroic degree of virtue. In our own day, when men seek so passionately after temporal goods, this young maiden lived in our midst practicing in all simplicity and devotedness the Christian virtues in order to honor God and to win eternal life. May her example strengthen in virtue and lead to a more perfect life, not only the cloistered souls but those living in the world.

In our present needs let us all invoke the patronage of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, that by her intercession a shower of Roses, that is, of the graces we require, may descend upon us. All of which We solemnly affirm out of the fullness of the Apostolic authority, and if anyone contravene our Decree — he shall incur the wrath of God and of St. Peter and St. Paul. Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, May 17, 1925, in the fourth year of our Pontificate, I, Pius, Bishop of the Catholic Church, et cetera.

**Appendix D: Session 3,
The Context of Holiness, pg. 92-96,**

By Fr. Marc Foley, OCD

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The Battle of Bearing her Emotions

The “third period” of Thérèse’s life dawned on December 25, 1886, when God gave her the grace to control her “extreme touchiness” (S. 97). Thérèse said that it was the greatest grace that she had ever received. It restored her strength of soul that she had lost when her mother died. The centrality of Thérèse’s Christmas conversion cannot be overemphasized. It was *the* event that changed the entire course of her life. It was the moment when she “received the grace of leaving childhood” (S. 98).

The Event. On Christmas day, it was a French tradition to fill the shoes of the baby of the family with little gifts. This custom continued in the Martin household until Thérèse was fourteen. When the Martin family returned home after attending midnight mass in 1886, Louis noticed Thérèse’s shoes in front of the fireplace and sighed to Céline, “Thérèse ought to have outgrown all this sort of thing, and I hope this will be the last time.”

Céline caught Thérèse’s eye and realized that she had overheard her father’s remark. Aware of Thérèse’s hypersensitivity, Céline followed her upstairs and found Thérèse sitting on her bed, her eyes filled with tears. Céline told her not to go downstairs in this state. Thérèse recounts: “I was no longer the same; Jesus had changed [my] heart. Forcing back my tears, I descended the stairs rapidly; controlling the poundings of my heart, I took my slippers and placed them in front of Papa, and withdrew all the objects joyfully. I had the happy appearance of a Queen. Having regained his own cheerfulness, Papa was laughing; Céline believed it was all a *dream!* Fortunately, it was a sweet reality; Thérèse had discovered once again the strength of soul which she had lost at the age of four and a half, and she was to preserve it forever. On that *night of light* began the third period of my life” (S. 98).

Here is an account of a teenage girl choosing to control her feelings. A seemingly insignificant event; yet, it was the turning point in Thérèse’s life. God “made me *strong* and *courageous*, arming me with His weapons. Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat. The source of my tears was dried up, [and I received] the grace of leaving my childhood, in a word, the grace of my complete conversion” (S. 97-8).

Leaving Childhood. What does it mean to leave childhood? What does it mean to become an adult? It means having the strength to not to be ruled by one’s emotions or allowing one’s feelings to dictate one’s choices, and possessing the determination to stand upright in the face of an emotional storm. This was the grace given to Thérèse.

Thérèse was *not* healed of her hypersensitivity. Rather, she was given the *strength* to deal with it. Her father’s remark deeply hurt Therese, but she received the strength not to give in to her

tears. Her *feelings* were not *changed*, rather, she was given the *strength* to *control* them: “*Forcing back my tears [and] controlling the poundings of my heart...*” (S. 98).

The grace that Thérèse received from “the *strong and powerful God*” was “the *strength* of soul which she had lost” (S. 98). God did not *remove* Thérèse from the battle of her emotions but gave her the fortitude to remain *in* the battle. “It is God’s will that I fight right up until death” (LC. 38). Pauline testified that “In Carmel [Thérèse] was just as sensitive as others...and found people just as annoying.” When Thérèse was sitting on her bed, her eyes filled with tears, she knew that God had “armed” her to do combat. And when she *chose* to enter the battle, “the third period” of her life began. “Since that night I have never been defeated in any combat” (S. 97).

The Combat. The battle that Thérèse engaged in on December 25, 1886, was the form of *all* the battles that she would fight. Whether it was the battle to endure her “natural antipathy” toward Sr. Teresa of St. Augustine (S. 222), the courage to face her fears when she was appointed novice mistress, the patience to suffer boredom while listening to Sr. St. Raphael drone on and on delivering spiritual nosegays, the fortitude to work with Sr. Marie of St. Joseph in the linen closet, the capacity to bear up under her father’s mental illness, the grace to deal with her scrupulosity, or the strength to resist being mothered by Pauline and other mother figures in Carmel, the battle was the same. It was the battle of bearing her emotions.

Reflect upon your own life, my dear readers. What do we suffer in doing God’s will? Is it not some painful emotion that accompanies our choices? Is it not fear that makes an act of faith harrowing? Is not the sadness of mourning that makes “letting go” difficult? Is not loneliness or emptiness the price of remaining faithful to one’s vows? Is not tediousness and boredom the burden of being dutiful to the daily round?

Love and suffering are inseparable. If we are unwilling to suffer, then we cannot love. The grace of her Christmas conversion gave Thérèse the strength to embrace this truth. And it revealed to her that true happiness lies in love. “I felt *charity* enter into my soul, and the need to forget myself and to please others; since then I’ve always been happy” (S. 99). If we do not understand this truth, then we cannot understand what Thérèse meant when she said that she *loved suffering*. Thérèse was not in love with pain; she was in love with God. Her love for God expressed itself in her choices to love her neighbor. This demanded that she bear the pain that love entails. By embracing suffering, she experienced the embrace of God. If God is love, then we cannot know God by any other means than love. There is no truth in those who claim that they *know* God without *loving* their neighbor (1 Jn 2:4).

The Nature of Healing. Freud once said that therapy ends when we are dealing with our problems and they are no longer dealing with us. Thirty-five years ago, when I was a gung-ho undergraduate psychology major, Freud’s viewpoint sounded pessimistic and depressing. Now, as a man in his sixties, who is still struggling with the same fears and neurotic tendencies that I wrestled with in my youth, I see Freud’s perspective as being realistic. For are not our deeply rooted, deeply embedded, and deeply entrenched personality traits chronic, obdurate, and unyielding by definition?

Even though I believe that by the grace of God I am not the man I was thirty-five years ago, for I can honestly say that much emotional healing has taken place in my heart. Nevertheless, during times of stress, when my old fears and neurotic compulsions well up within me in all their savage intensity, I feel that nothing has changed. I say to myself, "When will I ever be rid of this fear?"

Once I could accept the answer "*Never*" I felt a great weight taken off my shoulders. For I was released from the impossible goal of trying to become someone other than myself. "Working on yourself" can be an insidious mask of self-hate, for it makes you feel that there is something wrong with you until you are "healed."

I have often told people who come to me for spiritual direction to never make it a goal to conquer their faults. Simply ask for the grace to resist the temptation of the moment. Take it for granted that you will always have tendencies toward certain sins and self-destructive behaviors which will always be opportunities to grow in virtue and rely upon the grace of God.

"I had no need to grow up" (S. 208). Thérèse did not make it a goal to get *beyond* the effects of her childhood but to do the will of God *in the midst* of them. Thérèse understood that the emotional wounds of her childhood were not obstacles to spiritual growth but the *context* of growing in holiness.

Thérèse can help us to refocus our goal in life. She tells us to keep our minds on *doing* the will of God. If our emotions are transformed in the process, all well and good. Praise God! But if they are not changed, they are the context in which we will grow in God's love.

Appendix E: Session 3, Signs of Spiritual Maturity:

Prayer:

Spiritually mature persons' prayer becomes more a personal relationship with God, and less a task to be done. They persevere through the dry spells. There is commonly less interest in external devotional practices and an increasing inclination to "ponder in the heart." Extraordinary experiences are not a sign one way or the other, and a spiritually mature person doesn't dwell on them.

Self-knowledge:

They stop paying attention to what others are doing right or wrong, and instead reflect on their own behavior and attitudes. They patiently work on their faults without becoming anxious or discouraged. They don't worry about looking perfect, nor are they falsely modest. They are able to take correction with an open mind.

Humility and charity:

They recognize their own littleness, are grateful for God's love, and love others in turn. They are more likely to feel compassion than irritation at other people's shortcomings. They genuinely care about others' wellbeing. They are self-giving without feeling that they are doing anything extraordinary.

Detachment:

Yes, detachment from unnecessary material goods, but more importantly detachment from self-will. They are less "busy" about other people — what they think and what they do, because after all, "all things are passing."

Patience and peace:

Charity, humility, and detachment lead to patience and composure in adversity. The spiritually mature do not let themselves get caught up in emotional upsets. St. Teresa wrote about a widow with a great reputation for holiness, living alone and practicing great devotion and penance. The woman became ill and wanted daily Mass in her home, which a priest did for her. One day the priest was not able to come, and the woman became angry and was quite verbal about it. Holy Mother's point being that one can practice all the externals and be highly thought of, but without the habit of self-abnegation all the rest means very little.

Emotional maturity:

Spiritual maturity will show itself in emotional maturity. Prudence, wisdom, forbearance, justice, fair-mindedness, reliability. They can see the other person's point of view in a disagreement, and treat everyone with respect.

**Appendix F: Session 4,
St. Teresa of Avila Way of Perfection — Birth Centenary Resources, article 12
Determined Determination**

— DR. RUDOLF V. D'SOUZA, OCD

Determination means more than sitting back and wishing something to happen, but never making up one's mind to do what it takes to get it done. "Gee wouldn't it be nice if... someone takes medicine for my sickness?" is pretty cozy way of imagination of an easy life. Teresa understood that the key is being committed to getting it done is *determination*. In the words of one of her commentators, "We all have sufficient grace from God to become saints, but we may not all have the determination to do it."

Determined Will

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that "The choice of the *time and duration of the prayer* arises from a *determined will*, revealing the secrets of the heart. One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has the time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter. One cannot always meditate, but one can always enter into inner prayer, independently of the conditions of health, work, or emotional state. The heart is the place of this quest and encounter, in poverty and in faith" (CCC 2710).

Prayer in fact presupposes the action of God and co-operation on our part. When both happily meet there is growth. What is concretely required on our part is generosity and virtue. Teresa firmly suggests the virtue of courage and perseverance through "*determined determination*" (Way 21, ii)¹.

Portion from His own Mouth

But those who do give themselves with determined determination, "the Lord shares with them His food even to the point of taking a *portion from His own mouth*, to give them" (cfr. Way 16, ix). Here we understand clearly that "prayer" is only the beginning of the whole mystery of our salvation. As Teresa writes in the definition "mental prayer" is nothing but "friendly intercourse," which signifies, when it really reaches its highest point, it is going to be not only friendly but reaches the depth of friendship and love far beyond expression. It ought to be liberating experience. God in this state cannot resist a soul that desires Him ardently. Not to desire God is equal to not to find Him. Prayer is the power that provokes encounter. But we need to understand that "encounter" with God may not be always pleasant, soothing experience. "Mental prayer" is the way by which we lose ourselves in order to find Christ (Phil. 3.7-22). It is an exposing of oneself to God's company and presence, because we cannot in any way force God to be our companion. If he offers his companionship it is not out of our merit but

¹ Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodrigues translate this expression as "very resolute determination to persevere. Its Spanish rendering is "*Determinada determinación*."

a sheer gift from Him. Dealing with God in all humility and determination is the only way to love and have him. Hence, prayer is nothing but our exposure to God and to His riches. As the sun God's company is never failing but His rays could be prevented if one closes the door or window of one's soul. The need for spiritual exposure to God is an absolute precondition for prayer. It is in prayer that we come to know God and His mysterious works. Our eyes of faith are wide opened and hope becomes stronger through prayer. Through prayer the spiritual faculties are energised and vitalised to receive God. The initial effort at prayer is normally rewarded with gifts and graces from God, which saturate us to the point of thirsting for Him more and more with determination and courage.

Interior Virtues

What actually strengthens the soul towards our journey to God is not our hard penances but our determination in growing the "interior virtues" (Way 15, ii). The interior virtues do not destroy the body but fortify the soul: "do not destroy the strength of the body, which is required for observing the rules, but *fortify the soul*" (Way 15, ii).

Preachers by Works

Determined determination means accepting the daily crosses without complaint. There are several occasions in our life where we are accused of things we have not done or we are unjustly condemned; such are the opportunities that help a soul to grow in this determination to love the Lord "when, then, there is no other benefit except the confusion which the person receives who accused you, by seeing you suffer yourselves to be condemned without cause, even this is a very great benefit. Such a virtue sometimes elevates a soul more than ten sermons. Now, we must all endeavour to be preachers by our works" (Way 15, iii).

God always rewards the valiant. Teresa asks her sisters to work hard at prayer and the practice of virtues: "since we have come here for no other purpose, let us set to work; let us not think there is anything, whereby our Lord may be served better, which we may not hope to succeed in, by His help. Such presumption I wish to see in this house, for it always makes humility increase, and produces a holy boldness; for *God assists the valiant*" (Way 16, vi).

God will not fail

When we have our goal set and we strive after the goal, there is no looking back. When Jesus said: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk. 9.62). Similar way Teresa summarizes the efforts the members have to make to come to God: "all our evils come from *our not fixing our eyes upon Thee*. If we considered only the way, we should soon arrive there; but we fall a thousand times, and stumble and stray from the way, by not fixing our eyes (as I said) on the true way. It seems never to have been trodden, for it looks so new to us. That is truly to be regretted, which sometimes happens; and therefore I say, we seem not to be Christians, nor to have read the passion in our life, since *we cannot endure to be despised even in a trifle*, nay, it seems *impossible* to be endured. They reply immediately; 'We are not saints.' When we do something imperfect, may God deliver us, sisters, from saying — 'We are not angels,' — 'We are not saints.' Consider, that though we be not angels or saints, it is a great happiness to think that if we *strive*, we may be such by God's assistance; and fear not that *He will fail, if you fail not*" (Way 16, v — italics mine).

Practical Conclusion

The resolute *determination* according to Teresa must be *radical* (Life 2, i-iv), *irrevocable* (Way 20, ii), and *persevering* (IC II, 1, vi). If the friendship with God has to last and love to be true, the conditions must be met (Life 8, v). God only looks for this determination (Life 11, xv; IC III, 1, vii).

St. Paul looked back on his life of over thirty years of toil and struggle as a follower of Christ. He used the language of an athlete who has won the event. And, he applied this analogy to our true purpose and reward. In ancient times, the reward was not a medal or money as it is now, but rather a crown made of olive branches, and the respect of the people. Paul knew his reward was to come in the form of righteousness, which is far more valuable than any earthly prestige or reward. So, his eyes were on Christ and the goals God gave him. He did not allow suffering, failure, prison, or any other obstacle to thwart God's purpose in his life and mission. To see someone like Paul, who was an ordinary person, *stay the course* and *persevere* through all impossible obstacles, should give us inspiration so that we can do it too! The key principle for Paul was to guard his faith from anything that would turn it from God; so must we. We cannot let our setbacks, the discouragement of other people, or our own disregard of a problem hold us back from obeying and finishing well for Christ's glory (cfr. 2Tim 4.7-8 & 1Cor 9.25).

Righteous Determination requires our persistence to overcome barriers that hold us back — those that can be overcome by more effort, right thinking, clear goals, and help from others. Obstacles that are wrong, misplaced, or laden with sin are the ones to hurdle first. We are to honor obstacles and the timing that God gives, and not rush through with matters to which we are not called, or are not ready for. Our study of His Word, our prayer life, and listening to good, godly advice will be our keys to unlocking the right doors and making sure we do not open the wrong ones. Our Determination needs to be governed by righteous desire, commitment, and dedication to God's principles. You are on the right track if you have the desire to transform laziness or wrong direction into ways you can improve with good, Biblical, quality goals. If we are driven by pride or just the motivation to excel at all cost, it is a good bet we are on the wrong track and not in this Godly Character. Here is what Teresa says what we need to expect from the Lord when we have the determination of following him: "He intends to lead you on like *valiant persons*, giving you in this world a cross to carry, just as His Majesty carried one. And what stronger proof of friendship can we have, than to choose *for you* what he chose for Himself?" (Way 17, vi — italics mine).

Dr. Rudolf V. D'Souza OCD

Appendix G: Session 6, St. Thérèse's Poem Strewing Flowers

From the Poetry of Thérèse of Lisieux

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PN 34 — Strewing Flowers

(June 28, 1896)

Every night during June of 1896 Thérèse and the five young sisters in the novitiate would meet after Compline — about eight o'clock — at the granite cross in the courtyard. They would gather the petals shed beneath the twenty or so rose bushes there and throw them at the Crucifix. Thérèse would say, "Let's see whose will go highest and touch the Face of our good Jesus!" (Sister Marie of the Eucharist, 6/24/1896). Thérèse herself would carefully choose: her petals "so as only to strew very fresh ones," (Sister Genevieve).

Naturally Mother Agnes of Jesus liked this symbolic rite. For her feast day (June 29, Saints Peter and Paul), Thérèse composed — we do not know whether of her own accord or by request — a canticle on this theme.

In spite of some nice ideas (Refr. 1, 2-3) and some beautiful versed (2, 1), this text makes no great poetic pretensions. Its Virgilian grace and sweet tone, its tender style, and its charming images (not always developed very coherently) diminished somewhat the strength of this powerful symbol (cf. GCI, pp. 182-183). Perhaps too, our sensitivity is a little irritated by the stereotypes image associated with Thérèse (strewing flowers, the unpetalled rose, saccharine statues, little angels) for which this poem is a special medium.

Never the less, it would be a shame for all that to make us neglect this essential poem in Thérèse's repertory. The symbol of the unpetalled rose has deep roots in her childhood: "How I loved the feasts!... I especially loved the processions in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. What a joy it was for me to throw flowers beneath the feet of God!... I was never so happy as when I saw my roses touch the sacred Monstrance..." (SS, pg. 41).

In 1896 Thérèse's childhood gesture took on a new expressive power. Those flowers strewn on the Christ in the courtyard signify her whole life of love as a Carmelite. Three months later, she made this explicit in a text that is that is even more powerful and beautiful, even richer and more triumphant: pages 196-197 of Manuscript B of her autobiography. In that passage sacrificial love and giving to others are inseparable, in accord with her Carmelite vocation.

She sings the ultimate stage in this giving of self in "The Unpetalled Rose" (PN 51). In that poem it is no longer a matter of acts of love, but *her very* life that she is lavishing. This is the harsh

reality of the sacrifice that, right up to the end, she wants to give meaning to this elegant symbol. Flowers also illumine Her Last Conversations with the “smile”¹ (HLC, pg. 319).

That vivid image of Thérèse’s mission after death, “a shower of roses” (HLC, pg. 62) unveils — or rather should not veil — her only ambition in heaven as on earth: to love Jesus and make Him loved.

(Melody: “Oui, je le crois”)

Strewing Flowers

- 1 Jesus, my only Love, how I love to strew Flowers
Each evening at the foot of your Crucifix!
In unpetalling the springtime rose for you,
I would like to dry your tears...
- R.1 Strewing flowers is offering you as first fruits
My slightest sighs, my greatest sufferings.
My sorrows and my joys, my little sacrifices,
Those are my flowers!.....
- 2 Lord, my soul is in love with your beauty
I want to squander my perfumes and my flowers .on you.
In strewing them for you on the wings of the breeze,
I would like to inflame hearts!....
- R.2 Strewing Flowers, Jesus, is my weapon
When I want to fight to save sinners.
The victory is mine.... I always disarm you
With my flowers!!!...
- 3 The flower petals caressing your face.
Tell you that my heart is yours forever.
You understand the language of my unpetalled rose,
And you smile at my love.
- R.3 Strewing Flowers, repeating your praise.
That is my only delight in this valley of tears.
Soon I shall go to Heaven with the little angels
To strew Flowers!...

¹ “The flower is the smile of God,” she wrote at Christmas of 1894 (RP 2).

**Appendix H: Session 10,
JPII Homily, Proclamation of St. Thérèse Doctor of the Church**

**PROCLAMATION OF ST THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS
AND THE HOLY FACE
AS A “DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH”**

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 19 October 1997

1. “*Nations shall come to your light*” (Is 60: 3). The echo of Epiphany already resounds in the words of the prophet Isaiah as a fervent expectation and luminous hope. It is precisely the connection with this solemnity that enables us to perceive more clearly *this Sunday’s missionary character*. Isaiah’s prophecy, in fact, broadens the perspective of salvation to all humanity, and thus anticipates the prophetic act of the Magi who, coming from the East to adore the divine Child born in Bethlehem (cf. Mt 2: 1-12), proclaim and inaugurate the adherence of the nations to Christ’s message.

All men are called to accept in faith the saving Gospel. The Church is sent to all peoples, all lands and cultures: “Go ... and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28: 19-20). These words, spoken by Christ before ascending into heaven, together with the promise he made to the Apostles and their successors that he would be with them until the end of the world (cf. Mt 28: 20), are the essence of the missionary mandate: in the person of his ministers, it is Christ himself who goes *ad gentes*, to those who have not yet received the proclamation of the faith.

2. Thérèse Martin, a discalced Carmelite of Lisieux, ardently desired to be a missionary. She was one, to the point that she could be proclaimed *patroness of the missions*. Jesus himself showed her how she could live this vocation: by fully practising the commandment of love, she would be immersed in the very heart of the Church’s mission, supporting those who proclaim the Gospel with the mysterious power of prayer and communion. Thus she achieved what the Second Vatican Council emphasized in teaching that the Church is missionary by nature (cf. *Ad gentes*, n. 2). Not only those who choose the missionary life but all the baptized are in some way sent *ad gentes*.

This is why I chose this missionary Sunday to proclaim St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face *a doctor of the universal Church: a woman, a young person, a contemplative*.

3. Everyone thus realizes that today something surprising is happening. St. Thérèse of Lisieux was unable to attend a university or engage in systematic study. She died young: nevertheless, from this day forward she will be honoured as a doctor of the Church, an outstanding recognition which raises her in the esteem of the entire Christian community far beyond any academic title.

Indeed, when the Magisterium proclaims someone a doctor of the Church, it intends to point out to all the faithful, particularly to those who perform in the Church the fundamental service of preaching or who undertake the delicate task of theological teaching and research, that the doctrine professed and proclaimed by a certain person can be a reference point, not only because it conforms to revealed truth, but also because it sheds new light on the mysteries of the faith, a deeper understanding of Christ's mystery. The Council reminded us that, with the help of the Holy Spirit, understanding of the "depositum fidei" continually grows in the Church, and not only does the richly contemplative study to which theologians are called, not only does the Magisterium of pastors, endowed with the "sure charism of truth", contribute to this growth process, but also that "*profound understanding of spiritual things*" which is given *through experience*, with the wealth and diversity of gifts, to all those who let themselves be docilely led by God's Spirit (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 8). *Lumen gentium*, for its part, teaches that God himself "speaks to us" (n. 50) in his saints. It is for this reason that the spiritual experience of the saints has a special value for deepening our knowledge of the divine mysteries, which remain ever greater than our thoughts, and not by chance does the Church choose only saints to be distinguished with the title of "doctor".

4. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is the youngest of all the "doctors of the Church", but her ardent spiritual journey shows such maturity, and the insights of faith expressed in her writings are so vast and profound that they deserve a place among the great spiritual masters.

In the Apostolic Letter which I wrote for this occasion, I stressed several salient aspects of her doctrine. But how can we fail to recall here what can be considered its high point, starting with the account of the moving discovery of her special vocation in the Church? "Charity", she wrote, "gave me the key to my vocation. I understood that if the Church had a body composed of different members, the most necessary and most noble of all could not be lacking to it, and so I understood that the Church had a heart and that this heart was burning with love. I understood that it was love alone that made the Church's members act, that if love were ever extinguished, apostles would not proclaim the Gospel and martyrs would refuse to shed their blood. I understood that love includes all vocations.... Then in the excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: "O Jesus, my Love ... at last I have found my vocation; my vocation is Love!" (Ms B, 3v^o). This is a wonderful passage which suffices itself to show that one can apply to St. Thérèse the Gospel passage we heard in the Liturgy of the Word: "I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes" (Mt 11: 25).

5. Thérèse of Lisieux did not only grasp and describe the profound truth of Love as the centre and heart of the Church, but in her short life she lived it intensely. It is precisely this *convergence of doctrine and concrete experience*, of truth and life, of teaching and practice, which shines with particular brightness in this saint, and which makes her an attractive model especially for young people and for those who are seeking true meaning for their life.

Before the emptiness of so many words, Thérèse offers another solution, the one Word of salvation which, understood and lived in silence, becomes a source of renewed life. She counters a rational culture, so often overcome by practical materialism, with the disarming

simplicity of the “little way” which, by returning to the essentials, leads to the secret of all life: the divine Love that surrounds and penetrates every human venture. In a time like ours, so frequently marked by an ephemeral and hedonistic culture, this new doctor of the Church proves to be remarkably effective in enlightening the mind and heart of those who hunger and thirst for truth and love.

6. St. Thérèse is presented as a doctor of the Church on the day we are celebrating World Mission Sunday. She had the ardent desire to dedicate herself to proclaiming the Gospel, and she would have liked to have crowned her witness with the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom (cf. *Ms B, 3r^o*). Moreover, her intense personal commitment supporting the apostolic work of Fr Maurice Bellière and Fr Adolphe Rulland, missionaries respectively in Africa and China, is well-known. In her zealous love for evangelization, Thérèse had one ideal, as she herself says: “What we ask of him is to work for his glory, to love him and to make him loved” (*Letter 220*).

The way she took to reach this ideal of life is not that of the great undertakings reserved for the few, but on the contrary, a way within everyone’s reach, the “little way”, a path of trust and total self-abandonment to the Lord’s grace. It is not a prosaic way, as if it were less demanding. It is in fact a demanding reality, as the Gospel always is. But it is a way in which one is imbued with a sense of trusting abandonment to divine mercy, which makes even the most rigorous spiritual commitment light.

Because of this way in which she receives everything as “grace”, because she puts her relationship with Christ and her choice of love at the centre of everything, because of the place she gives to the ardent impulses of the heart on her spiritual journey, Thérèse of Lisieux is a saint who remains young despite the passing years, and she is held up as an eminent model and guide on the path of Christians, as we approach the third millennium.

7. Therefore the Church’s joy is great on this day that crowns the expectations and prayers of so many who have understood, in requesting the title of doctor, this special gift of God and have supported its recognition and acceptance. We would all like to give thanks to the Lord together, particularly with the professors and students of Rome’s ecclesiastical universities, who in recent days have begun the new academic year.

Yes, O Father, we bless you, together with Jesus (cf. Mt 11: 25), because you have “hidden your secrets from the wise and understanding” and have revealed them to this “little one” whom today you hold up again for our attention and imitation.

Thank you for the wisdom you gave her, making her an exceptional witness and teacher of life for the whole Church!

Thank you for the love you poured out upon her and which continues to illumine and warm hearts, spurring them to holiness.

The desire Thérèse expressed to “spend her heaven doing good on earth” (*Opere Complete*, p. 1050), continues to be fulfilled in a marvellous way.

Thank you Father, for making her close to us today with a new title, to the praise and glory of your name for ever and ever. Amen!

**Appendix I: Session 10,
JP II, Apostolic letter, Proclamation of St. Thérèse Doctor of the Church**

APOSTOLIC LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

DIVINI AMORIS SCIENTIA

**SAINT THÉRÈSE OF THE CHILD JESUS AND THE HOLY FACE
IS PROCLAIMED A DOCTOR OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH**

1. THE SCIENCE OF DIVINE LOVE, which the Father of mercies pours out through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, is a gift granted to the little and the humble so that they may know and proclaim the secrets of the kingdom, hidden from the learned and the wise; for this reason Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, praising the Father who graciously willed it so (cf. *Lk* 10:21-22; *Mt* 11:25-26).

Mother Church also rejoices in noting that throughout history the Lord has continued to reveal himself to the little and the humble, enabling his chosen ones, through the Spirit who “searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 *Cor* 2:10), to speak of the gifts “bestowed on us by God... in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language” (1 *Cor* 2:12,13). In this way the Holy Spirit guides the Church into the whole truth, endowing her with various gifts, adorning her with his fruits, rejuvenating her with the power of the Gospel and enabling her to discern the signs of the times in order to respond ever more fully to the will of God (cf. *Lumen gentium*, nn. 4, 12; *Gaudium et spes*, n. 4).

Shining brightly among the little ones to whom the secrets of the kingdom were revealed in a most special way is Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, a professed nun of the Order of Discalced Carmelites, the 100th anniversary of whose entry into the heavenly homeland occurs this year.

During her life Thérèse discovered “new lights, hidden and mysterious meanings” (*Ms A*, 83v) and received from the divine Teacher that “science of love” which she then expressed with particular originality in her writings (cf. *Ms B*, 1r). This science is the luminous expression of her knowledge of the mystery of the kingdom and of her personal experience of grace. It can be considered a special charism of Gospel wisdom which Thérèse, like other saints and teachers of faith, attained in prayer (cf. *Ms C*, 36r).

2. The reception given to the example of her life and Gospel teaching in our century was quick, universal and constant. As if in imitation of her precocious spiritual maturity, her holiness was recognized by the Church in the space of a few years. In fact, on 10 June 1914 Pius X signed the decree introducing her cause of beatification; on 14 August 1921 Benedict XV declared the heroic virtues of the Servant of God, giving an address for the occasion on the way of spiritual childhood; and Pius XI proclaimed her blessed on 29 April 1923. Shortly afterwards, on 17 May 1925, the same Pope canonized her before an immense crowd in St. Peter’s Basilica, highlighting the splendour of her virtues and the originality of her doctrine. Two years later, on 14 December 1927, in response to the petition of many missionary Bishops, he proclaimed her patron of the missions along with St. Francis Xavier.

Beginning with these acts of recognition, the spiritual radiance of Thérèse of the Child Jesus increased in the Church and spread throughout the world. Many institutes of consecrated life and ecclesial movements, especially in the young Churches, chose her as their patron and teacher, taking their inspiration from her spiritual doctrine. Her message, often summarized in the so-called “little way”, which is nothing other than the Gospel way of holiness for all, was studied by theologians and experts in spirituality. Cathedrals, basilicas, shrines and churches throughout the world were built and dedicated to the Lord under the patronage of the Saint of Lisieux. The Catholic Church venerates her in the various Eastern and Western rites. Many of the faithful have been able to experience the power of her intercession. Many of those called to the priestly ministry or the consecrated life, especially in the missions and the cloister, attribute the divine grace of their vocation to her intercession and example.

3. The Pastors of the Church, beginning with my predecessors, the Supreme Pontiffs of this century, who held up her holiness as an example for all, also stressed that Thérèse is a teacher of the spiritual life with a doctrine both spiritual and profound, which she drew from the Gospel sources under the guidance of the divine Teacher and then imparted to her brothers and sisters in the Church with the greatest effectiveness (cf. *Ms B*, 2v-3).

This spiritual doctrine has been passed on to us primarily by her autobiography which, taken from three manuscripts she wrote in the last years of her life and published a year after her death with the title *Histoire d'une âme* (Lisieux 1898), has aroused an extraordinary interest down to our day. This autobiography, translated along with her other writings into about 50 languages, has made Thérèse known in every part of the world, even outside the Catholic Church. A century after her death, Thérèse of the Child Jesus continues to be recognized as one of the great masters of the spiritual life in our time.

4. It is not surprising then that the Apostolic See received many petitions to confer on her the title of Doctor of the Universal Church.

In recent years, especially with the happy occasion of the first centenary of her death close at hand, these requests became more and more numerous, including on the part of Episcopal Conferences; in addition, study conferences were held and numerous publications have pointed out how Thérèse of the Child Jesus possesses an extraordinary wisdom and with her doctrine helps so many men and women of every state in life to know and love Jesus Christ and his Gospel.

In the light of these facts, I decided carefully to study whether the Saint of Lisieux had the prerequisites for being awarded the title of Doctor of the Universal Church.

5. In this context I am pleased to recall briefly some events in the life of Thérèse of the Child Jesus. Born in Alençon, France, on 2 January 1873, she is baptized two days later in the Church of Notre Dame, receiving the name Marie-Françoise-Thérèse. Her parents are Louis Martin and Zélie Guérin, whose heroic virtues I recently recognized. After her mother's death on 28 August 1877, Thérèse moves with her whole family to the town of Lisieux where, surrounded by the affection of her father and sisters, she receives a formation both demanding and full of tenderness.

Towards the end of 1879 she receives the sacrament of Penance for the first time. On the day of Pentecost in 1883 she has the extraordinary grace of being healed from a serious illness through the intercession of Our Lady of Victories. Educated by the Benedictines of Lisieux, she receives First Communion on 8 May 1884, after an intense preparation crowned with an exceptional experience of the grace of intimate union with Jesus. A few weeks later, on 14 June of that same year, she receives the sacrament of Confirmation with a vivid awareness of what the gift of the Holy Spirit involves in her personal sharing in the grace of Pentecost. On Christmas Day of 1886 she has a profound spiritual experience that she describes as a “complete conversion”. As a result, she overcomes the emotional weakness caused by the loss of her mother and begins “to run as a giant” on the way of perfection (cf. *Ms A*, 44v45v).

Thérèse wishes to embrace the contemplative life, like her sisters Pauline and Marie in the Carmel of Lisieux, but is prevented from doing so by her young age. During a pilgrimage to Italy, after visiting the Holy House of Loreto and places in the Eternal City, at an audience granted by the Pope to the faithful of the Diocese of Lisieux on 20 November 1887, she asks Leo XIII with filial boldness to be able to enter Carmel at the age of 15 years.

On 9 April 1888 she enters the Carmel of Lisieux, where she receives the habit of the Blessed Virgin’s order on 10 January of the following year and makes her religious profession on 8 September 1890, the feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. At Carmel she undertakes the way of perfection marked out by the Mother Foundress, Teresa of Jesus, with genuine fervour and fidelity in fulfilling the various community tasks entrusted to her. Illumined by the Word of God, particularly tried by the illness of her beloved father, Louis Martin, who dies on 29 July 1894, Thérèse embarks on the way of holiness, insisting on the centrality of love. She discovers and imparts to the novices entrusted to her care the little way of spiritual childhood, by which she enters more and more deeply into the mystery of the Church and, drawn by the love of Christ, feels growing within her the apostolic and missionary vocation which spurs her to bring everyone with her to meet the divine Spouse.

On 9 June 1895, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, she offers herself as a sacrificial victim to the merciful Love of God. On 3 April of the following year, on the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, she notices the first symptoms of the illness which will lead to her death. Thérèse welcomes it as a mysterious visitation of the divine Spouse. At the same time she undergoes a trial of faith which will last until her death. As her health deteriorates, she is moved to the infirmary on 8 July 1897. Her sisters and other religious collect her sayings, while her sufferings and trials, borne with patience, intensify to the moment of her death on the afternoon of 30 September 1897. “I am not dying; I am entering life”, she had written to one of her spiritual brothers, Fr Bellière (*Lettres* 244). Her last words, “My God, I love you”, are the seal of her life.

6. Thérèse of the Child Jesus left us writings that deservedly qualify her as a teacher of the spiritual life. Her principal work remains the account of her life in three autobiographical manuscripts (*Manuscrits autobiographiques A, B, C*), first published with the soon to be famous title of *Histoire d'une Âme*.

In Manuscript A, written at the request of her sister Agnes of Jesus, then Prioress of the monastery, and given to her on 21 January 1896, Thérèse describes the stages of her religious

experience: the early years of childhood, especially the time of her First Communion and Confirmation, adolescence, up to her entrance into Carmel and her first profession.

Manuscript B, written during her retreat that same year at the request of her sister Marie of the Sacred Heart, contains some of the most beautiful, best known and oft-quoted passages from the Saint of Lisieux. They reveal the Saint's full maturity as she speaks of her vocation in the Church, the Bride of Christ and Mother of souls.

Manuscript C, composed in June and the first days of July 1897, a few months before her death and dedicated to the Prioress, Marie de Gonzague, who had requested it, completes the recollections in Manuscript A on life in Carmel. These pages reveal the author's supernatural wisdom. Thérèse recounts some sublime experiences during this final period of her life. She devotes moving pages to her trial of faith: a grace of purification that immerses her in a long and painful dark night, illuminated by her trust in the merciful, fatherly love of God. Once again, and without repeating herself, Thérèse makes the light of the Gospel shine brightly. Here we find the most beautiful pages she devoted to trusting abandonment into God's hands, to unity between love of God and love of neighbour, to her missionary vocation in the Church.

In these three different manuscripts, which converge in a thematic unity and in a progressive description of her life and spiritual way, Thérèse has left us an original autobiography which is the story of her soul. It shows how in her life God has offered the world a precise message, indicating an evangelical way, the "little way", which everyone can take, because everyone is called to holiness.

In the 266 Lettres we possess, addressed to family members, women religious and missionary "brothers", Thérèse shares her wisdom, developing a teaching that is actually a profound exercise in the spiritual direction of souls.

Her writings also include 54 *Poésies*, some of which have great theological and spiritual depth inspired by Sacred Scripture. Worthy of special mention are *Vivre d'Amour!...* (*Poésies* 17) and *Pourquoi je t'aime, ô Marie!* (*Poésies* 54), an original synthesis of the Virgin Mary's journey according to the Gospel. To this literary production should be added eight *Récréations pieuses*: poetic and theatrical compositions, conceived and performed by the Saint for her community on certain feast days, in accordance with the tradition of Carmel. Among those writings should be mentioned a series of 21 *Prières*. Nor can we forget the collection of all she said during the last months of her life. These sayings, of which there are several editions, known as the *Novissima verba*, have also been given the title *Derniers Entretiens*.

7. From careful study of the writings of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and from the resonance they have had in the Church, salient aspects can be noted of her "eminent doctrine", which is the fundamental element for conferring the title of Doctor of the Church.

First of all, we find a special charism of wisdom. This young Carmelite, without any particular theological training, but illumined by the light of the Gospel, feels she is being taught by the divine Teacher who, as she says, is "the Doctor of Doctors" (*Ms A*, 83v), and from him she receives "divine teachings" (*Ms B*, 1r). She feels that the words of Scripture are fulfilled in her: "Whoever is a little one, let him come to me.... For to him that is little, mercy shall be shown" (*Ms B*, 1v; cf. Prv 9:4; Wis 6:6) and she knows she is being instructed in the science of love,

hidden from the wise and prudent, which the divine Teacher deigned to reveal to her, as to babes (*Ms A*, 49r; cf. Lk 10:21-22).

Pius XI, who considered Thérèse of Lisieux the “Star of his pontificate”, did not hesitate to assert in his homily on the day of her canonization, 17 May 1925: “The Spirit of truth opened and made known to her what he usually hides from the wise and prudent and reveals to little ones; thus she enjoyed such knowledge of the things above — as Our immediate Predecessor attests — that she shows everyone else the sure way of salvation” (AAS 17 [1925], p. 213).

Her teaching not only conforms to Scripture and the Catholic faith, but excels (“*eminent*”) for *the depth and wise synthesis it achieved*. Her doctrine is at once a confession of the Church’s faith, an experience of the Christian mystery and a way to holiness. Thérèse offers a mature synthesis of Christian spirituality: she combines theology and the spiritual life; she expresses herself with strength and authority, with a great ability to persuade and communicate, as is shown by the reception and dissemination of her message among the People of God.

Thérèse’s teaching expresses with coherence and harmonious unity the dogmas of the Christian faith as a doctrine of truth and an experience of life. In this regard it should not be forgotten that the understanding of the deposit of faith transmitted by the Apostles, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, makes progress in the Church with the help of the Holy Spirit: “There is growth in insight into the realities and words that are passed on... through the contemplation and study of believers who ponder these things in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). It comes from the intimate sense of spiritual realities which they experience. And it comes from the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 8).

In the writings of Thérèse of Lisieux we do not find perhaps, as in other Doctors, a scholarly presentation of the things of God, but we can discern an enlightened witness of faith which, while accepting with trusting love God’s merciful condescension and salvation in Christ, reveals the mystery and holiness of the Church.

Thus we can rightly recognize in the Saint of Lisieux the charism of a Doctor of the Church, because of the gift of the Holy Spirit she received for living and expressing her experience of faith, and because of her particular understanding of the mystery of Christ. In her are found the gifts of the new law, that is, the grace of the Holy Spirit, who manifests himself in living faith working through charity (cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 106, art. 1; q. 108, art. 1).

We can apply to Thérèse of Lisieux what my Predecessor Paul VI said of another young Saint and Doctor of the Church, Catherine of Siena: “What strikes us most about the Saint is her infused wisdom, that is to say, her lucid, profound and inebriating absorption of the divine truths and mysteries of faith.... That assimilation was certainly favoured by the most singular natural gifts, but it was also evidently something prodigious, due to a charism of wisdom from the Holy Spirit” (AAS 62 [1970], p. 675).

8. With her distinctive doctrine and unmistakable style, Thérèse appears as an *authentic teacher of faith and the Christian life*. In her writings, as in the sayings of the Holy Fathers, is found that life-giving presence of Catholic tradition whose riches, as the Second Vatican Council

again says, “are poured out in the practice and life of the Church, in her belief and prayer” (*Dei Verbum*, n. 8).

If considered in its literary genre, corresponding to her education and culture, and if evaluated according to the particular circumstances of her era, the doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux appears in providential harmony with the Church’s most authentic tradition, both for its confession of the Catholic faith and for its promotion of the most genuine spiritual life, presented to all the faithful in a living, accessible language.

She has made the Gospel shine appealingly in our time; she had the mission of making the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ, known and loved; she helped to heal souls of the rigours and fears of Jansenism, which tended to stress God’s justice rather than his divine mercy. In God’s mercy she contemplated and adored all the divine perfections, because “even his justice (and perhaps even more so than the other perfections) seems to me clothed in love” (*Ms A*, 83v). Thus she became a living icon of that God who, according to the Church’s prayer, “shows his almighty power in his mercy and forgiveness” (cf. *Roman Missal*, Opening prayer, 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time).

Even though Thérèse does not have a true and proper doctrinal corpus, nevertheless a *particular radiance of doctrine* shines forth from her writings which, as if by a charism of the Holy Spirit, grasp the very heart of the message of Revelation in a fresh and original vision, presenting a teaching of eminent quality.

The core of her message is actually the mystery itself of God-Love, of the Triune God, infinitely perfect in himself. If genuine Christian spiritual experience should conform to the revealed truths in which God communicates himself and the mystery of his will (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 2), it must be said that Thérèse experienced divine revelation, going so far as to contemplate the fundamental truths of our faith united in the mystery of Trinitarian life. At the summit, as the source and goal, is the merciful love of the three Divine Persons, as she expresses it, especially in her *Act of Oblation to Merciful Love*. At the root, on the subject’s part, is the experience of being the Father’s adoptive children in Jesus; this is the most authentic meaning of spiritual childhood, that is, the experience of divine filiation, under the movement of the Holy Spirit. At the root again, and standing before us, is our neighbour, others, for whose salvation we must collaborate with and in Jesus, with the same merciful love as his.

Through spiritual childhood one experiences that everything comes from God, returns to him and abides in him, for the salvation of all, in a mystery of merciful love. Such is the doctrinal message taught and lived by this Saint.

As it was for the Church’s Saints in every age, so also for her, in her spiritual experience Christ is the centre and fullness of Revelation. Thérèse knew Jesus, loved him and made him loved with the passion of a bride. She penetrated the mysteries of his infancy, the words of his Gospel, the passion of the suffering Servant engraved on his holy Face, in the splendour of his glorious life, in his Eucharistic presence. She sang of all the expressions of Christ’s divine charity, as they are presented in the Gospel (cf. *PN 24, Jésus, mon Bien-Aimé, rappelle-toi!*).

Thérèse received particular light on the reality of Christ’s Mystical Body, on the variety of its charisms, gifts of the Holy Spirit, on the eminent power of love, which in a way is the very heart

of the Church, where she found her vocation as a contemplative and missionary (cf. *Ms B*, 2r-3v).

Lastly, among the most original chapters of her spiritual doctrine we must recall Thérèse's wise delving into the mystery and journey of the Virgin Mary, achieving results very close to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council in chapter eight of the Constitution *Lumen gentium* and to what I myself taught in the Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater* of 25 March 1987.

9. The primary source of her spiritual experience and her teaching is the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments. She herself admits it, particularly stressing her passionate love for the Gospel (cf. *Ms A*, 83v). Her writings contain over 1,000 biblical quotations: more than 400 from the Old Testament and over 600 from the New.

Despite her inadequate training and lack of resources for studying and interpreting the sacred books, Thérèse immersed herself in meditation on the Word of God with exceptional faith and spontaneity. Under the influence of the Holy Spirit she attained a profound knowledge of Revelation for herself and for others. By her loving concentration on Scripture — she even wanted to learn Hebrew and Greek to understand better the spirit and letter of the sacred books — she showed the importance of the biblical sources in the spiritual life, she emphasized the originality and freshness of the Gospel, she cultivated with moderation the spiritual exegesis of the Word of God in both the Old and New Testaments. Thus she discovered hidden treasures, appropriating words and episodes, sometimes with supernatural boldness, as when, in reading the texts of St. Paul (cf. 1 Cor 12-13), she realized her vocation to love (cf. *Ms B*, 3r-3v). Enlightened by the revealed Word, Thérèse wrote brilliant pages on the unity between love of God and love of neighbour (cf. *Ms C*, 11v-19r); and she identified with Jesus' prayer at the Last Supper as the expression of her intercession for the salvation of all (cf. *Ms C*, 34r-35r).

Her doctrine, as was said, conforms to the Church's teaching. From childhood she was taught by her family to participate in prayer and liturgical worship. In preparation for her first Confession, first Communion and the sacrament of Confirmation, she gave evidence of an extraordinary love for the truths of the faith, and she learned the *Catechism* almost word for word (cf. *Ms A*, 37r-37v). At the end of her life she wrote the Apostles' Creed in her own blood, as an expression of her unreserved attachment to the profession of faith.

In addition to the words of Scripture and the Church's doctrine, Thérèse was nourished as a youth by the teaching of the *Imitation of Christ*, which, as she herself acknowledges, she knew almost by heart (cf. *Ms A*, 47r). Decisive for fulfilling her Carmelite vocation were the spiritual texts of the Mother Foundress, Teresa of Jesus, especially those explaining the contemplative and ecclesial meaning of the charism of the Teresian Carmel (cf. *Ms C*, 33v). But in a very special way, Thérèse was nourished on the mystical doctrine of St. John of the Cross, who was her true spiritual master (cf. *Ms A*, 83r). It should cause no surprise, then, if she who had been an outstanding pupil in the school of these two Saints, later declared Doctors of the Church, should later become a master of the spiritual life.

10. The *spiritual doctrine of Thérèse of Lisieux has helped extend the kingdom of God*. By her example of holiness, of perfect fidelity to Mother Church, of full communion with the See of Peter, as well as by the special graces obtained by her for many missionary brothers and sisters,

she has rendered a particular service to the renewed proclamation and experience of Christ's Gospel and to the extension of the Catholic faith in every nation on earth.

There is no need to dwell at length on the *universality of Thérèse's doctrine and on the broad reception of her message* during the century since her death: it has been well documented in the studies made in view of conferring on her the title of Doctor of the Church.

A particularly important fact in this regard is that the Church's Magisterium has not only recognized Thérèse's holiness, but has also highlighted the wisdom of her doctrine. Pius X had already said that she was "the greatest saint of modern times". On joyfully receiving the first Italian edition of the *Story of a Soul*, he extolled the fruits that had resulted from Thérèse's spirituality. Benedict XV, on the occasion of proclaiming the Servant of God's heroic virtues, explained the way of spiritual childhood and praised the knowledge of divine realities which God granted to Thérèse in order to teach others the ways of salvation (cf. AAS 13 [1921], pp. 449-452). On the occasion of both her beatification and canonization, Pius XI wished to expound and recommend the Saint's doctrine, underscoring her special divine enlightenment (*Discorsi di Pio XI*, vol. I, Turin 1959, p. 91) and describing her as a teacher of life (cf. AAS 17 [1925], pp. 211-214). When the Basilica of Lisieux was consecrated in 1954, Pius XII said, among other things, that Thérèse penetrated to the very heart of the Gospel with her doctrine (cf. AAS 46 [1954], pp. 404-408). Cardinal Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope John XXIII, visited Lisieux several times, especially when he was Nuncio in Paris. On various occasions during his pontificate he showed his devotion to the Saint and explained the relationship between the doctrine of the Saint of Avila and her daughter, Thérèse of Lisieux (*Discorsi, Messaggi, Colloqui*, vol. II [1959-1960], pp. 771-772). Many times during the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Fathers recalled her example and doctrine. On the centenary of her birth, Paul VI addressed a Letter on 2 January 1973 to the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, in which he extolled Thérèse's example in the search for God, offered her as a teacher of prayer and theological virtue of hope, and a model of communion with the Church, calling the attention of teachers, educators, pastors and theologians themselves to the study of her doctrine (cf. AAS 65 [1973], pp. 12-15). I myself on various occasions have had the joy of recalling the person and doctrine of the Saint, especially during my unforgettable visit to Lisieux on 2 June 1980, when I wished to remind everyone: "One can say with conviction about Thérèse of Lisieux that the Spirit of God allowed her heart to reveal directly to the people of our time the *fundamental mystery*, the reality of the Gospel.... Her 'little way' is the way of 'holy childhood'. There is something unique in this way, the genius of St. Thérèse of Lisieux. At the same time there is the confirmation and renewal of the most *basic* and most *universal* truth. What truth of the Gospel message is really more basic and more universal than this: God is our Father and we are his children?" (*Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, vol. III/1 [1980], p. 1659).

These simple references to an uninterrupted series of testimonies from the Popes of this century on the holiness and doctrine of St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and to the universal dissemination of her message clearly express to what extent the Church, in her pastors and her faithful, has accepted the spiritual doctrine of this young Saint.

A sign of the ecclesial reception of the Saint's teaching is *the appeal to her doctrine in many documents of the Church's ordinary Magisterium*, especially when speaking of the

contemplative and missionary vocation, of trust in the just and merciful God, of Christian joy and of the call to holiness. Evidence of this fact is the presence of her doctrine in the recent *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (nn. 127, 826, 956, 1011, 2011, 2558). She who so loved to learn the truths of the faith in the catechism deserved to be included among the authoritative witnesses of Catholic doctrine.

Thérèse possesses an exceptional universality. Her person, the Gospel message of the “little way” of trust and spiritual childhood have received and continue to receive a remarkable welcome, which has transcended every border.

The influence of her message extends first of all to men and women whose holiness and heroic virtues the Church herself has recognized, to the Church’s pastors, to experts in theology and spirituality, to priests and seminarians, to men and women religious, to ecclesial movements and new communities, to men and women of every condition and every continent. To everyone Thérèse gives her personal confirmation that the Christian mystery, whose witness and apostle she became by making herself in prayer “the apostle of the apostles”, as she boldly calls herself (*Ms A*, 56r-), must be taken literally, with the greatest possible realism, because it has a value for every time and place. The power of her message lies in its concrete explanation of how all Jesus’ promises are fulfilled in the believer who knows how confidently to welcome in his own life the saving presence of the Redeemer.

11. All these reasons are clear evidence of how *timely* is the Saint of Lisieux’s doctrine and of the *particular impact* her message has had on the men and women of our century. Moreover, some circumstances contribute to making her designation as a Teacher for the Church of our time even more significant.

First of all, Thérèse is a *woman*, who in approaching the Gospel knew how to grasp its hidden wealth with that practicality and deep resonance of life and wisdom which belong to the feminine genius. Because of her universality she stands out among the multitude of holy women who are resplendent for their Gospel wisdom.

Thérèse is also a *contemplative*. In the hiddenness of her Carmel she lived the great adventure of Christian experience to the point of knowing the breadth, length, height and depth of Christ’s love (cf. Eph 3:18-19). God did not want his secrets to remain hidden, but enabled Thérèse to proclaim the secrets of the King (cf. *Ms C*, 2v-). By her life Thérèse offers a witness and theological illustration of the beauty of the contemplative life as the total dedication to Christ, Spouse of the Church, and as an affirmation of God’s primacy over all things. Hers is a hidden life which possesses a mysterious fruitfulness for spreading the Gospel and fills the Church and the world with the sweet odour of Christ (cf. *LT* 169, 2v).

Lastly, Thérèse of Lisieux is a *young person*. She reached the maturity of holiness in the prime of youth (cf. *Ms C*, 4r). As such, she appears as a Teacher of evangelical life, particularly effective in illumining the paths of young people, who must be the leaders and witnesses of the Gospel to the new generations.

Thérèse of the Child Jesus is not only the youngest Doctor of the Church, but is also the closest to us in time, as if to emphasize the continuity with which the Spirit of the Lord sends his messengers to the Church, men and women as teachers and witnesses to the faith. In fact,

whatever changes can be noted in the course of history and despite the repercussions they usually have on the life and thought of individuals in every age, we must never lose sight of the continuity which links the Doctors of the Church to each other: in every historical context they remain witnesses to the unchanging Gospel and, with the light and strength that come from the Holy Spirit, they become its messengers, returning to proclaim it in its purity to their contemporaries. Thérèse is a Teacher for our time, which thirsts for living and essential words, for heroic and credible acts of witness. For this reason she is also loved and accepted by brothers and sisters of other Christian communities and even by non-Christians.

12. This year, when the centenary of the glorious death of Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face is being celebrated, as we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, after receiving a great number of authoritative petitions, especially from many Episcopal Conferences throughout the world, and after accepting the official petition, or *Supplex Libellus*, addressed to me on 8 March 1997 by the Bishop of Bayeux and Lisieux, as well as from the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel and from the Postulator General of the same order, I decided to entrust the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which has competence in this matter, with the special study of the cause for conferring the title of Doctor on this Saint, “after hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding the eminent doctrine” (Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, n. 73).

After the necessary documentation had been collected, the two above-mentioned Congregations addressed the question in the meetings of their respective consultors: the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on 5 May 1997, with regard to the “eminent doctrine”, and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on 29 May of the same year, to examine the special “Positio”. On the following 17 June, the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of these Congregations, following a procedure approved by me for this occasion, met in a plenary interdicasterial session and discussed the cause, giving a unanimously favourable opinion on granting the title of Doctor of the Universal Church to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. I was personally informed of this opinion by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and by the Pro-Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Archbishop Alberto Bovone, titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia.

In view of this, on 24 August last, during the Angelus prayer in the presence of hundreds of Bishops and before a vast throng of young people from around the world, gathered in Paris for the 12th World Youth Day, I wanted personally to announce my intention to proclaim Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church during the celebration of World Mission Sunday in Rome.

Today, 19 October 1997, in St. Peter’s Square, filled with faithful from every part of the world, and in the presence of a great many Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, during the solemn Eucharistic celebration I proclaimed Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face a Doctor of the Universal Church in these words: **Fulfilling the wishes of many Brothers in the Episcopate and of a great number of the faithful throughout the world, after consulting the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and hearing the opinion of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith regarding her eminent doctrine, with certain knowledge and after lengthy reflection,**

with the fullness of Our apostolic authority We declare Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, virgin, to be a Doctor of the Universal Church. In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

This having been duly enacted, We decree that this Apostolic Letter is to be religiously preserved and to have full effect both now and in the future; furthermore, it is thus to be judged and defined as right, and whatever to the contrary may be attempted by anyone, on whatever authority, knowingly or unknowingly, is null and void.

Given in Rome, at St. Peter's, under the Fisherman's ring, the 19th day of the month of October in the year of the Lord 1997, the 20th of the Pontificate.

Appendix J: Session 10, CCC — The Prayer of the Hour of Jesus

2746 When “his hour” came, Jesus prayed to the Father. His prayer, the longest transmitted by the Gospel, embraces the whole economy of creation and salvation, as well as his death and Resurrection. The prayer of the Hour of Jesus always remains his own, just as his Passover “once for all” remains ever present in the liturgy of his Church.

2747 Christian Tradition rightly calls this prayer the “priestly” prayer of Jesus. It is the prayer of our high priest, inseparable from his sacrifice, from his passing over (Passover) to the Father to whom he is wholly “consecrated.”

2748 In this Paschal and sacrificial prayer, everything is recapitulated in Christ: God and the world; the Word and the flesh; eternal life and time; the love that hands itself over and the sin that betrays it; the disciples present and those who will believe in him by their word; humiliation and glory. It is the prayer of unity.

2749 Jesus fulfilled the work of the Father completely; his prayer, like his sacrifice, extends until the end of time. the prayer of this hour fills the end-times and carries them toward their consummation. Jesus, the Son to whom the Father has given all things, has given himself wholly back to the Father, yet expresses himself with a sovereign freedom by virtue of the power the Father has given him over all flesh. The Son, who made himself Servant, is Lord, the Pantocrator. Our high priest who prays for us is also the one who prays in us and the God who hears our prayer.

2750 By entering into the holy name of the Lord Jesus we can accept, from within, the prayer he teaches us: “Our Father!” His priestly prayer fulfills, from within, the great petitions of the Lord’s Prayer: concern for the Father’s name; passionate zeal for his kingdom (Glory); The accomplishment of the will of the Father, of his plan of salvation; and deliverance from evil.

2751 Finally, in this prayer Jesus reveals and gives to us the “knowledge,” inseparably one, of the Father and of the Son, which is the very mystery of the life of prayer.

**Appendix K: Session 11,
Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD Superior General March 6, 2019 letter to OCDS**

CASA GENERALIZIA CARMELITANI SCALZI

CORSO D'ITALIA, 38
00198 ROMA

To my very dear Brothers and Sisters of the OCDS

In Christ Jesus and his Holy Spirit, greetings of peace and communion!

1. For some years I have been meeting with you through the letter to the OCDS. By this means, I want to exercise part of my service of “spiritual and pastoral care of the OCDS”, as well as “guaranteeing the fidelity of the OCDS to the charism of the Discalced Carmelite Order, unity... and communion with the Church” (*Pastoral Care of the Secular Order*: 1; 3:2; cfr. 6-7).

In this regard, I would like to reflect with you on some issues related to the *Councils of the Secular Order communities*. I would like to help you in the service of guiding communities, of which you are “the immediate authority” (CC = OCDS Constitutions 46). At the same time, I think that these reflections can also shed light on the service provided by the Provincial Councils of the OCDS in promoting formation, apostolate and unity in the Provinces, even if they do not have a legal authority on par with that of the local councils (cf. CC 57-58).

2. From documents concerning the Secular Order emerge the *characteristics* and *duties* of the local Council.

This is composed of a President, three Councillors and the Director of formation who has made definitive promises (CC 52-53). Together with the General and the Provincial, the Council has the responsibility of guiding the Community “in discerning and accepting God’s ways” (CC 15), as legitimate Superiors of the Secular Order (CC 48). With regard to matters arising that are outside the “competence of the Council, it is the obligation of the President to bring it to the attention of the Provincial” (CC 47g).

The “primary responsibility” of the local Council is taking care of the “formation and Christian and Carmelite maturing of the members of the community” (CC 46; cfr. *Ratio Institutionis of the Secular Order* n. 6, 10, 11, 28, 29, 30, 31, 34, 35). In order that this may come about, the Council must meet frequently “in reference to taking care of formation programs and the growth of their own community” (CC 47). Other duties in the formation field are: to exercise discernment in admitting candidates to formation (cfr. *Ratio OCDS* 59-93), to first promise and to definitive promise and to give its consent to admit those called to vows (CC 36b, c, d; 39; 47a). For just motives and with the consent of the Provincial, it may reduce the period of formation to the first promise (CC 47b); lastly, it can receive a member transferring from another community (CC 47f).

Another fundamental aspect of the mission of the Council is involving the Community, remembering that it has a responsibility in formation (cfr. *Ratio of the Secular Order*: 28). What benefits this greatly is *preserving fraternal communion* within the Community according to the

style of St. Teresa. This, its crucial role, appears in article 24d of the Constitutions, to which I refer you.

Every three years the Council must convene the Community for the elections of the new Council (CC 47c), according to the electoral process established in the Provincial Statutes. Once the members of the new Council are elected, they appoint a Secretary and a Treasurer (CC 50, 54-55) from whom to receive the minutes of the meetings and the half-yearly report of the accounts. For a serious reason, the Council may replace a member of the Council itself (CC 47d).

After consultation with the Council, the OCD Provincial appoints a Spiritual Assistant for the Community (CC 43); the Assistant, although not part of the Council, may be invited to participate in its meetings and consulted on the ability of a candidate to assume the responsibility of a vocation to the OCDS (CC 44) . Here, in thanking every Assistant for his dedication, I mention that he is the guarantor of the fidelity of the community to the charism (cf. CC 44; *Guide for Pastoral Care to the Secular Order*, 14-18) and in charge of its liturgical celebrations (ritual 13, 31, 51, 66). In addition, the Assistant plays the most important role of being a bond of fraternal communion between the community and the friars and the nuns of the Order, in whose name he fulfils this ministry of assistance.

Finally, it is up to the Council to take care of the processes of dismissal of members of the Community, as well as evaluating and discerning together with a member who, of his or her own accord, wants to leave the Community (CC 24e; 47e).

3. From these duties, we see that the Council carries out a fundamental role of accompanying and leading the Community in its mission. For this reason, it ought to walk together towards it, encouraging the *communal character of the Christian and Carmelite* vocation and look upon each of the members with God's eyes.

The Church, being a mystery of communion (cf. LG 2-4), formed of people created in the "image of divine communion" (Evangeli Gaudium = EG 178; cfr. Gen 1:26,27), Christians must bear witness to a "captivating fraternity" (Final document of 2018 Synod: 1), the root of which is in the Most Holy Trinity. Communion in the Church leads to communion with Christ (cf 1Jn 1:3), which in turn builds communion between men and women. In fact, in this communion, all the baptized participate in the commonly held meaning (*sensus commune*) of the faith (cf LG 12; EG 119-120) and are called to become actively engaged in evangelization (EG 120). Thus, they "make real the human person's call to live communion, which comes about through sincere self-giving, union with God and unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ." Then, "the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will" (cf International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, March 2, 2018 (= ITC) 43, 68).

4. The authority of the Council is shared among its 5 members by different functions. Firstly, I think that the warning of our Holy Mother to the Discalced friars is also useful for the Council, that is, that "their leaders be in accord" (Spiritual Testimonies 64). It should be an authority lived "with a mother's love" and with "discretion" (S. Teresa of Jesus, Constitutions 34, or cfr. Foundations 18:6-8). Its exercise requires *active co-responsibility*, both within the Council itself

in the choices and decisions to be taken, and in arousing the active and responsible participation of each member of the community, in decisions concerning the good of the community and in the exercise of the discernment of truth. Today more than ever, in the face of social and ecclesial reality, a solid formation is necessary that leads to the practice of discernment in community. The community is then the fertile sphere of this; it should lead each member to be co-responsible for the community, its formation and its mission (EG 175; cf. Final Document 2018 Synod, 119-124).

Lastly, its character as *a temporary shared authority*, renewed every three years, indicates that the Council receives an authority of mediation and delegation from the community that elects it. It must therefore lead it according to the spirit and charism of the Teresian Carmel, according to what is defined in the OCDS constitutions. By fulfilling this condition, it elicits and strengthens the identity and sense of belonging to the Order, and favours encounter with God and with the brethren, thus facilitating embodiment in each member. For this to happen, the members of the Council must know well the documents that govern the OCDS and let themselves be guided by them.

5. As an immediate authority, the Council serves as a support for the community's good; it must stand out *by its great esteem for the charism of the Teresian Carmel and a fraternal relationship* with the friars and nuns and the other members of the Teresian Carmel family. Its role, therefore, is to mediate between the Order and the members of the community, to which the Council lends a humble service (cf. CC 24d). To this end, they must cherish a love of the truths of Sacred Scripture, docility and submission to the teachings of the Magisterium of the Church and Order, avoiding radicalism and strange, fanatical or anachronistic conceptions about the Church or the Order (See Ratio 67). The community must not close in on itself, but feel itself in communion with other communities, since we are all branches of the one vine (cf. Jn 15:5-6).

To carry out this service, the members of the Council must look to Jesus, who came to serve and give his life for others (cf. Mk 10:43-45). This leads authority to be respectful towards the community, understanding it as a gift from above that must be guarded (cf. Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate*, 34) and as a place where the Risen One is present (EG 142; cfr. VC 42). It must seek the community's good and lead it to human, Christian and Carmelite growth, with the attitudes of the Good Shepherd (Jn 10:11-15), until all arrive at the final goal of Faith: eternal life (cf. 2Cor 5:1).

6. Another very important quality in the exercise of the Council's service is the ability to live and promote *confident dialogue* at different levels: within the Council itself; between the Council and the other members of the community; it must also foster dialogue with other communities, with the Provincial Council and other realities of the Order.

In the practical exercise of dialogue, on the one hand, all must have *the patience of listening*. It must be understood as "an encounter in freedom, which requires humility, patience, willingness to understand, and an effort to respond in new ways. Listening transforms the heart of those who do it especially when it takes place with an inner disposition of harmony and docility to the Spirit" (Final Document of the 2018 Synod: 6). On the other hand, it also implies having *the courage to speak*. This must be done with frankness and openly, and refer to what one has prayed about and weighed up, in the silence of a heart at peace and in the light of God,

having therefore perceived that it is in conformity with the truths of Scripture and the Magisterium. So, it is not a question here of tenaciously defending one's ideas, but of seeking the truth together with others in humility.

It is also a dialogue respectful of others and of the diversity of opinions and experiences in the community. Only so can we develop, through dialogue, the acceptance of what is different from me in a unity that generates life, making possible a "communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity" (EG 228; cf. 226-230). In this form of dialogue, possible and eventual conflicts in the community that could fragment it (cf. *Way of Perfection* 7:10), are harmonized by the unity of the spirit.

7. In order that what has been said so far can come about, *humility* is essential. The Apostle Paul proposes in the letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:2-11) the example of the self-emptying (kenosis) of Christ. It implies first of all an attitude of service and considering others superior to oneself. All are called to be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Humility also requires having our eyes fixed on God, the true centre of each and every one, not considering oneself the centre of the world and of oneself. Thanks to this, the humble person recognizes that he or she needs others, to which our Holy Father John of the Cross has already drawn our attention: "[Humble people] do not dare deal with God independently, nor can they be completely satisfied without human counsel and direction. God wants this (...) he draws near those who come together in an endeavour to know it [truth]" (St. John of the Cross, 2 *Ascent* 22:11). Only with humility and detachment from self can we overcome the temptations of factions, rivalries and vainglory in the community (cf. *Way of Perfection* 10:3-4).

8. Finally, so that there may be a co-responsible exercise of authority by the Council and all the members, there is a need for *training in communion* which helps to move from the selfish "I" of the old person to the "we" of the new person (cf. NMI 43; ITC 107-109). In the first place comes the common good, sought by all. Everyone must feel in search of the fulfillment of God's will, following in the footsteps of Jesus under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, at the service of the mission.

Since for each community attention is required to be given to the new generations, who appreciate a readiness and a capacity for working collaboratively, it should be remembered that "the skill required for working collaboratively involves cultivating specific relational virtues: the discipline of listening and the capacity to give the other person space, readiness to forgive and willingness to 'put oneself on the line', according to a genuine spirituality of communion" (*Final Document of 2018 Synod*: 103).

In this formation, the celebration of the Eucharist plays a primordial role. In fact, in the Eucharist that "source and paradigm of the spirituality of communion", there are the principles of communion among all, in the equal dignity received in Baptism.

Constituted into a Eucharistic assembly, with the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity and participating in the sacred action in a full, conscious, pious and active form (cf. SC 4 & 14), the members of the community, through their various gifts and charisms received from the Father of all, express and renew the commitment of each one to unity, promoted by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, recognizing their own fragility and personal sins (*penitential act*), they are called to live and to choose again the path of communion, by implementing reconciliation with God and with their brothers and sisters. Then, the common listening to the word of God recalls that learning to listen to God takes first place and leads to listening to others. The offering of gifts reminds us of the union with Christ in our daily activities and works which, lived in the faith and spirit of Christ in the liturgy, are now united to His unique offering (cf. SC 61). Communion with the body and blood of Christ, received by those present, in turn realizes the unity of the members in the one bread, creating and favouring communion with God and with the brothers and sisters. Finally, nourished by the Eucharist, they are led to mission, to be a community of faith “outgoing” towards all (cf. ITC 109). Thus, in the Eucharist “source and apex of the whole Christian Life” (LG 11), is formed and nourished in the members of the community a reciprocal affection that leads to walking together, which is a “constitutive dimension of the Church (ITC 1.5.42.57, 94, 120).

9. My dear Secular Order members, what I have told you may seem an ideal difficult to achieve, in the face of the countless challenges you encounter in carrying out this task. Nevertheless, the important thing is to take steps in this direction, to start and to follow the processes of growth (cf. EG 222-225). I am sure that we are in an authentic time of grace. It is *now and here* that we are called to be prophetic, sensing in faith the way to go together, thus corresponding to God’s will. “God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness” (LG 9; cfr. GS 32; EG 6). For this reason, we have the guarantee of the grace received in the consecration of Baptism and Confirmation. More concretely, with the call to the Teresian Carmel we have the guarantee of divine support in continuing to walk the path of holiness in community, with the virtues of “endurance, patience and meekness, joy and sense of humour, daring and fervour” (cf. EG 110-157). St. John of the Cross confirms this to us: “The Lord has always revealed to mortals the treasures of his wisdom and his spirit, but now that the face of evil bares itself more and more, so does the Lord bare his treasures more” (*Sayings 1*).

Dear brothers and sisters: May the Holy Spirit continue to shed light on your path. Following the example of Jesus and in fidelity to the Teresian charism, promote always the witness of the kingdom in the midst of the world and thus collaborate in the mission of the Church and the Order.

In thanking you for your fraternal affection so often shown, I offer dear and brotherly greeting to you, your families and communities. I wish you a fruitful Lenten time and a holy Easter of the Resurrection: Let it be the inexhaustible source of hope and joy for each one of you. Imploring upon you the Lord’s blessing, I beg Our Lady of Mt Carmel to guard you and gather you around her Son.

Fraternally,
Fr Saverio Cannistrà OCD
Superior General

Rome, 6th March 2019
Ash Wednesday

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