

Message to the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of the Holy Land

Dear Sisters,

In this first visit to the Holy Land, it was a pleasure to meet you, to see the places where you live, to share with you thoughts, plans and desires. It was an enriching gift to me, pleasing to God and to each one of you. Now when I think of the Holy Land I will always have in mind your fraternal and prayerful communities.

Certainly, it is a grace to live in these places, in which – as Psalm 87 says – “every one was born there”. The love for Christ’s humanity, which pervades the whole spiritual experience of the Holy Mother Teresa, is found here, in the places where he was born, lived, died and rose for the dead, a continuous stimulus and sustenance. Joined to this spring, there is another abundant source from which to drink which is the eremitical and monastic tradition, from which Carmel was born, through the community of the first hermits *iuxta fontem Eliae* and the Rule of St Albert. Continuity with our first Fathers, so sought after by Saint Teresa, constitutes a constant call to prayer and contemplation (cf. 5M 1:2).

However, together with all these graces are the labours and crosses of this land, which from the point of view of the life of the theological virtues are also precious. The existing conflict between the Arab and Jewish world is the *present moment* which you are called to take upon yourselves, lifting it up in prayer and transforming into an offering of love all that you are called to suffer in communion with the men and women of these countries.

There is no doubt that these place and this history demand of you great human and spiritual maturity. You teach me how easy it is in daily living to get lost in secondary details and complicate things by giving them excessive importance. This is a call to simplify your life to the maximum in order to go to the essential of your vocation. All this world of suffering of so many people surrounding you asks this, and it is a challenge demanded by the very multicultural composition of your communities. What really caught my attention was the fact that “living together as sisters” was possible for people coming from seven or eight different countries, with totally different customs and traditions, from Europe to Asia, from Africa to Latin America. This means that each one of you must go constantly out of herself in order to encounter the other on the common ground of the same humanity and the same vocation. I believe that in this effort of encounter and simplification of yours, you are giving an important example to the whole Order, which today needs to learn how to live inter-culturally, a need becoming every more present in our globalized society.

Finally, in regard to your reading of Saint Teresa: I was able to see with what interest and commitment you are carrying this out. As we already said in community dialogue, we need to discover St Teresa’s fundamental options in order to discern what protects contemplative and fraternal life, as well as what can be detrimental to it and lead it astray. I consider this work of discernment particularly important for learning how to live in a truly evangelical way relationship with the world. Separation from the world is really for loving the world. Now, in order to love it, there is a need to know it, know it in its reality, not through the virtual images that the world itself provides for us. To know the world not through mundane means, but through a direct and real relationship, with persons and things is one of the great challenges which you are called to face, particularly in this country, which continues to be the centre of world history, its equilibrium and its tensions.

I hope you live this Lenten time to the full, and that you welcome the invitation to this knowledge and attention to yourself, which is essential for the spiritual life.

United in prayer. With fraternal affection,

P. Saverio Cannistrà ocd