

**Message of the 90<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Discalced Carmelite Friars  
Fatima -- April 17 – May 8, 2009**

Dear Brothers, Sisters, members of the Secular Order, and all friends of Carmel,

1. The members of the 90<sup>th</sup> General Chapter of the Discalced Carmelite Friars (April 17 – May 8, 2009) send you fervent greetings from Portugal, “the land of Mary,” near the shrine consecrated to her at Fatima: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the holy Spirit* (Rom 15, 13).
2. During these three weeks, we have experienced the fraternity that unites us all in the vocation and mission of Carmel. Many of us are participating in a General Chapter for the first time. Together, we have prayed and broken the bread of life. We have attentively considered the reports of Father General and of the General Bursar. After having expounded upon the background work of the General Definitory, as well as upon new developments during the 2003-2006 sexennium, Father General emphasized the vitality and current relevancy of the Teresian charism. He called to mind the challenge of formation – both initial and ongoing – so necessary for our spiritual life to be more profound, our communion greater, and our missionary spirit more authentic. The General Bursar presented the financial report, inviting us to make the most of our economic structures, especially given the context of the rapid changes occurring in this [financial] sector, and to prudently avoid any reduction of our patrimony.
3. We have elected a new team, centered around a Father General from a new generation – Fr. Saverio Cannistrà, of the Province of Tuscany. We have listened to the news and the expectations of the Secular Order, with a focus upon their formation program. The meeting with our Carmelite sisters – eleven Federation presidents come from around the world – gave us an experience of the family spirit that unites us in such a way that we cannot define ourselves one without the other. Our dialogue was an efficacious sign of precisely the style of fraternity that our Mother St. Teresa taught to St. John of the Cross. We desire to continue and to persevere in this style of dialogue. Another sign of the same fraternity was visible in our “religious brothers”, invited as observers to the Chapter. They reminded us of the beauty of their own vocation, their irreplaceable place in our history, their particular participation in the apostolate of spirituality, and the support of their prayer and counsel. Priests and brothers, we have to build up together our Carmelite witness.

In brief, we have discussed, discerned, decided, voted – ordinary actions of all Chapters. And now, what shall we do? What do we desire to live out?

***Looking to the 5<sup>th</sup> Centenary of the Birth of Teresa of Jesus***

4. Carmel “has need of fire in its heart, of words on its lips, of a prophetic gaze in its eyes” (Paul VI) in order to remain faithful to the mystical, prophetic and missionary dimensions of its vocation. In our world constantly in flux, we need to remain both solid as well as in solidarity with one another. To this end, we must work at a foundational level, to “begin always anew” (*Foundations* 29, 32), in the creative fidelity of the Holy Spirit. In following through on the dynamic of hope set in motion by the 2003 General Chapter's *Journeying with St. Teresa of Jesus and St. John of the Cross. Setting Out from Essentials*, the entire 2009-2015 sexennium will be oriented towards the 5<sup>th</sup> centenary of the birth of Teresa de

Ahumada (March 28, 1515), the birth of her whom we consider to be our holy Mother: Teresa of Jesus. The Chapter project, *I Was Born for You*, constitutes, as it were, a signpost for the animation of this sexennium.

### ***Reading, meditating, and being renewed by the writings of our Mother St. Teresa***

5. We desire for all members of the Order a new springtime in our life of allegiance to Jesus Christ. Our ongoing formation must be an authentic formation: education, maturation, growth in religious life, community life, and in the life of prayer. To this end, we invite each one of you to a personal encounter with Teresa, to enter into the conversation she began with her writings. As she stated: “I will be speaking with them as I write” (*Interior Castle*, Prologue). A person to person encounter is possible only in the intimate depths of the soul along the path of prayer, the adventure of friendship with Jesus – the human face of God and the divine face of Man.

### ***Transformed by the Experience of God***

6. We wish to make the writings of our holy Mother our daily bread. Her words resound in order to give us an experience of God. “My intention is to give souls an appetite for so elevated a good.” (*Life* 18,8) Does our life effectively offer a space to contemplate God? Do we give witness to his great goodness, to his magnanimity and to his work of liberation? (Cf. *Life* 4,10; 23,1) Through a unique, radical effort we need to learn anew for ourselves and others how to speak to people in a convincing manner about who God is in our lives. *God is love*: his love is life-giving, transforming and liberating.
7. Teresa invites us to “walk in the truth before God and man as far as possible” (*Interior Castle* VI, 10, 6). Disciples and servants of the Word of God, we perform the works of truth, we come to the light, we reach liberty. It is in this sovereign freedom that we are called to become heralds and witnesses, by giving ourselves entirely to him who gives himself to us totally in his Son, the true friend.

### ***Faithful to Prophetic Inspiration***

8. The freedom acquired in the act of giving herself to the Lord lead St. Teresa to raise her voice, as a woman, in audacious criticisms of the society of her time. Attentive to ecclesial and societal developments, she denounced her society's pitfalls, vanities and lies. In listening to the “spiritual people” of her time, and in contradiction to the opinions of “the theologians,” Teresa responded to the challenges of her times by her choice of poverty and the Christian humanism of her foundations, lived out through a friendly and frugal community life, characterized by the evangelical virtues of gentleness, humility and joy. For us, too, widespread poverty and that which provokes it, knowledge of growing inequality and injustice in the world, constitutes a challenge. The sorrowful faces of the poor are to us the suffering face of Christ.

### ***Following through with our Missionary Dynamism***

9. “Prayer enkindled by the fire of love” is “the lever” that lifts the world (Thérèse of Lisieux). The missionary dynamic that animates us upholds our passion for humanity and maintains its liveliness. Moving always away from any type of self-centeredness, we place ourselves at the service of humanity's future. We desire to open for humanity new forms of hope, which can be realized concretely. The emergence of globalization as a “new world order” invites us to harness together our human, spiritual and material resources in a more effective

collaboration – both between regions as well as with the Center of the Order – in order to continue to consolidate the expansion of the Order throughout the world. The Chapter has had the joy of manifesting a sign of this expansion in the recognition and erection of Korea as a new Province of the Order. In the same way, the formation of a new group within the Chapter, the *coetus africanus* for Africa and Madagascar, shows the development of our presence in this vast continent.

10. However, globalization also has the effect of breaking the world into fragments, in which the number of refugees and of new forms of misery is multiplied. In a world characterized at the same time by a closer interconnection and a greater fragmentation, we can offer the witness and hospitality of our fraternal life that is rooted in friendship with Jesus, who has “broken down the dividing wall of enmity” between people, as proclaimed in the Letter to the Ephesians (2,4). Our Holy Mother Teresa was fully and actively involved with this wounded humanity and was filled with sorrow and compassion for it by her experience of hell (cf. *Life* 32). This same love for the salvation and full liberation of human beings animates our life and our apostolate. We desire to become “servants of love” (*Life* 11, 1), “truly spiritual people,” as portrayed by Teresa: “slaves of God, branded with the sign of the Cross, having surrendered their freedom to him so that he may sell them as slaves to all the world, as he himself was” (*Interior Castle* VII, 4, 8).

### ***In the Habit of the Virgin Mary***

11. In the life of our Mother St. Teresa, as in the history of Carmel, the glorious Virgin Mary occupies a unique place. We are Carmelites because we belong to a family consecrated to the Virgin Mary. Our Chapter has renewed its awareness of this fact here in Fatima. Sister Lucia and the two other little shepherds were able to contemplate Our Lady in the habit of Carmel, inviting us to pray for sinners and for peace. Her message nourishes also our hope: “My Immaculate Heart will triumph.” “What does this signify? The Heart open to God, purified by the contemplation of God, is stronger than guns and weapons of any kind. Mary's *fiat*, the word of her heart, changed the history of the world, for, thanks to her “yes,” God could become man in our world and hence dwell among us forever” (Benedict XVI). Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the Magnificat, we renew ever more effectively in ourselves the awareness that the truth about God who saves, the truth about God who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his preferential love for the poor and humble, that love which is expressed in the words and works of Jesus (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 37).
12. To read and to meditate upon the works of our Mother St. Teresa (both personally and in community), to assimilate her doctrine that shows us the way to holiness, to share it with others by renewing also our own manner of speaking of this doctrine: the program of this sexennium, made concrete each year through study guides, will be for the entire Family of Carmel a source of grace and renewal. For of our Mother St. Teresa, mother of spiritual people and first female doctor of the Church, we can say with Edith Stein: “Her effect extends beyond the frontiers of her people and of her Order and even reaches those who find themselves outside the Church. The power of her language, the sincerity and simplicity of the style of her writings opens hearts and disposes them to divine life. Only on the day of the last judgment will it become known the number of those who, thanks to her, have found the way of Light.”

Fatima – May 7, 2009