SUPERIOR GENERAL OF DISCALCED CARMELITES
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TO THE SECULAR CARMELITES OCDS

ONLY ONE FAMILY: WALKING TOGETHER

Dear brothers and sisters: PEACE!

Ten months after having celebrated our General Chapter, and as this month of July comes to an end with Mary, our Mother of Carmel, as well as celebrating the feast of Saint Martha, who invites us to live our daily hard work, with our hearts set on one thing, being contemplatives in the world. It fills me with joy to address all of you, my sisters and brothers in Carmel, to thank, confirm, encourage, bless and celebrate with you this moment in your history as Secular Carmelites, which is also the history of all of us who make up the great family of the Teresian Carmel.

THANKS

My first feeling, since I was a General, when thinking of the Secular Carmel, is one of admiration and sincere gratitude. Wherever I go and meet local OCDS communities or when Provinces have assemblies, I receive the impact of a joy and enthusiasm that reminds me a lot of the passion in the heart of Teresa of Jesus. What is comforting and encouraging is your dedication and your interest in forming yourself, to walk as a family, to continue on as a community that is local, provincial, as well as an Order. You are always an injection of life, even when you yourselves ask to be accompanied and encouraged, precisely for that reason. Thank you, because in recent years the Secular Carmel has grown, not only in number, but also in structures of coordination and collaboration, of animation and synodality, apart from the richness of the Constitutions, the enormous effort of the different regional or provincial Statutes. I congratulate you on that path accomplished. As well, I encourage you not to stay in the letter of the law. Not to get caught up in useless dialogues about legal nuances or casuistic interpretations. A legal structure is necessary, it protects us and the community taking care there is not arbitrariness, improvisation, and, in many cases, manipulation. We need standards of life that express our purpose of life. And we need to regain the sense of

Teresian obedience, which is a precious value well understood. Obeying is everyone's duty; we need to regain the ability to allow ourselves to be guided and welcomed by God's plan in tune with those who hold the position of servants of the community and with our superiors. Just as those who encourage have to do so detached from themselves, and never clinging to their positions. Governing well is obedience to God and not to oneself.

I hope you do not have the time to discuss things of little importance, as Saint Teresa lamented at the beginning of the Way of Perfection. Secular Carmel needs, throughout the world, an evangelical leap, a Teresian audacity, risking to live a deep experience of God, a deep prayer, an authentic community life, with the irresistible appeal of evangelical simplicity, without disguises, or educated distinctions, but with frankness and transparency, true love for one another. That in our communities the 'look at how they love each other' is transparent. When someone new comes to our community they are not surprised by the great organization we have or the beautiful Constitutions, what they observe is how you pray, how you communicate, how you love each other. See to it that there are no rivalries or misgivings, that there is a community in which those who have the position of guiding are at the service of all and if the latter also have the chance to express how they feel, observe your empathy with the suffering of our environment.

ONLY ONE FAMILIA

I want to start with a couple of examples that serve as an entry, and that, even in the case of simple projects, could express the sense of family, co-responsibility and belonging that has been given to us lay people, nuns and friars: Since I have been in Italy I have already gone several times to our Monte Compatri monastery. There Laura and Lorenzo, mother and son, two spirited lay people of the OCDS, lead, with Father Basilio, the Director of the Spirituality Centre, the care of the house, collaborating at different levels. The laity take care of the relationship with the guests, collaborate in the secretariat and in the organization and management of the staff. Laura takes care of the food. The animation and programming of pastoral initiatives of the Centre is carried out in collaboration, between friars and laity. Gianfranco, Lorenzo's maternal grandfather, also worked here until just over a year ago. He was a well-known and much loved man, perennial in goal, he continued to work until a few days before his death. He now rests in the same tomb as the Carmelites here on Monte Compatri, united also after death. In the Order we have similar and beautiful examples in some provinces, in different fields and apostolates.

Likewise, in the first months of this year, the decision was taken, as in so many other places, to leave, as a community of friars, the foundation in Las Ermitas de Córdoba (Spain). It is a beautiful place in the mountains and of ancient eremitical tradition (prior to the presence of the Carmelites). However, in view of the proposal of the Diocese to hand over the place to some other contemplative community, and being such an emblematic place for our Order, we have considered the possibility of continuing our presence, but through a project in collaboration with the laity of the secular Carmel. In this regard, I encourage initiatives that "demonstrate the richness of our Order, and the common contemplative and apostolic vocation that defines us, in communion with our sisters, at the service of the Church."

Here comes the quote from the OCDS Constitutions, numbers 1, 2, 37 and 38: When speaking of the laity, nuns and friars they say: "It is **one family with the same spiritual possessions, the same call to holiness (cf. Eph 1:4; 1 Peter 1:15) and the same apostolic mission**. Secular members contribute to the Order the benefits proper to their secular state of life." (Const. 1). They take part in the charism and spirituality of the Order as part of it (cf. Const. 2). "It is an integral part of the Discalced Carmelite Order" (37). In addition, **"it will be arranged that representatives of the Secular Order are present when the apostolic service of the Order is planned in a geographical area, at a local or provincial area, at a local or provincial level, or when serious study is made on the situation in the Church or in society**." (38)

These very clear points of your Constitutions open us to the challenge of creative collaboration at so many levels, and that begins with a true communion in the same vocation within the great Teresian family. A charism shared from the special characteristics of our state of life, assumed with full awareness that responding to the call of God, each one living in fullness their vocation, for the richness of the whole body. That is, the richness and fullness of **spirituality, charism and belonging** are a whole gift for lay people, nuns and friars, without levels of importance. This truth that constitutes us as a single Order, rather than being a 'privilege' or a vain 'pride', roots us in the sense of a true vocation in the Church, calling us to live in daily listening to the Word, in community, willingly yielding to God in our lives, to the breath of the Spirit, seeking the truth together.

Number 38 of the OCDS Constitutions says something very beautiful: "The friars and nuns of the Teresian Carmel consider the lay community of Secular Carmel an enrichment for their consecrated life. Through mutual interaction the friars and nuns wish to learn from the Secular Carmelites to recognize the signs of the times together with them." I want you to know that this is how we also feel, as a word of God for the whole Order, for all of us. I would like to insist on this 'mutual learning', which concerns us all equally and which is an essential part of being Carmelites: discernment in community, which constitutes one of the challenges that all of Carmel has today. We are aware of the reality inside and outside of us, we are attentive to the signs of the times, walking as humble apprentices in the communal listening to the Word, listening to the cries of the present, praying in the heart of the wounds of our world. True prayer makes us contemplate God in the pandemics and the sprouts of new life in our world.

SYNODALITY AND COMMUNITY

We are immersed in an ecclesial process of deep listening to God, to the present moment, with the challenge of learning to live synodality in Carmel. Aware that the program is as beautiful as it is arduous. I do not want to hide from you my concern about the situation that is perceived in many communities of the OCDS, in which the richness of 'love first', of the gift received in the call, of the Teresian enthusiasm of the charism, is, on some occasions, hampered by internal conflicts, power struggles, lack of serene and sincere dialogue, ambitions disguised as truth, difficulty for communion in diversity. On some occasions, the beauty of life in community is threatened by the lack of trust and freedom, by the desire to impose one's own vision of things, by the lack of Teresian acceptance of each and every one, without discrimination.

When a charism and a personal gift is good and comes from the Spirit, it helps to build community. If there is sincere prayer, my silence is a deep listening to the other. Community is built in and out of meeting time, it is built on what we talk about and what we do not say, it grows in polite interest in the other. I encourage you that the formation shared in the communities be solid and well-founded, a formation for life, not to accumulate theories. To make it a life that helps us to be witnesses to the Gospel in your environment, messengers of the doctrine and experience of our Saints of Carmel.

Not all are called to live in community, not everyone has the capacity to establish bonds of respect and welcome to others, in a path of collaboration and true listening. It is essential to perceive if the person who wants to enter Carmel has this openness and ability to assimilate a lifestyle in community. The ability to be accompanied and guided with maturity, sincerity and dialogue is key at all periods of formation, and ongoing formation. We need to open in our communities processes of serene self-criticism, without fear, starting with the animators, continuing with those in formation, and including the assisting priests. For a community to be healthy it needs to free itself from illusions (Life 16:7).

Among ourselves, we need to accompany each other, and ask for help. As an example: the way Saint Teresa thought the relationship between friends of God. She always allowed herself to be helped, and included a fundamental key to discernment: "We do not know ourselves as well as others who observe us, if they do so with love and concern for our progress." To let ourselves be seen means, in the style of St Teresa, to allow oneself to be confronted, to open the windows of the house, of the community, to be strengthened and confirmed in the path undertaken. We have to read again the Way of Perfection, to learn to be community. "Humility, detachment and love for one another...", the three pillars of the Teresian way of prayer, continue to be our inspiration to create authentic praying communities. That our communities might smell of fresh air, trust and creative dialogue. Carmel does not want, above all, to be a school of legal or moral 'perfection', but a school of communion, in which perfection is lived as an integration, with that Teresian joy that made its nuns want to be holy, by the fire of love that they carried within and that their mother Teresa, with her sisterly love infected them.

IN THE SCHOOL OF OUR ORIGINS

This path always draws nourishment from the experience of our origins. We must go back deeper into the beginning of Carmel, the Rule and the '*propositum*', (intention), that moved those first hermits, gathered together around the Fountain of Elijah and under the protection of Mary, to give their lives for a common ideal of holiness, keeping nothing for themselves. Return to the beginning of the Teresian adventure, with those four 'poor little things', who premiered a new family in the Church, born in love from Teresa's heart. Today the challenge is to rediscover the freshness of the origins, without longing for the past... What was the secret of those hermits? What had been given to them to live so resolutely and courageously as a gift of Jesus Christ? What treasure burned in Teresa's heart?, What did she perceive in the Gaze of Jesus?, What adventure was born within her to let herself be

moved by the Spirit and change, 'woman and ruin', the history of a spirituality founded on such a beautiful friendship with God and friendship with brothers and sisters?

It is a precious moment for the entire Secular Carmel, as precious as it is challenging. Let us not be carried away by a pessimism that is a sin against the Holy Spirit. God always gave Carmel its best lights in the most critical situations. Today we need each other as a united family, humble and on the way, without boasting, without triumphalism, or defeatism. It is always time to offer yourself as an instrument, you and I who feel so nothing, and to whom God, like Mary, has asked us to give a bold and prompt yes.

I need you and I call you, with Mary, on the road to Ain Karem, to serve so many who need us, with the mystery (contemplation) of God deep in our hearts, in our community. God leading ahead. TRUST AND FAITH.

Thank you, my brothers and sisters of the Secular Carmel, Carmelites in soul and body. Together let us walk!!

God bless you always. May Mary and Joseph take you by their hand.

Fr. Miguel Márquez Calle, ocd[1]
Superior General

[1] I want to add at the bottom of the page a special, very warm thanks to Fathers Aloysius Deeney, Alzinir Debastiani and Ramiro Casale... General Delegates successively for the OCDS, for the enormous, timely and precious help for so many years to the Secular Carmel of the whole world. God continue to fill you with grace and blessing.