

TASTE OF CARMEL

EXERCISES IN CARMELITE SPIRITUALITY

A service of the St. Anne Lay Carmelites





THE CHARISM

The Carmelite charism is to **live in the loving awareness of God**. We “practice” this awareness, but as it matures, Jesus begins to infuse it directly. We call this unmerited grace “Contemplation.”

Contemplation is an infused sense of His presence. It's all His work. It doesn't require concentration. It's like doing dishes while other people are in the room. Your awareness of their presence doesn't interrupt your chore.

Carmelites often verbally separate Contemplation from prayer. When we say “prayer”, we mean an active interaction with God that requires at least momentary effort: meditation, aspiration, Liturgy of the Hours. But in reality, it's all prayer. Life is prayer. Action is prayer. We're never NOT interacting with God.



OUR MOUNTAIN

Carmelites think of their journey to Contemplation as a mountain climb. This radical journey of transformation burns away any obstacles to being fully united in His love.

Jesus isn't standing at the top of His mountain. He is the mountain. He lifts us higher into his love. But, the climb is steep. We keep our eyes locked on his Sacred Humanity and His Indwelling.

Our Lord's Sacred Humanity reminds us of what we have in common with Him. His residence inside us inspires deeper intimacy and attachment.

Carmelites don't talk to the sky. We speak to His Holy Face smiling in our hearts. He is our mountain of love.

EXERCISES

1. **Try this.** Tell the Father about a problem you're having. Now, tell the Holy Spirit. Lastly, imagine the Holy Face. See him inside your heart. Talk to him about the same problem. Feel the difference?

NOTES:

2. **Google Jesus** images or sort through your holy cards. Find faces that really touch your heart. One Carmelite keeps all her favorites on her phone. Another cuts out images from cards and donation requests and keeps them on her home altar. Each time she goes to pray, she "picks the Jesus" she feels closest to that day.

NOTES:

3. **Experiment.** Before you pray, focus your mind on your favorite Holy Face. Locate it inside your heart. Then talk to Him. At Mass, try doing the same. See Him celebrating the Liturgy along with you. Hear Him say the responses. During the day, maybe say hello to His Holy Face in your soul. One Carmelite taps on her heart when she thinks of Him. The important thing is try it out and see what sparks the most LOVE in you.

NOTES:



OUR MOUNTAIN GUIDE

There are many ways to climb the same mountain, just like there are many ways to pray. Who you look to for advice and example affects your choices.

Carmelites look to Mary. Before all else, Mary is our mother, sister, model, and guide. She's lived her life infused with grace. Carmelites imitate her every step.

More than anyone, Mary focused on the Sacred Humanity and the Indwelling. She carried Him spiritually and physically. She reflected on the Word, pondering Him in her heart, and always trusting.

Some say contemplation requires isolation. Mary was an "active" contemplative. In fact, the Annunciation is the only time we see her alone. From the Visitation on, she's always serving people.

In Acts 2, we get to see inside her community life. It's like our guide left a "map." Mary's Jerusalem family was "devoted to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers and providing for each one's need."

In temple times, priests sacrificed a lamb each morning and evening. "The prayers" in Acts 2 meant the liturgical temple prayers, psalms said together especially at the hours of sacrifice. The Liturgy of the Hours is a direct descendant of this practice.

Like our guide, Carmelites focus on the Sacred Humanity and the Indwelling; we ponder Him in our hearts. With her community, we devote ourselves "to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to the prayers and providing for each one's need."



EXERCISES

1. **Try it.** How do you usually talk to Mary? Is she Queen? Our Lady? Holy Mother? Try something new. Think of a person who needs prayer. Instead of your usual image, speak to your Sister and Guide, the one who has walked this road herself. Tell her what you love about the person. Ask her advice. Also, be sure to let her know how you're holding up. She cares!

Notes:

2. **Imagine.** Liturgy, or the Mass and its extension in the Liturgy of the Hours, is the highest prayer, even though it doesn't always feel that way. The Blessed Virgin and her community still prayed the Hours. What do you imagine they were thinking about at the hours of sacrifice?

Notes:

3. **Brainstorm.** If you had the Blessed Virgin as a member of your parish, what do you think her greatest service to the community would be?

Notes:



OUR FIRE

Where Mary is calm and reserved, helpful and steady, our father Elijah shows us the emotional highs and lows that come with the climb. Elijah is fiery and dramatic, full of prophecy and passion! He's up; he's down. He's confident; he's desolated. But however inelegantly he weathered the emotional storms of the journey, There's one thing Elijah was definitely not...half-hearted.

Carmelites call it "puritas cordis," a pure heart/an undivided heart. Jesus loves all His creatures, all his creations. He loves sunsets and good wine and music and friends, but He loves them all in the context of His Father's goodness, never in opposition. An undivided heart has many loves, but they're organized and unified in a single-minded allegiance to Jesus.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah's undivided heart and radical pursuit of holiness makes him a target. He flees into the wilderness. He's depressed. He can't feed himself; he can't even will himself to keep living. He's totally empty; God fills him.

Carmelites call internal emptiness "vacare Deo," making space for God. We try to make space for Him intentionally, but some emptying has to be done for us. On the mountain journey, there are times of desolation. It's ugly, but it's healthy and normal.

Finally, we learn from Elijah how to hear God. He ignores the "great and powerful wind" that "tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks." He ignores the earthquake and the fire. Then "came a gentle whisper." Elijah knew God was a whisperer. Like Elijah, Carmelites look for God in the silence, not the cyclone.



EXERCISES

1. **Think** about your loves: family, friends, hobbies, etc. (Don't go over spiritual and try not to love creation.) Look at them through the lens of total allegiance to Jesus. Can you bring them into focus? Are there aspects that work in opposition to Him? Remember to keep your eyes on the Sacred Humanity.

NOTES:

2. **Remember** a time of desolation. Choose something that is no longer painful. Reflect on that completed work of that suffering. How did it make room for Jesus? Think of what it helped you become. What did you let go of? What did you gain?

NOTES:

3. **Riddle me this.** Mary and Jesus required no cleansing, but they both experienced desolation at the cross. "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Read Psalm 22. Picture Jesus in your heart, saying these words. What does it mean that they went through this? Is all desolation purification from sin? What good did God bring from it?

NOTES:



St. Anne Lay **CARMELITES** *Memphis, TN*

WE HOPE YOUR TASTE OF
CARMEL WAS DELICIOUS!

If you completed these
exercises, let us know. Use the
contact form at **carmelscall.com**.

We'd be honored to share more
of our ancient spirituality with
you!

*In Christ's Love,
The St. Anne Lay Carmelites*