



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
FOR THE 550th ANNIVERSARY OF THE ADDITION
OF THE CLOISTERED NUNS AND THE THIRD ORDER
OF THE LAITY TO THE CARMELITE ORDER**

*To Reverend Fr Joseph Chalmers
Prior General of the Order of Carmelites (O.Carm.)*

1. I learned with joy that this year, this religious family observes the 550th anniversary of the entrance into the Order of the cloistered nuns and of the establishment of the Third Order, consisting of lay people desirous of living Carmelite spirituality in the world.

With the spread of the Order in Europe, some women asked to be united with it by the same ties as the men religious. Many lay faithful also desired to live the same spirituality while staying in their homes. Bl. John Soreth, Prior General at the time, perceived that the life of sacrifice, solitude and prayer of the nuns would be beneficial for the friars recalling them to the primitive and genuine spirit; and also that it would be useful to offer lay people, as was the case with the Mendicant Orders, the possibility of drawing life from the common spiritual source.

So, on 7 October 1452, the Order asked my venerable predecessor, Pope Nicholas V, for the faculty to set up in the Order the enclosed nuns of contemplative life, and an association of lay persons living in the world, the Carmelite Third Order. The Pope granted this with the Bull *Cum nulla* that is now being commemorated.

I am sure that to recall this authoritative papal intervention is a motive for intimate satisfaction for the cloistered sisters of contemplative life in papal enclosure, while it is an incentive to the Third Order to an ever more courageous spiritual dedication to serve the new evangelization.

2. The Carmelite nuns, immersed in silence and prayer, recall to all believers, and especially their brothers dedicated to the active apostolate, the absolute primacy of God. Consecrated totally to

the quest for God, they witness that he is the source of the full realization of the human person and of every spiritual activity. When they open their hearts to him, he comes to meet his children to introduce them into intimacy with him, achieving with them an ever more perfect communion of love. For the Carmelites, the choice of living in solitude, separated from the world, responds to this special call from the Lord. Carmel for this reason enriches the entire Christian community.

From the beginning, this form of cloistered life bore fruit; over the centuries it was enriched with the bright witness of exemplary women, some of whom are officially recognized as blessed or saints and are even pointed out today as models to imitate. I would like to mention Bl. Frances d'Amboise, considered the foundress of the Carmelite nuns in France, because she worked in close unity and friendship with Bl. Soerth; Bl. Giovanna Scopelli, one of the outstanding exponents of this experience in Italy and Bl. Giralani, who chose the name "Archangel" because she wanted to dedicate herself completely to the praise of God like the angels in heaven. In Florence, St Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi was an eminent example of apostolic and ecclesial zeal and a mirror of the unceasing quest for God and his glory.

In this furrow of holiness, in Spain, we find St Teresa of Jesus, the most illustrious member of the enclosed Carmelite congregation, by whom the nuns of every era have been inspired. Teresa re-elaborated and renewed the Carmelite tradition, fostering the desire to live more perfectly in solitude with God, imitating the first Fathers, hermits of Mount Carmel. Following her example, Carmelite nuns are called, as it is written in their Constitutions, "*to prayer and contemplation, for in these are our origins; we are the offspring of those holy fathers of Mount Carmel, who in deep solitude and total disregard of the world, sought this treasure and precious pearl*" (*Constitutions of the Carmelite Nuns*, n. 61).

3. I gladly join in the thanksgiving of the Carmelite family for the countless miracles worked by God in the course of the centuries through this established form of consecrated life which, as we read in the Rule of St Albert of Jerusalem, "is holy and good" (n. 20). In the silence of Carmel, in so many parts of the world, they continue to bring forth perfumed flowers of holiness, souls in love with Heaven, who with their evangelical heroism have sustained and effectively sustain the mission of the Church.

People are reminded by Carmel, though they are busy with so many concerns, that they must give absolute priority to seeking "*the kingdom of God and his justice*" (Mt 6,33). Looking to Carmel, where prayer becomes life and life flourishes with prayer, the Christian community can more easily understand, as I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio ineunte*, how they can become "genuine 'schools' of prayer" (n. 33). I ask the beloved Carmelite Sisters, who are so completely given over to the praise of the Lord, to help the Christians of our time to achieve this demanding ascetical and apostolic task. May their monasteries become beacons of holiness, especially for the parishes and dioceses which have the good fortune to have them.

4. The 550th anniversary of the Bull *Cum nulla* also recalls the incorporation of lay people into the Carmelite family, by establishing the Third Order. They are men and women called to live the Carmelite charism in the world, sanctifying their daily activity by their fidelity to their Baptismal promises. For them to fulfil this vocation fully, they must learn to sanctify the day with prayer, especially with the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours. They follow the example of Elijah, whose prophetic mission arose out of an uninterrupted experience of God; above all, let them imitate Mary, who listened to the word of the Lord and, keeping it in her heart, put it into practice.

May these brothers and sisters whom the Scapular joins to the other members of the Carmelite Order, be grateful for the gift received and in every circumstance be faithful to the duties that derive from this charismatic belonging. May they not be satisfied with a superficial Christian life, but respond to the radical appeal of Christ, who calls his disciples to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (cf. Mt 5,48).

With these sentiments, I invoke upon the entire Carmelite family a renewed outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that they may live in fidelity to their vocation and communicate the merciful love of God to the men and women of our time. To this end I implore the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and Beauty of Carmel, and I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to the men religious, to the cloistered nuns, to the members of the Third Order, encouraging them all to make their own contribution to the sanctification of the world.

From the Vatican, 7 October 2002, Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary.

JOHN PAUL II