

Tuesday: Ordinary 23-B

Blessing of Carmelite Hill Formation House

Westminster Abbey

11 September 2012

Dear Father Abbot, Monsignor Jensen, Father Archibald, Discalced Carmelite Fathers of the Karnataka-Goa Province working in the Archdiocese and guests from other dioceses, brother priests, secular Carmelites, and dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

It is a special joy for all of us to be gathered here for the Eucharist in this splendid Abbey church of the Benedictine community in Mission to celebrate the beginning of a new and exciting adventure of grace in the Archdiocese of Vancouver: the establishment of a formation house for Carmelite seminarians. This historic occasion is the fruit of fraternal encouragement, generous financial support and a great deal of prayer. I salute the Discalced Carmelites for this new endeavour which they are undertaking in faith. In the future, Carmel Hill will be a residence for young professed Carmelite men who will continue their priestly formation by studying philosophy and theology here at Christ the King Seminary, undoubtedly one of the very finest seminaries in North America. It provides the necessary intellectual formation, in a spirit of prayer, liturgical worship and fidelity to the teaching of the Church, for men who will serve the People of God as priests.

As you know, the Archdiocese of Vancouver has, until now, had no

Order other than the Benedictines who have formed their young seminarians here. With boldness, vision and confidence in the guiding hand of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Discalced Carmelites are staking out new territory. And for that I have very thankful to them and to all who have made this dream possible in so short a span of time. It will take all of our continued support, above of all of our prayers and sacrifice, to see to it that many young men will eventually receive their formation here at Carmel Hill and Westminster Abbey.

In the Carmelite Tradition

I would like to take note that, by divine Providence, today's occasion is taking place less than three weeks after the Church has celebrated the 450th anniversary of the beginning of the Reform of Carmel begun by that astounding mystic and woman of practical genius, the great St. Teresa of Avila. From these beginnings of renewal Teresian spirituality has provided a sure light and path for men and women to follow. In love with the Lord, this courageous woman did not want anything other than to please him in all things. She humbly let Christ penetrate her soul and act through her, truly allowing him to take the lead in all her actions and aspirations, inspiring her founding an extraordinary number of new monasteries, while facing seemingly insurmountable

obstacles.¹ This is what our Carmelite brothers present here this morning have likewise done. Under the leadership of their Provincial, Father Archibald, they have taken up this new project in faith, convinced that it is one pleasing to God.

How did they make such an important decision? What inspired a community such as the Carmelites from the Karnataka-Goa Province to cast out into the deep (cf. Lk 5:4), taking such a leap of faith?

In today's Gospel we have the answer. Here we see Jesus taking one of the most important decisions of his earthly life: the selection of the Twelve, those men whom he called to be especially close to him, to be formed in his teaching and in his way of life, and to carry on his ministry of proclaiming the arrival of the Kingdom of God. Such a decision could not be made lightly. Nor was it.

St. Luke tells us the secret of what he did. He prayed – and not just momentarily, but “he spent the night in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12). Jesus liked to go to “lonely places” to pray (cf. Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16). He often withdrew to “the hills” to be alone (cf. Lk 6:12; 9:28); and “the night” afforded him the solitude necessary for him to be alone with the Father

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message to the Bishop of Avila on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of the Monastery of San José and the Beginning of the Reform of Carmel (16 July 2012), n. 1.

(cf. Mk 1:35; 6:46-47; Lk 6:12). In this morning's Gospel, after daybreak, Jesus chose from among the many who had been following him just twelve – as there had been twelve tribes that made up ancient Israel – and he named them Apostles (cf. Lk 6:13): the ones to be sent forth to evangelize the world.

This prayer and choice of Jesus remind us of what the work of the new Carmel Hill Formation House is meant to be. The work of carefully encouraging and supporting vocations to the priesthood finds its source of inspiration in this Gospel where Jesus names his closest Apostles and then forms them with love and care as a community. We should pay close attention to just how Jesus called his closest associates. The first thing he did was to pray: before calling them, Jesus spent the night alone in prayer, listening to the will of the Father (cf. Lk 6:12). It is only after Jesus' intimate conversation with the Father that the calling of his Apostles takes place.

Likewise today. Vocations to the ministerial priesthood and to the consecrated life are first and foremost the fruit of contact with the living God and insistent prayer lifted up to the “Lord of the harvest,” whether in parish communities, in Catholic families or in groups specifically devoted to prayer for vocations.² This morning, therefore, I exhort you to pray

² Cf. Benedict XVI, Message for the 48th World Day of Prayer for Vocations (15 May 2011).

that in the not too distant future Carmel Hill House will be filled to overflowing with Carmelite seminarians ready to give their lives to the service of Christ and his Church.

Prayer, of course, is absolutely central to Carmelite spirituality. Teaching others to pray as did St. Teresa of Jesus is fundamental. For her, a life of prayer consists in “being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with him who, we know, loves us.”³ Her whole movement of reform was based on encouraging a form of life that would favour personal encounter with the Lord, for which “we have only to find a place where we can be alone and look upon him present within us. Nor need we feel strange in the presence of so kind a Guest,”⁴ she wrote.⁵

³ St. Teresa of Avila, *Libro de la Vida* 8, 5.

⁴ St. Teresa of Avila, *Camino de perfección*, 28, 2.

⁵Cf. Benedict XVI, Message to the Bishop of Avila on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of the Monastery of San José and the Beginning of the Reform of Carmel (16 July 2012), n. 2.

One other lesson we can take from the life of the great Doctor of the Church, Teresa, is relevant to today's celebration. She was very aware, as she said, that the "times were dangerous."⁶ Awareness of this danger necessitated, she went on to say, that "the friends of God should be strong, in order that they may support the weak."⁷ I think that her insight is as equally valid today as it was in the sixteenth century.

We live in "dangerous times" for living, and especially for proclaiming, the Gospel. So that the weak in faith among us can be strengthened and supported, we need places of formation which will prepare our future priests to do just that: to be courageous witnesses to the Gospel, yet gentle and reverent in their words of proclamation (cf. 1 Pet 3:16).⁸ Teresa provides not only seminarians but all of us with a model to imitate. In her time she evangelized without mincing her words, with unfailing ardour, and with great zeal, never giving in to inertia: a true model of the new evangelization.

St. Teresa, her fellow reformer St. John of the Cross, and the whole army of Carmelite saints urge us to take seriously our vocation to

⁶ St. Teresa of Avila, *Libro de la Vida* 33, 5.

⁷ St. Teresa of Avila, *Libro de la Vida* 15, 5.

⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, Message to the Bishop of Avila on the Occasion of the 450th Anniversary of the Monastery of San José and the Beginning of the Reform of Carmel (16 July 2012), n. 3.

holiness: our call, like them, to be saints. Like Teresa, may we aspire to belong totally to Jesus, only to Jesus and always to Jesus. Let us not be afraid to say to our Lord, as she did: “I am yours; I was born for you, what do you want to do with me?”⁹

After Mass we shall be going to Carmel Hill, the new Carmelite House of Formation. The first Carmelites went to Mount Carmel because they believed in the love of God, who so loved the world that he gave his Only-Begotten Son for our salvation (cf. Jn 3:16). Welcoming the Lord into their lives, they made themselves available to being transformed by his love. Our journey with Christ, our travelling with him, is not an additional burden in our life; it does not make it heavier, but is a power that helps us to bear it, for it is “life in abundance” (Jn 10:10).

⁹ St. Teresa of Avila, Poem 2.

This is faith: being loved by God and letting oneself be loved by God in Jesus Christ. Letting oneself be loved in this way is the light that helps us to bear our daily burden. The holiness to which we are all called is not a difficult action of our own doing. Rather, it means opening the windows of our soul to let in God's light.¹⁰

Conclusion

As we continue our Eucharist, let us thank the Lord for this great new gift of the Carmel Hill House of Formation. Continue to pray that, through the intercession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and all the Carmelite Saints, it will bear an abundance of spiritual fruit for the Church. And may the good Lord grant his richest blessings to all those who have made this new foundation possible! Amen.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
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¹⁰ Cf. Benedict XVI, General Audience (16 February 2007).