

Workshop On "The Rule Of Life"

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Let us look back to our admission into the Secular Order. Before the scapular was laid on your shoulders, you received the Bible and the Rule of Life. Each of us was called to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ. Living in allegiance to Jesus Christ is a grace. It is hidden union with God, birthed in one's life through prayer, contemplation and action - service to others, family, friends, the community and the Church. It is a call to holiness to Christian maturity.

The Constitutions of the Secular Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Teresa of Jesus will replace the Rule of Life. We, the secular branch of Carmel will be in step with the friars and nuns being governed by constitutions, norms, statutes and the Primitive Rule of St. Albert, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. This primitive rule of the first Carmelite Brothers put into writing a way of life that had been tested and was being lived on Mount Carmel. As Carmelites, it is our inheritance.

Growth always brings with it change. In the early sixties the Holy Spirit came with His wind of change. To reflect the spirit of renewal of Vatican II the Generalate wrote the Rule of Life. The Holy Spirit continues through the Church to call forth the talents of God's people. This call is for our own spiritual growth, for the service of our brothers and sisters and for the good of the whole Church. At the international Congress in Mexico, in response to this call, a committee of ten members was set up to review the existing Rule of Life and write the Constitutions. The committee members, five males and five females, came from all over the world.

As Christians and as Carmelites we are called to be holy. The Rule of Life gives us a way to answer God's call to holiness and to live in allegiance to His Son - Jesus Christ. It takes about fifteen minutes to read and a lifetime to live. Where is your copy of the Rule of Life, or your new copy of the Constitutions? Does it show signs of wear or is it sitting on a shelf? Do you ever ponder over this document and use it as a springboard to meditation and prayer? This little document is a gold mine! It defines who we are as Carmelites. It is our own personal road map to union with God. The Rule of Life is our friend, a special tool given to us by God our Father. Through pondering of its meaning and its application to our lives, our spiritual roots grow deep and are nourished. Then we become beautiful flowers in the Garden of Carmel.

As Seculars living in the world we can bring God and His Word - Jesus, to the marketplace. Our lives should be a balance of Martha and Mary. Through living the directives of the Rule of Life, that of prayer and contemplation, grace and energy is given to become at every moment prayer, to reach out and serve, to evangelize first with our actions, then if necessary with our words. It is good to remember that others put us under close scrutiny - in judging us they judge the Order of Carmel. Unfortunately, at times they misjudge Carmel because of our weaknesses or sin. Everything in our daily life reflects back on the Catholic Church and the Order of Carmel. In our journey of life God never guides us to a place where He does not provide for us. Tapping into our rich inheritance as sons and daughters of Carmel, through God's grace we can reflect the love of God found in Christ Crucified and the beauty of Carmelite Spirituality.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit and in response to God's love, one makes the promise. This promise is more than a pledge to persevere in personal holiness. The promise is a commitment to the Church for her needs and concerns in the world. The promise 'to tend towards evangelical perfection in the spirit of evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, obedience and of the Beatitudes according to the Rule of Life', is awesome and demanding.

The key to living the promise and to live within the Rule of Life is love. "Strong is love more than death and all the waters of the world cannot quench love."(Song of Songs 8.7). Something done out of duty may become a burden, but something done out of love becomes joy. One of the ways to return the gift of love, to give of ourselves is the apostolate.

The first duty of love is to listen. In the silence of our hearts we are called to listen to the Word - Jesus Christ. Why did God create us, you and me? Why am I, why are you a member of the Secular Order? Have you ever wondered why in the communities of nuns in Lisieux France, in Los Andes, Chile, in Dijon, France, only one saint was birthed? Was not the climate, the way of life, the daily schedule, the exercises of piety, austerity and mortification the same for all? The answer is love. Love makes saints. St. Therese, Doctor of the Church, Doctor of Love exclaimed with joy that she had found her place in the Church, and that it is God who have her this place in the heart of the Church. She said that in the heart of the Church, she would be Love, and her dream would be realized. To Celine St. Therese wrote that Jesus taught her not to count up her good acts, but to do all through love, to refuse Him nothing, and to be content when He gives her a chance of proving to Him that she loves Him. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote that she thought that in Carmel it so simple to live by love from morning to evening and that the Rule is there to express the will of God moment to moment. She expressed her love of this Rule in which Jesus wants her to become holy. As I said, everything done of out love becomes joy. Of this happiness St. Teresa of the Andes said that each day she is happier - since she belongs to our Lord, He gives her true happiness as love for Jesus gives her strength and happiness.

So let us open our hearts to the Beloved, to Love. Let us receive love so that in our daily life, at all times, we may be prayer, we may be life for "The love of Christ urges us on." (2 Corinthians 5.14). We may live the daily requirement of prayer found in the Rule of Life out of duty by our own strength, we will in time lack joy. If we try to live the daily requirement of prayer out of love we will find love and never lack joy. This love and joy will be returned to our Heavenly Father each and every day of our lives through our contact with others. Love kept in an open hand and heart will live and multiply as it returns through others to the Giver. St. Teresa observed that the purpose of prayer is the birth always of good works.

The role of the president and master of formation are part of this panel presentation and will be presented by others. However, I would like to briefly touch on formation. If it takes a whole village to raise a child, I propose that it takes a whole community to give formation. But, a member's behavior in the community or parish can inspire to give scandal to newer members or those contemplating a call to Carmel. Actions do speak louder and truer than words. One never arrives at the end of formation. It is ongoing. The more I learn the more I realize how much I have to grow. Each of us, I repeat, every one of us is responsible for his or her ongoing formation.

Fr. Alfred, our Provincial, wrote a letter of greeting and blessing to us on the occasion of this Congress. His closing paragraph is beautiful ... worth committing to memory. "Finally in this Rule, (The Rule of St. Albert) Mary is not mentioned once. Yet, in the middle of the cells, a Chapel is dedicated to her. This is an image of Mary's place, central yet discreet, in our lives as Carmelites. She stands among us and with us and teaches us to fix our eyes not on her but on her Son, as she says to us, 'Do whatever He tells you.'"

In gratitude may we always remember how blest we are. In our left hand let us take and hold fast to our Mother Mary, her holy scapular and The Rule of Life of the Secular Order of Carmel. Mary's mantle of love will cover her faithful sons and daughters. The Rule will guide us as Mary accompanies and encourages us on our journey up the holy mountain. Let us take in our right hand the cross of Jesus, God's sign of love for all humanity and Sacred Scripture His letter of love. St. John of the Cross tells us the Father spoke one Word, which was His Son, and this Word He speaks always in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul. In the profound silence of our hearts, in the business and turmoil of life His Love was, is and will be with us always. May we cling fast to our Father's promise, letting the Word be active and a reality in our lives. The Word and The Rule of Life will be a light to our path and guide our steps up the holy mountain.