



To the Most Reverend Father  
**JOSEPH CHALMERS**  
Prior General  
of the Order of Brothers  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel

It is with great joy that I learn of this ancient and illustrious Order's preparations for the celebration, in September, of its General Chapter, on the occasion of the eighth centenary of the delivery, by St. Albert, Patriarch of Jerusalem (1205-1214) of the *formula vitae* which inspired the Latin hermits who took up residence "at the spring on Mount Carmel" (*Carmelite Rule*, 1). This was the first recognition by the Church of this group of men who had forsaken everything to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ, after the sublime example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the prophet Elijah. The canonical *iter* was concluded, with some amendments, and the *Rule* was subsequently approved by my predecessor, Pope Innocent IV.

By a happy coincidence, the Carmelite Order also celebrates this year other anniversaries which will be experienced as moments of grace, such as the seventh centenary of the holy passing of St. Albert of Trapani, dubbed the *Pater Ordinis*, and the fourth centenary of the passing into eternal life of Saint Mary Magdalene de'Pazzi, Seraph of the Carmel. It is therefore with profound joy that I express my participation in the intense spiritual experience shared by the Carmelite Family on the occasion of this Chapter.

The first Carmelites went to Mount Carmel because they believed in the love of God, who had such love for the world that he gave up his one and only Son (cf. John 3:16). Welcoming the rule of Christ into their lives,

they allowed themselves to be transformed by that love. This is the basic choice faced by every Christian. I spoke of this in my first Encyclical Letter: "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (*Deus Caritas est*, 1). If this challenge applies to Christians, how much more must Carmelites feel its call, their vocation being the ascent of the mount of perfection!

We know well, however, that it is not at all easy to answer this call faithfully. In a certain sense, there is a need to protect oneself with armour from the perils of the world. The Carmelite Rule too recalls this: "The loins are to be girt with the cincture of chastity. Your breast is to be fortified with holy ponderings, for it is written: Holy ponderings will save you. The breastplate of justice is to be put on, that you may love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself. In all things is to be taken up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the wicked one" (no. 18). And: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, should dwell abundantly in your mouth and in your hearts. And whatever you have to do, let it all be done in the Name of the Lord" (no. 19).

Many men and women have attained sanctity by living with creative fidelity the values of the Carmelite Rule. Looking to them, as to all other disciples who have faithfully followed Christ, "we are inspired with a new reason for seeking the City that is to come and at the same time we are shown a most safe path by which among the vicissitudes of this world, in keeping with the state in life and condition proper to each of us, we will be able to arrive at perfect union with Christ, that is, perfect holiness" (Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, 50).

The theme of your chapter – *In obsequio Jesu Christi. A praying and prophetic community in a changing world* – illustrates the particular way in which the Order of Carmel seeks to answer the love of God by means of a life imbued with prayer, brotherhood and prophetic spirit. At the heart of your Rule is the precept of *convening* each morning for the Eucharistic celebration. It is the Eucharist, indeed, that "reveals the loving plan that guides all of salvation history... God's whole life encounters us and is sacramentally shared with us" (Apostolic Constitution, *Sacramentum caritatis*, 8). The first Carmelites, who pursued their personal

sanctification by means of daily participation in the Eucharistic banquet, were well aware of this: in fact, the daily celebration of the Eucharist results in “a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)” (*Ibid.*, no. 11).

With their gaze set firmly on Christ and trusting in the aid of the saints who, for the last eight centuries have embodied the precepts of the Carmelite Rule, may each member of the Order of Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel feel the summons to be a true witness to the spiritual dimension within every human being. The lay faithful may in this way find in the Carmelite communities true “schools’ of prayer, where the meeting with Christ is expressed not just in imploring help but also in thanksgiving, praise, adoration, contemplation, listening and ardent devotion, until the heart truly ‘falls in love’” (JOHN PAUL II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte* Apostolic Letter, 6th January 2001, 33).

May The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother and pride of the Carmel, assist the Carmelites, the members of the Third Order, and all those who in various capacities are part of the great Carmelite Family, and teach them to obey the Word of God and preserve it in their hearts, meditating on it daily. May the prophet Elijah make them zealous upholders of the living God, and guide them to the holy mountain, where they may feel the gentle breeze of the Divine Presence.

With these sentiments, as I call upon the entire Carmelite Family a profusion of the gifts of a renewed Pentecost which increases their zeal for the Lord, I wholeheartedly impart to all, with a special thought for the Capitulars, my Apostolic Blessing.

Castel Gandolfo, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2007

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