

*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation,
nor will people say 'Here it is' or 'There it is',
because the kingdom of God is within you.
Lk 17:20-21¹*

Contemplation - the heart of the Carmelite charism

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1. Contemplation – the transforming process of accepting the boundless love of God

In line with our Rule and Constitutions the new RIVC develops contemplation as the heart of our Carmelite charism, as the dynamic core of our specific mission, which unifies and shapes the other essential elements of our way of life: prayer, fraternity and service.

The understanding of contemplation which we gained within our Order over the last years is much wider than just thinking in terms of living like cloistered nuns, spending as much time as possible in one's own cell or, even worse, fostering the old dichotomy between "action" and "contemplation" by playing activities and apostolates off against a life dedicated to prayer. Instead we came to comprehend contemplation as an attitude and a life-style, as an inner journey and a process of transformation, which affects all dimensions of our life without any exceptions: our prayer as well as our activity, our solitude as well as our relationships, what we do as well as what we are.

Contemplation therefore is the most essential and basic value of our vocation because it means nothing less than entrusting ourselves in any situation of our life to the unlimited love of the true God without clinging to any other means of security so that He may heal our wounds, purify our motivations, transform our feelings and our thinking according to the principles of his kingdom, which are so different from what we normally were taught to believe. Contemplation as the most fundamental attitude to trust always and everywhere in the love of Jesus Christ's Abba will gradually unmask, identify and heal our false gods and along with them our false self formed by all the painful experiences of our biography as consequences of humankind's original sin. Eventually our true self, the innermost chamber of our inner castle, the unscathed centre of our being, where the only one true God dwells (cf. Teresa of Jesus), can grow stronger and stronger.

To enter this process of a healing transformation and to persevere in it means to become more and more ready and able to recognise and to live in the presence of the kingdom of God, which is the reality of an all-powerful and ubiquitous love that Jesus made visible to those who have eyes to see (cf. Mc 8:17, Lk 10:23). To remind of and to bring forward this fundamental meta-noia, this existential change of mind and heart as the main challenge of Christianity, is, so I strongly believe, the centre of our charism as Carmelites - nothing less. If we are called above all to contemplation then we are not just called to keep alive this or that aspect of our Christian faith but it's very centre, or to say it with the words of Thérèse of Lisieux: we are called to be the love in the heart of the church! (Ms B) All the spiritual and mystical tradition of our Order emphasises this in one way or another. If contemplation is our primary mission then it is not so important how "much" we pray or what we specifically "do" but what we "are", that we become more and more our true self. This transformation happens when we unceasingly and untiringly renew our

¹ Scripture references are from the New International Version (NIV) Study Bible.

decision to open ourselves to the reality of God - that is to the reality of love - in any situation of our life, in our prayer as well as in our activities, in our joy as well as in our pain, in our strength as well as in our weakness, in our trust as well as in our doubts, in our confidence as well as in our anxiety, in our good deeds as well as in our sins.

Our first call as contemplatives therefore is to learn to see and to accept our true self, that we are God's beloved children not because we are so virtuous and holy by ourselves but only because God himself has freely and irrevocably chosen us to be his beloved sons and daughters. We cannot deserve his love, but only receive it and accept it, just like we receive the life he has given us. I am very much convinced that to live out this sole and lasting meaning of our life is our main task and the most needed service we can give to ourselves, to the Church and to all people, no matter which culture or subculture they belong to. By authentically witnessing to the reality of an unconditionally loving God we give the only satisfying answer to the deepest longings of all human persons, who in various ways are caught up in the destructive power of idolatry, compensating their fundamental need for a loving acceptance by adoring the false and enslaving gods of consumption, luxury, money, efficiency, power, perfection, symbiotic relationships, esoteric or religious flights from reality and innumerable others. All of these gods somehow promise happiness but after a fleeting experience of satisfaction they only extend our false self by increasing its feelings of inferiority, self-alienation, inner division and restlessness. To break this vicious circle each one of us has to begin by becoming himself a true contemplative, deeply rooted in the love of God so that our true self can be nourished and unfolded.

At the same time we have to strive for creating conditions within our provinces and communities and above all in our formation houses, which encourage us to grow in a contemplative attitude and to make this transformation process the centre of our lives. Indispensable for that is sufficient time for prayer and meditation, spiritual direction, regular directed retreats, appropriate psychological and spiritual formation, individual and common reflection on our individual and community life-style - only to mention the most important elements which help and enable us to become true contemplatives.

But before considering the consequences, I think it is necessary to describe the meaning of contemplation as a transformation process more comprehensively. For only by gaining a deep understanding of our contemplative vocation will we be ready and able to really let contemplation become the all determining source of our Carmelite life.

2. Contemplation – discovering the presence of the kingdom of God

In my own spiritual journey I learn more and more to see contemplation as a means God has opened up to us so that we may become able to discover the presence of his kingdom, which Jesus proclaimed to be already among and even within us, the salvation already carried out and made available for us (cf. Lk 17:20-21). Precisely this is so difficult for us to perceive and therefore so hard to believe. Holy Scripture often confronts us with the fact that our eyes are blind and therefore cannot see the true reality as it is from God's perspective (cf. above all Dtn 29:3, Ps 115:5, Ps 135:16, Is 44:18, Jer 5:21, Ez 12:2, Mt 13:15, Mc 8:18, Lk 10:23, Jo 12:40, Acts 28:27).

a) Original Sin - the dualistic and divided world of the false self and its false gods

First of all, we have to realise very consciously that all our suffering is rooted in our wrong perception of reality caused by what already the first pages of the Bible describe as the fall of humankind and what theologians later called “original sin”². Choosing to become like God, we have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and thereby lost the ability to perceive the unity and wholeness of God and his creation (cf. Gen 3). The price humanity - and in consequence each human person - has to pay for knowledge is the burden of a split and a judgmental mind. We cannot see and understand any longer reality as it is in itself but only in terms of opposites so that we are constantly judging between good and bad, right and wrong, this should be and that should not be. By doing this we are continually dividing, separating and cutting off - ourselves, others and the whole of creation.

We have to recognise that the way we perceive reality is in fact an illusion, not reality in itself or from the perspective of God. Our knowledge and therefore the world we believe to see is a reflection of our split mind, holding on to the illusion of separation and alienation - the source of all our constant dualistic thinking and therefore also of our false self. The inner division that we have inherited and then also acquired from our childhood makes us believe that we are separated from God, from others and even from ourselves, that we are not we “should be”. This makes us become alien to our true self, building up a false self which makes us feel wrong, anxious, guilty, ashamed and inferior because of our human nakedness (cf. Gen 3, 10). We cannot bear to be just created, naked human beings for we have opted to be like God and projected on him our dualistic judgements, so that we constantly mix up the true God with our self-made enslaving idols. Since our humanness falls short of our impossible goal to be as perfect as our wrong and idolatrous images of God demand of us in order to be accepted, worthy and loved, an existential guilt and anxiety is our constant companion - the cause of all our actual sins which are nothing else than the desperate endeavours to compensate and satisfy our apparent needs and to fill up our imaginary lacks. Another attempt to escape and lighten our inner conflict is to project onto others our interior split. The pictures that we take of other people and situations are merely the view we have of ourselves. What we do not like and accept in us we fight in others. Since we are internally divided and separated we naturally see a divided and separated world.

b) Metanoia – Transformation of our divided heart and mind through contemplation

We got so used to our dualistic mode of perception that it makes us even feel secure to a certain extent for it allows us to understand, control and manage the world according to our thought-patterns even if they are only true in our split mind. Although we suffer from our inner division and the anxieties caused by it we have more or less successfully learnt to cope with our false self and our false gods. It is much more threatening for us to follow Jesus’ call for metanoia: “The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mk 1:15). Jesus calls us to change our mindset, to give up our dualistic judgements and perceptions and to accept in faith – a faith so often dark and naked for our divided perception - the good news of the unconditional love of the true God who invites us to enter his kingdom which is already among us, here and now. Contemplation can open our eyes for the reality of this kingdom which is in fact the only true reality - by transforming our divided heart and our split mind, uniting it with God through faith: “Whoever believes in the Son *has* eternal life” (Jn 3:36). In God there is only

² For further reading I recommend fervently the book of an American Trappist which inspired me very much and from which I got some of the following ideas regarding an existential and spiritual understanding of original sin: John Jacob Raub, *Who told you that you are naked? Freedom from Judgement, Guilt and Fear of Punishment*, (St. Paul’s Publishing, London 2000).

life and love without any division. Therefore also the paradise tree of life is without any divisions or opposites – it is not a dualistic tree of life and death but a simple tree of life, in contrast to the tree of knowledge of good and evil that we chose (cf. Gen 2:9).

By proclaiming the presence of God's kingdom through so many parables and miracles, Jesus pointed out very clearly that it is up to us to stick to the human dualistic mode of perception and to strive for fulfilling the claims of our self-made idols or to enter the process of metanoia in order to learn to see the world from the perspective of the true God who only knows love and unity. Jesus challenges us to choose either the perfection of the false gods or the wholeness of the true God, either division or unity, either performance or love, either self-righteousness or pure grace - either death or life.

Contemplation, if understood as an attitude and a life-style (RIVC, n. 38), initiates and leads us through a process of transformation, in which we learn to accept the kingdom Jesus has introduced to us and "to see the world with God's eyes" (RIVC, n. 24; Const., n. 15). If we practise contemplation by continuously bringing all our experiences in touch with the only true God described in the First Testament as always faithful to his chosen people and finally revealed in Jesus unambiguously as the tender, merciful and loving Abba - if we bring constantly all our reality before him, then we are drawn into a process which gives God the opportunity to transform and heal the many layers of doubt and mistrust deeply rooted in the false self of our split mind and wounded heart so that eventually, little by little, our true self can grow stronger, our true identity as the always and forever beloved son or daughter of a God who is nothing else than love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8).

By faithfully exercising our contemplative charism we will be more and more able to see God's kingdom and his loving presence in ourselves and in our world so that we can also help others to discover it and to grow into it. As Carmelites this must be our main occupation - in a world and a Church mixed up with idolatry, division and dualism.

3. Contemplation – the active and passive process of transformation

As soon as we realise the fatal mistake of our human perception and begin to experience something of the liberating power of contemplation we enter into a process in which we more and more have to give up our own judgements and perceptions in order to learn God's way of seeing reality. As liberating this process is, it is also painful, because all the security that came from our familiar ways of thinking and perceiving will be taken away from us. John of the Cross therefore calls this process an experience of dark night where we must only cling to pure and naked faith (e.g. 2 S 3,3f.; 4,2). Because feelings or thoughts may always deceive us, no matter whether they make us enthusiastic or anxious, we must, like St. Paul, hold on to a conscious and clear decision, "to know nothing ... except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2) and to "live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). The spiritual life therefore is not primarily a matter of feelings but of a conscious decision for a relationship offered to me by another, by God through Jesus Christ, the icon of the true God. He has already taken the initiative and he is waiting for my response.

As Carmelites we are invited to respond by contemplation, a mutual loving encounter with two dimensions like in any other loving relationship: the active dimension of "contemplating God" in order to get to know him better (usually called meditation) and the passive aspect of "letting God contemplate me" so that I may be fully known by him and at the same time gain a true knowledge of Him - not any longer by my own activity but by his personal and intimate revelation of his love. (In the spiritual and mystical tradition usually only this passive part of the process is

described by contemplation). In all this process our heart and mind, our sensual and spiritual capacities are being purified and transformed so that we become ever more aware of our true union with God and all creation which always was and is a reality but our split mind was not able to perceive: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor 13:12).

It is now necessary to reflect on some major challenges of this transforming process of contemplation which, as we have seen, involves our active meditation in times of prayer and in the events of our daily life as well as our passive receptivity for God in all situations of our life which may lead into the true contemplative experience.

a) Unmasking our false gods and our false self

Right from the beginning of this process there is a crucial challenge that we have to face consciously in order to make progress on our spiritual journey: to distinguish the true God of life and love from the many different gods and idols of our wounded heart and split mind which we often unconsciously take for the true God, particular as they have the power to make us believe so in very subtle and convincing ways!

It is like in our relationships with other people and friends: how easily do we unconsciously project our fears, anxieties, needs, expectations and all our other previous experiences onto the other person so that we are not able to really get to know her as she really is. We make our own image of the other person and believe in it until we some day painfully realise that it is wrong. Exactly the same happens in our relationship with God. We always tend to project onto him the experiences of our past that shaped our perception of life; therefore our images of God often have traits of our parents or other people who played an important role in our life, for example teachers and priests. We then mistake the internalised messages of these people for the messages of the true God so that they hinder us to encounter him in a way that really transforms us in his likeness. Instead these messages, turned into the voices of the false gods, constantly tell us how we "should be": more grateful, more efficient, more virtuous, less sinful, etc. - and if we are not living up to these claims we believe that we are not acceptable or even deserve punishment.

We can discover the wrong and destructive images of God, our self-made idols, for example with the help of a simple exercise. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and imagine that God himself is approaching you. How do you perceive him approaching you, what feelings does his getting closer to you arouse? What is your first emotional reaction, what are your primary thoughts? We can also get some hints of our hidden and unconscious idols that block us from the encounter with the true God when we become aware of those situations in which we escape from prayer and meditation, from really entrusting our lives to him. Then it is important to try to get to the ground of our feelings inside by asking ourselves: What is keeping me away from God now? Why am I avoiding prayer and silence? What pressures, fears, constraints dwell within me and what false images of God do they evoke? What painful experiences of my life are the sources of these images? A good spiritual direction is of great help in this process of bringing to the level of consciousness all our unconscious images of God and to deprive them of their destructive power by confronting them with the true God who is the unconditional loving Abba revealed and incarnated in Jesus Christ.

Every single person who is on a spiritual journey has to undergo this process of purifying his images of God. We must go through the same process undertaken by humankind as a whole. We can verify this by studying how the understanding of God progressed from primitive nature worship over polytheistic ideas to the revelation of the one true God who only through Jesus Christ could be recognised unambiguously as pure love without any dualism or division. The Bible tells

us of this long process which goes on in each one of us. As Carmelites we cannot offer a better service to humanity than to consciously enter this process of transforming our false and destructive images of God which correspond to our wrong self-images in consequence of the original sin of escaping our createdness in order to be like God who knows good and evil. By committing ourselves to the process of contemplation and by encouraging it in others we contribute to the spreading of the kingdom of God which is not "divided against itself" (Mt 12:25) but united and unifying, for it is a kingdom of love. If our perception is going to be transformed and healed in this process we learn to see that there is no other reality than love, except in the illusions of our split mind.

This process of transformation requires our active and untiring effort to unmask our dualistic thinking and feeling by confronting it with the only true God who is neither a comfortable stop-gap fulfilling our selfish wishes, nor a weak and sweet caricature to whom we can escape from our painful reality and misery by repressing and neglecting it, nor a narrow-minded book-keeper or punishing judge asking of us moral perfection and sinlessness. The genuine biblical message tells us that the true God is "compassionate and gracious, ... he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities" (Ps 103:8,10). God faces our sinful reality not in order to punish but to heal us for he knows that the cause of all our misery is the separation imagined by our split mind which cannot perceive and believe that the only reality which really exists is love. To face this love of God is painful for us, not only because of our inner division, which does not allow us to believe in such a love, but also because of our false self with its deeply rooted pride that we should be as perfect as our idols are demanding. We avoid God's love - although it is what we are really longing for - because it takes away the illusions, doubtful securities and selfmade thought-systems of our false self and asks us for pure trust, which is the most difficult thing for human beings who have been brought up in a world of mistrust and anxiety. And yet our salvation which is already a reality can only become effective if we accept God's love which is here and now available for us.

The only way to experience the true God and our true self is through a process of "metanoia" which leads us to change our split mind and to accept the kingdom of God by turning upside down our ingrained convictions. Before Jesus was able to witness to this kingdom he - having become a human being like us - had to go through a process of transformation himself in order to learn who God really is. According to the synoptic gospels Jesus began his public life after his baptism at which he had the overwhelming experience of being the beloved Son of God. This experience was questioned, purified and deepened during his temptation in the desert - a transforming process in which he learned to refuse the deceiving insinuations of the false gods of a dualistic world-view. Only after this desert-process could he proclaim that the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled and God's kingdom is already present, giving freedom to the prisoners, sight to the blind and release to the oppressed. According to Luke, Jesus stopped the quotation of Isaiah after the proclamation of the year of God's favour omitting the mention of the vengeance of the Lord - a significant act of demonstrating the unambiguity of his Abba who is nothing but love (cf. Lk 4:16-21 and Is 61:1-2). There is no other reality, so that Jesus consequently realised that there is no other godlike power anymore: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Lk 10:18).

b) Accepting the reality of God's love and of our true self

Once and for all Jesus overcame our split human mind. He constantly tried to unmask and heal our dualistic thinking of God and of reality. We, however, who are not used to the principles of God's kingdom, turn his teaching very easily into moralistic stories so that it corresponds to our way of perception. But he does not give up to shake us awake: "Do you have eyes but fail to see?" (Mk 8:8). Contemplation therefore means allowing him to transform our wrong perception

and thinking by his words and deeds, so that the understanding of God's true being and kingdom can grow in us like the mustard seed or the yeast (cf. Mt 13:31-33). Time and again the gospels tell us that there is no division and split in God, that "he causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good" and that he "sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Mt 5:45), that he is present even in what appears to our judgmental categories to be wrong. Jesus' love for the outsiders, the sinners, the unclean and little ones, his parables of the Prodigal Son, of the workers in the vineyard, of the good Samaritan, of the lost sheep - only to mention some of them - show us very clearly that in the kingdom of God there is no judgmental logic but only love, which is far beyond our logic for it never judges but only sets free and heals.

Consequently Jesus warns us not to judge in the sense of condemning (cf. Lk 7:36) for by doing so we remain imprisoned in our destructive inner division, which is the source of all suffering. Judging others and ourselves makes us incapable of accepting the unconditional love of God, which alone makes us able of loving others and ourselves as He loves us. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned" (Jn 3:16-18). He only stands condemned because he does not want to give up the wrong perception of his split and judgmental mind and therefore cannot see that in the true reality of love and unity there can be no condemnation at all. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

God has given us everything (cf. John of the Cross, 2 S 22, 3.5.7; Dichos 26). Salvation has already taken place, the kingdom of God is in and around us - we just have to give up our idolatrous prejudices and our split perception in order to believe that in him we already "have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col 1:14). "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Eph 3:12).

Contemplation is nothing else than accepting this reality and getting more and more used to think and to perceive in terms of the kingdom, that is with the eyes of our merciful loving God. Our active contribution consists precisely of reminding ourselves continually, day and night, at home and on the road (cf. Dtn 6:7) of the presence of God's love in order to entrust ourselves totally to him and his mercy - just as we are, beyond all virtue and moral or religious performance in advance. If we open ourselves faithfully to the reality of the true God we will eventually experience his transforming action, already proclaimed by Ezekiel: "I will cleanse you ... from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you" (Ez 36:25-26), so that the false gods in us together with their false claims and promises can be removed and with them our false self with its judging mentality, guilt feelings and egocentricity. This is a painful and long process. Even when the mind begins to understand something of God's love it takes long to convince and transform the human heart which from its first beat onwards was so often hurt and expected too much of by the limited, divided and calculating love of others. To adapt ourselves to the principles of God's reality we have to give up the security of our dualistic thinking which is so familiar to us, so much so that we feel that we are losing our footing. In these circumstances we are tempted to give up and to return into our old world of compensation, separation and judgement. The more we progress, we will discover in ourselves deeper levels of mistrust that try to prevent us from total surrender. In these dark nights we can do nothing but persevere by holding on to God's promises. With the grace and assistance of the Holy Spirit we must trust only in the unwavering love of the true God even if we are not able to feel it but on the contrary are tempted to doubt it.

If - with God's help - we are faithful in rejecting all doubts, God and his love can gain more and more ground in us and with him our true self. We begin to really accept that we are loved as imperfect as we may perceive ourselves, as created human beings, who are nothing by themselves

but everything by God's grace. Thérèse puts it this way: "Perfection seems easy to me for I realise that it is enough to recognise my nothingness and to fall into the arms of God like a child" (Letter 226), and in another place she writes: "Perfection means to accept perfectly one's own imperfection". By taking this to heart we learn to expect nothing from ourselves but everything from him, and we begin to experience that everything is possible for those who trust in him (cf. Mk 9:23). Now we allow God to look on us, to contemplate us, to love us, to accept us just as we are. This alone will heal us profoundly and open our heart for a deep knowledge of God, of ourselves, of other people and of all creation so that we eventually become "a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them" (2 Cor 5: 17-19). By accepting our true self, reconciled and united with God, "the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col 3:10), we overcome our inner division so that we are able to experience already something of "the new earth ... there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:4). In God's kingdom already present within us there is no division and therefore no more differences, "neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" (Gal 3:28), „but Christ is all, and is in all“ (Col 3:11). Only by being transformed to this reality can we truly bear fruit for the kingdom of God by what we are and what we do - for now we are open to receive and to share God's all embracing love with everyone we meet. We find ourselves more and more in accordance with the will of God, so that our efforts for fraternity and service will be the proof of the authenticity of our contemplation.

4. Conclusion: Contemplation as the primary mission of Carmelites

If contemplation is truly the heart of our charism, we are first of all called to undergo this process of transformation. Our false images of God and correspondingly our false self, which feels in many various ways insufficient, inferior, guilty and separated from God, has to be put to death. Only thus can the true God of love take over in our lives and correspondingly bring about the emergence of our true self, our true identity of children of God, loved always and forever. We can enter this process at any time and at any place. We only have to create appropriate conditions: sufficient time for regular prayer, meditation, lectio divina, spiritual reading, spiritual direction, psychological-spiritual programmes etc. If we are overburdened with work or other occupations of whatever kind we will be very unlikely open and receptive enough to concentrate on the "only one thing needed" (Lk 10:42), that is to go through this transformation process in order to live out fully our true identity. To say it very clearly: there is no choice - unless we as Carmelites do not see contemplation as the primary mission that God has entrusted to us, all our other efforts will be meaningless in the end, how heroic they may be (cf. 1Cor 13). On the other hand, if we really try to open ourselves for this process of transformation in all aspects and dimensions of our life, then it does not matter at all where we live and what kind of work we do. The only decisive criterion with regard to bearing fruit for the kingdom is according to John to "remain in his love". Only then do we become able to really love others - the only "fruit that will last" (cf. Jn 15:1-17).

As formators we have a special responsibility to get right our priorities as Carmelites - for the sake of ourselves and for those who are entrusted to us in formation. We must be willing to enter and endure this process of contemplation and transformation and to prepare and accompany our candidates for it. I don't want to be presumptuous, but may be as formators we have even the task to find appropriate ways of reminding our communities and provinces of our real vocation because through our formation work we are in some way privileged to deal more profoundly with these matters.

Carmelite spirituality and mysticism touches and explores the very heart of our Christian faith: God who is love, pure and undivided love. In him there is no division, only unity, and he wants to share this unity with all creation. We are called to witness to this unity which is already a reality for those who have eyes to see. Contemplation will open our eyes for the presence of God's kingdom in us and in our world so that our false self with its split and judgmental mind-set will be transformed into our true self which fully accepts to be the beloved child of the true God of infinite love. Let us not hesitate to enter this process, and let us not be discouraged by the many-fold and subtle defence mechanisms of our false self and its idols. God has already won the battle for us; we only need to accept his saving action in us:

*If God is for us, who can be against us?
 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all -
 how will he not also, along with him, graciously give all things?
 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.
 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died - more than that, who was raised to life -
 is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.
 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
 Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...
 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.
 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,
 neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,
 will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

(Rom 8:31-39)

Questions for reflection

1. Do I share this concept of contemplation as the heart of our Carmelite charism?
 What do I share?
 Where do I not agree?
2. Am I willing to enter the process of transformation or where do I regard myself to be in this process?
 What are my longings and my anxieties?
 What kinds of support do I need for this process and are they available for me?
 What prevents me from this process, what hinders me in continuing this process?
3. What is the situation in my community / in my province with regard to contemplation as the heart of our charism?
4. What can I contribute to create conditions in my community / in my province which allow contemplation to be really the priority of our life?
5. How do I see my role as a formator with regard to leading our candidates into a process of contemplation?

Possible texts for Midday Prayer

- *Institutio primorum monachorum*, 1, 2 (God appeared to him with the instruction ... - ... reference of Ps 63:2-3)
- *Institutio primorum monachorum*, 1, 6 (My son, if you wish to be complete ... - ... reference of Mt 10:37)
Juan de la Cruz, Dichos 26 : Oración de alma enamorada, *Obras completas* (B.A.C. 15), 45
- Juan de la Cruz, Posías 3 (Romance 4), verses 123-126, *Obras completas* (B.A.C. 15), 17
- Juan de la Cruz, Posías 8, (Glosa del mismo), *Obras completas* (B.A.C. 15), 34
- Juan de la Cruz, Posías 12, (Llama de amor viva), *Obras completas* (B.A.C. 15), 40