

Salamanca, 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Dear Pope Francesco,

I am Fray Pablo Maria of the Cross Alonso Hidalgo, a Carmelite Friar. I am 21 years old. On 25 June 2023 I received the grace of being admitted for religious profession "*in articulo mortis*," taking the vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity within the Carmelite Order, in the Priory of San Andrés of Salamanca, a place where St John of the Cross once lived. At this point I can only thank God for this undeserved and great gift rendered to me by the Church our mother, through the Carmelite Order. Its life programme could not be more fascinating: "*to live in allegiance to Jesus Christ.*"

For the past 6 years, I have been struggling with Ewing Sarcoma. I know that everything makes sense within God's plan. Through ups and downs, better days and worse, through much purification by means of this sickness, today I can contemplate my life and confess that I have been, and I am happy. I have discovered that the centre of my life is not my illness but Christ. As I said to my friends, my family, and my Carmelite brothers: "*Through suffering by means of this sickness I have encountered God, and by means of death through this illness, I will go to Him. And for this I thank him.*"

Currently, I am at the Palliative Care Unit at the University Clinical Hospital of Salamanca, and I feel that the Father, in his infinite mercy, will very soon call me to be with him. At this final stage of my life the doctors have given me a piece of great news: that I can return to the priory, and there surrender my life to Jesus, dying in "El Carmen de Abajo,"<sup>1</sup> where I have received so many graces at the feet of the Virgin of Carmel. The mystery of the cross has reigned over my life, but I can shout out loud along with St Titus Brandsma, to whom I entrusted myself a few months ago: "The cross is my joy, not my sorrow." Nevertheless, throughout my sickness, I have not been alone. Jesus in the Eucharist has accompanied me day by day, and He has been the best palliative and the best medicine for my pain. I have already arranged for it to be announced at my funeral, that: "*Whoever wants to speak to me, it is very easy to do so; let him approach the Eucharist, and there he will always find me available. If you and I, brother, feel the same fire of love for Jesus in the Eucharist, then we are ONE!*"

I would have loved to join you at the World Youth Day in Lisbon, together with so many youths who travel there from all over the world. I know from experience that no one can extinguish the interior fire that a young person who is in love with Jesus, can have. I pray the Lord that this fire of love of God will burn in Lisbon. How I would like for young people to get to know Jesus, my Beloved! How much he has given me! How much he has consoled me! How happy he has made me! Physically I am without any strength, but the communion of saints will allow me to join you in another, more profound and by no less distant way. Indeed, I don't know if, when you receive this letter, I would be able to accompany you with my prayers, or if God in his infinite mercy, would have already called me to himself. In that case, I hope you will allow me to give you a hand – that would be much better! – from Heaven, making a feast with much noise, as you yourself would put it.

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<sup>1</sup> As the Carmelite Priory of San Andrés is known locally (note of the translator).

I have asked the Lord insistently, that I may be small and poor, and as such, I would be close to the smallest and especially to the sickest persons and their families. The cross has given me a special faculty of sensing what they go through, and the courage to approach them and touch their wounds. I wish that my offering will also touch the sick persons' families. For this reason, I unite the weakness of my fragile life – a life however, which I know is precious in the eyes of Jesus – and my intentions to yours, on the strength of the World Youth Day. In the first place, I ask the Lord for the conversion of young people, that they may encounter the love of God through Jesus in the Eucharist. In second place I offer my life for the Church, our mother, and I ask for the help of the Virgin Mary so that all the Movements, Itineraries, Ecclesial Groups, Religious Congregations and Orders may be one, in a way that no division will uglify the face of the Church, and that the beauty of the Body of Christ will shine in our world and within the Church itself. In the third place, I unite myself to the passion of the Lord so that the offering of my poor life, if it is the Lord's will, will help us do away with the fear of death. Heaven exists!

In Carmel, the Garden of God, antechamber of Heaven, grows Mary, God's Sunflower, whom I love to call and imagine as the Virgin of Spring. I ask her to transform the deserts of suffering into gardens of consolation. And in her hands, I entrust the evangelisation of young people.

In my prayer, I entrust to the Lord the Order of Carmel, the Diocese of Salamanca, and the entire Church.

May Jesus and Mary accompany you in your old age and in your proclamation of the Gospel.

I pray for you. Pray for me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pablo Maria de la Cruz". To the right of the text is a simple, hand-drawn cross symbol.

Fray Pablo Maria of the Cross,

Carmelite