



CURIA GENERALIZIA DEI CARMELITANI

VIA GIOVANNI LANZA, 138 - 00184 ROMA (ITALIA)
www.ocarm.org - email: seggen@ocarm.org
TEL. +39.6.462018.1 FAX +39.6.46.2018.47

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Pro orantibus, a message for the Carmelite Nuns worldwide

Dear Sisters,

On the day the Church dedicates to you each year under the title *Pro orantibus*, my thoughts and prayers are with you. By your dedication to God, you adorn and strengthen the Carmelite Order throughout the world and you offer to the Carmelite family, amid the many gifts that express Carmel's love for silence and solitude, the example of cloistered life, as a way of making space for God in our lives and deepening our love for God.

The Book of Exodus gives us the words that God addresses to Moses, at a time when Moses need to know who God is: The Lord says this: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. (Ex 3,7) The Scriptures will repeat many times that our God is a God who hears the cry.

Our world today has many cries. Some of them are very forceful and urgent. They spring from the depth of our being. They are cries that express our longing for truth, truth about ourselves and truth about God. They are the cries of the deer longing for running streams, the cries of creation, torn and lacerated by that part of humanity that wants to make more money at any cost. Among these cries there is a cry today that is very striking. It is the cry of the human heart for family, good family, the kind of family where life in all its differences is nurtured, protected and helped to grow. Men and women of "every tribe and tongue and nation" recognize their need for family, not as an idea, but as something they miss greatly when it is not there, they are sad when it is in trouble, they feel helpless when it has fallen apart, because in all of us there is a bond with family from which we were born and from which we took our human nature, just like the Incarnate Word from the womb of Mary, and through the care of Mary and Joseph in their home in Nazareth. In his post synodal exhortation, *Amoris laetitia*, (57) Pope Francis recognizes the many difficulties that families face today, and gives thanks to God for all those families that survive and grow to maturity because of what these families do for all their members.

Family today suffers greatly because of their lack of motivation, preparation and support. In the question of support, laws in society do very little to ensure that people are not disadvantaged by forming a family, by bringing children into the world, caring for them and educating them. When this caring and educating becomes a burden too heavy to bear, family life begins to suffer. Sometimes this burden comes from the fact of people having too many expectations, and sometimes the wrong expectations, created by a society that is more intent on selling happiness than building it through common effort and the sharing of gifts in love. To add to the tragedy that families face today we see the awful displacement and dispersal of people through the ravages of war, hunger and natural disasters, many of which the scientists tell us could be avoided. Now in this great forced movement of people, from country to country, from refugee camp to refugee camp, peoples' faces tell us a story of people separated from their home and separated from their family and a great cry goes up to heaven.

The way of life of Carmelite nuns stands as a sign of another way of life, one than that offers to people the full dignity of recognizing who God is and how God loves his daughters and sons in every land. Your way of life also brings down the mercy of God through your constant prayer of intercession: this part of humanity opens doors for God to enter a world where many doors are closed on account of that great idolatry that keeps God at a distance because having God close is far to uncomfortable.

On this day, as you do every day, you will pray for families, listen to the families that come to you for prayer and advice, and remain as the sign of the sacrifices we make in order to let our thoughts be centered on God in a community life that allows each member to find her own dignity before God in answering to God's call each day, in a way of life that does not allow any sister to think only about herself, but much more about others, in the building up of a community that stands before God and finds its dignity in responding everyday not with marvels beyond us, but with the simple knowledge that God is love and in him we find love.

As the Church prays for you, you pray for the Church, and in our Carmelite way of life we pray for one another and strengthen one another and all those for whom we pray. May Mary, the mother in the family of, and Joseph, the father and protector of that family, help us today to think about family, and be close to men and women, young and old, in their longing for family and in their sadness about all that is happening in the world that is pulling families apart.



Yours ever in Carmel,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Mícheál O'Neill", written in a cursive style.

Fr. Mícheál O'Neill, O.Carm.
Prior General