



My dear sisters

The 20 A.C. sisters who had gone to Spain as part of the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of St. Teresa of Avila's birth, are now back. I am sure they have a lot to share with us and one of the powerful statements which appeared on the invite, coincided with the question I had in my first circular: "What do you want from me?"

It is indeed therefore, a very important occasion for all Carmelites around the world, including us, to recall important events of her life and reinvigorate ourselves in the footsteps of the great saint, who incidentally is the only female Doctor of the Church. It is a wonderful coincidence, that during her 500th Birth Anniversary, the Church too is observing this year as the "Year of Consecrated Life", which began late last year and will end

on 2nd February 2016. I would like all of us to begin our reflection on this significant occasion, upon a few points that I found in the inspiring and instructive letter, written by Pope Francis to Fr. Xavier Cannistrà, Superior General of the Order of Discalced Carmelites. It could as well be a letter to all of us, containing important points for reflection. He writes:

- "How much goodness does the testimony of her consecration – born directly from the encounter with Christ, her experience of prayer as continuous dialogue with God, and her community life, rooted in the motherhood of the Church – do for us?"
- We all know that St. Teresa is known as a mystic and reformer. She became disillusioned by the laxity of monastic life within the cloister, and committed herself to reforming the Order.
- For St. Teresa, prayer arose in all occasions, not simply in times and places of seclusion. Moreover, she believed that "continuous prayer" – even when it was imperfect – had value. The saint asks us to be steadfast, faithful, even in times of dryness, personal difficulties or urgent needs that call us.
- The concrete proposals and methods of prayer left by St. Teresa offers us a great treasure to renew consecrated life today.
- "Far from closing us in on ourselves or leading us only to inner balance, (they) always make us start again from Jesus and constitute a genuine school to grow in love for God and neighbour."

- “Even today the saint opens new horizons for us; she calls us to a great undertaking, to see the world with the eyes of Christ, to seek what He seeks and to love what He loves.”
- St. Teresa recognized the importance of “authentic community life” in sustaining both prayer and the evangelical mission.
- Warning against “the danger of individualism in fraternal life,” the saint commends those living in community to place themselves “at the service of others,” with a humility consisting “of self-acceptance, awareness of one’s own dignity, missionary courage, gratitude and trust in God.”
- “Teresian communities are called to become houses of communion, capable of witnessing to fraternal love and to the motherhood of the Church, presenting to the Lord the needs of the world, torn by divisions and wars.”
- Pope Francis concluded by praying that the Carmelite community's “witness to life” would allow “the joy and beauty of living the Gospel to shine and attract many young people to follow Christ closely.”

The Pope’s letter provides, in my understanding, a very good basis to begin once again our own renewal, both at personal level and at the community level. It would not be an exaggeration to say, that many of the points in my first circular, are found in what the Pope is saying, albeit in different words. None of us is ‘holy enough’ to say, that a little more reform in my community life, through my personal contribution to the Community, in my prayer life, in my religious life and in my outlook towards the poor, would not go a long way to reform myself. And would that not, then stand as a great and much needed witness to the modern world?

After having completed the visits to nearly half the number of communities in the Province and the sharing by the sisters has inspired me and given me an impetus to look forward with faith and hope. The sisters were open to being challenged and confronted and they felt that they needed this wakeup call. I found a very good response to the community exercises that we had together, trying to reflect on questions such as, “And where are you”? The Why of my Vocation? The purpose of my being here. This was basically an exercise to fan the flame within us and to re-ignite our first emphatic ‘Yes’ to the Religious and the Apostolic Carmel way of life.

I thank the sisters for their spirit of openness and letting me be part of their story. Most of you are doing good work with commitment and dedication. It was heartening to discover from my visits, that many of our sisters want to do even more than what they are already doing. There is a desire in them to ‘shine as happy witnesses of religious life’, so as to attract more young people to our way of life.

Some, however, I am sorry to say, have created a nice cozy corner for themselves, by doing and fulfilling the minimum required of the demands of religious life. They are like our famous young man in the gospel, who comes to Jesus to ask what he must do and soon replied to Jesus, “All these things I have been doing from my childhood but what more must I do...?” Remember, what Jesus told him and how he went away sad? So as we celebrate both the 500th anniversary of the birth of St. Teresa and the Year of Consecrated life, let us ask ourselves, “What more must I do?” The three points that top my priority list are:

- What more must I do to improve my prayer life? This does not mean that we just increase the number of minutes I spend in chapel (that would certainly help), but how can I get closer to the Person of Jesus?
- What more must I do to improve my relationships in community? This does not mean that we become a little more polite (that would certainly help), but how can I show greater concern and be more sensitive to one another in the community – the younger ones for the elderly and the elderly in a different way, for the personal and spiritual growth of the younger ones?
- What more must I do to reach out to people? It is a good thing that at least some are responding to the call of the chapter recommendations of visiting families. This does not mean that I start making some visits in my neighborhood or to the families of poorer and weaker students of our class and school, to fulfill a social obligation (that would certainly help), but to engage with them in such a way that they meet Jesus in us. Mother Teresa (another Teresa there!) did all that she did because she found the suffering Jesus in the poorest of the poor.

“There are three types of people in this world. Those that make things happen, those that watch things happen, and those that wonder what happened.”

Let us, as we celebrate the Feast of Holy Mother Teresa, keep reflecting on the important questions, “What is that you want from me Lord?” and “What more must I do?”

Let us renew ourselves personally and reach out in understanding and compassion to our communities and the families in our neighborhood.

A very happy Feast of our Patroness St. Teresa to all of you

Sr. M. Nirmalini A.C.
Provincial Superior