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Audience with participants in the General Chapter of the Order of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel (Carmelites)

At 12.05 this morning, in the Consistory Hall of the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis will receive in audience the participants in the General Chapter of the Order of Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel (Carmelites), taking place in Rome from 10 to 27 September 2019, on the theme: “*«You are my witnesses» (Is 43: 10); from one generation to the next: called to be faithful to our Carmelite charism*” (cf. Const. 21).

The following is the Pope’s address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers!

With joy I greet you, called to celebrate the General Chapter, and through you I greet all the members of the Carmelite Order. The theme at the centre of your Chapter reflection is “You are my witnesses” (*Is 43: 10); from one generation to the next: called to be faithful to our Carmelite charism* (cf. Const. 21).

God has blessed Carmel with an original charism to enrich the Church and to communicate the joy of the Gospel to the world, sharing what you have received with enthusiasm and generosity: “Freely you have received; freely give” (*Mt 10: 8*). I would like to encourage you in this by pointing out three lines of action.

The first line is *fidelity and contemplation*. The Church appreciates you and, when she thinks of Carmel, she thinks of a school of contemplation. As a rich spiritual tradition attests, your mission is fruitful to the extent that it is rooted in your personal relationship with God. Blessed Titus Brandsma, a martyr and mystic, said: “It is proper to the Order of Carmel, although it is a mendicant order of active life and living among people, to maintain great esteem for solitude and detachment from the world, considering solitude and contemplation as the best part of its spiritual life”. The Constitutions of 1995, which you are currently revising, underline this: “The great spiritual

teachers of the Carmelite Family have always returned to this contemplative vocation” (17). The Carmelite way of living contemplation prepares you to serve the people of God through any ministry or apostolate. What is certain is that whatever you do, you will be faithful to your past and open to the future with hope if, “living in allegiance to Jesus Christ” (2), you have at heart in particular the spiritual journey of people.

The second line is *accompaniment and prayer*. Carmel is synonymous with the inner life. Carmelite mystics and writers have understood that “being in God” and “being in His things” do not always coincide. If we become anxious about a thousand things related to God without being rooted in Him (cf. *Lk 10: 38-42*), sooner or later he presents us with the bill: we realize that we have lost Him along the way. Saint Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi, in her famous letters on the Renewal of the Church (1586), provides that “lukewarmness” can creep into the consecrated life when the evangelical counsels become only a routine and love of Jesus is no longer the centre of life (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 264). And so worldliness can also creep in, which is the most dangerous temptation for the Church, especially for us, men of the Church. I am well aware, brothers, that this temptation has entered and done serious damage even among you. I have prayed and I pray that the Lord will help you. And this Chapter is a providential occasion to receive from the Holy Spirit the strength to fight together against these pitfalls.

Generations of Carmelites and Carmelites have taught us by example to live more “inside” than “outside” ourselves, and to go towards “el más profundo centro – the deepest centre”, as Saint John of the Cross says (The Living Flame of Love B, 1,11-12), that is where God lives, and there He invites us to seek Him out. The true prophet in the Church is he and she who comes from the “desert”, like Elijah, rich in the Holy Spirit, and with the authority that belongs to those who have listened in silence to the subtle voice of God (cf. *1 Kings 19: 12*).

I encourage you to accompany people to “make friends” with God. Saint Teresa said: “I hardly ever tired of speaking or hearing about God”. Our world thirsts for God and you Carmelites, teachers of prayer, can help many to leave behind the noise, haste and spiritual aridity. Of course it is not a question of teaching people to accumulate prayers, but of being men and women of faith, friends of God, who know how to walk the ways of the spirit.

From silence and prayer are renewed communities and authentic ministries will be born (cf. *Const. 62*). As good artisans of fraternity, place your trust in the Lord by overcoming the inertia of immobility and avoiding the temptation of reducing the religious community to “working groups” that would eventually dilute the fundamental elements of religious life. The beauty of community life is in itself a point of reference that generates serenity, attracts the people of God and spreads the joy of the Risen Christ. The true Carmelite transmits the joy of seeing the other as a brother to be supported and loved and with whom to share life.

And finally the third line: *tenderness and compassion*. The contemplative has a compassionate heart. When love is weakened, everything loses its flavour. Love, caring and creative, is a balm for those who are tired and exhausted (cf. *Mt 11: 28*), for those who suffer abandonment, the silence of God, the emptiness of the soul, and broken love. If one day, around us, there are no longer sick and hungry people, abandoned and despised – the *minores* of which your begging tradition speaks – it will not be because they are not there, but simply because we do not see them. The little ones (cf. *Mt 25: 31-46*) and the discarded (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 53) will always be there (cf. *Jn 12: 8*), to offer us an opportunity to enable contemplation to be a window open to beauty, truth and goodness. “Whoever loves God must seek him in the poor”, in the “brothers of Jesus”, as Blessed Angelo Paoli said, and whose third centenary of death you will soon celebrate. May you always have the goodness to seek them out! Blessed Angelo Paoli’s absolute trust in divine providence made him exclaim with joy: “I have a pantry in which nothing is missing!” May your pantry overflow with compassion in the face of all forms of human suffering!

Contemplation would merely be momentary if it were to be reduced to raptures and ecstasies that distance us from the joys and worries of the people. We must be wary of the contemplative who is not compassionate. Tenderness, in the style of Jesus (cf. *Lk 10:25-37*), shelters us from “pseudo-mystics”, “weekend solidarity” and the temptation to keep our distance from the wounds of Christ’s body. Three dangers: “pseudo-mystics”, “weekend solidarity” and the temptation to keep our distance from the wounds of Christ’s body. Jesus’ wounds

are still visible today in the bodies of our brothers and sisters who are despoiled, humiliated and enslaved. By touching these wounds, caressing them, it is possible to worship the living God in our midst. Today there is a need for a revolution of tenderness (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, 88; 288) which will make us more sensitive to the dark nights and dramas of humanity.

Dear brothers, I thank you for this meeting. May the Virgin of Carmel always accompany you and protect all those who collaborate with you and draw from your spirituality. And, please, entrust me also to her maternal protection. Thank you!
