



Parishioners' Corner

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity: Her Carmelite Spirituality and Method of Prayer

For a deeper appreciation of our patron, it is beneficial to understand Carmelite spirituality.

Early in the 13th Century, a group of hermits gathered to live on Mt. Carmel, which in the present day is located in northern Israel. The word "Carmel" in Hebrew means "garden of God." The most perfect garden of God is considered by many to be the Immaculate Heart of Mary. St. Augustine confirms that Mary conceived Jesus in her heart before she did in her womb. Carmelites emphasize a contemplative life of prayer to mold their hearts into a beautiful garden for God to dwell in loving union, following the example of the Blessed Virgin.

This passage from Gospel (John 14:23) provides the setting: "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Our response is prayer, which can take varied forms:

- Vocal Prayer (Our Father, Hail Mary, etc.)
- Meditative Prayer (reflecting on the Gospels or the writing of a saint), which is "active."
- Mental Prayer (also called Discursive or Contemplative Prayer), which is "passive."

Here is a brief overview of Mental Prayer and its particular benefits from two Carmelite masters.

St. Teresa of Avila

Whoever has not begun the practice of prayer, I beg for the love of the Lord not to go without so great a good....For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. In order for that love to be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord. (Book of Her Life, Chapter 8, paragraph 5)

Beginners (in prayer) must realize that in order to give delight to the Lord, they are starting to cultivate a garden on very barren soil, full of abominable weeds. His Majesty pulls up the weeds and plants good seed...Then He will often come to take delight in this garden and find His joy among these virtues. (Book of Her Life, Chapter 11, paragraph 6)

Represent the Lord himself as close to you, and behold how lovingly and humbly He is teaching you. Believe me, you should remain with so good a friend as long as you can... Do you think it is some small matter to have a friend like this at your side? (The Way of Perfection, Chapter 26, paragraph 1)

All my longing was and still is that since He (Jesus) has so many enemies and so few friends, that these few friends be good ones. (The Way of Perfection, Chapter 1, paragraph 2)

St. Therese of Lisieux

How great is the power of prayer! One could call it a Queen who has at each instance free access to the King....I say very simply to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me. For me, prayer is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus. (Story of a Soul, Chapter XI)

from a Carmelite devotee