

## **“You must do some work” (Rule 20)**

### **Our contemplative fraternity discerns its mission**

Malang, Indonesia, 9 – 26 September 2025

Dear brothers,

Bishop Tonino Bello, recalling the washing of feet (cf. Jn 13:1-15), said that true authority in the Church is exercised by “putting on the apron”. The God of surprises had a gift in the form of a cross and was looking for someone to embrace. With fear and trembling, I accept this responsibility as a service of love to God, to the Church, and to the Carmelite Order in each one of you, my brothers, so that we may bring to fulfilment the vocation to which we have been called.

When I was young, I was spiritually guided by a great Carmelite, Fr Rafael María López Melús, O.Carm. He is 97 years old, has suffered two strokes, and I am immensely fortunate to be able to live in community with him in Madrid-Ayala. I remember, as a teenager, asking him one day what Heaven was. He answered me very naturally, quoting another Carmelite, Fr Enrique María Esteve, O.Carm.: ‘Heaven, in Carmel, is Jesus and Mary.’ I was always amazed by his simplicity, his freshness, his enthusiasm. One day he left me a book of aphorisms: ‘The Book of the Friend and the Beloved’ by Ramón Llull, a 14th-century Spanish philosopher and mystic from Mallorca. There is a maxim in it that has accompanied me throughout my life: ‘The Beloved asks the friend: “Will you be patient if I double your pains?”. “Yes,” replies the friend, “as long as you double my loves”’. It came to mind on the day of the election of the Prior General: pains and loves. If Love is the driving force of our lives, there is nothing to fear. It is our loving God who will do everything. We just have to let Him do it. What I know today, looking back, is that I have been and am happy, and if I were born a thousand times, I would be a Carmelite a thousand times over.

Allow me now to share with you four insights from my experience during the General Chapter. These are just a few reflections.

1. *Let God be God.* In these days, we have remembered that contemplation is not only the heart of the Carmelite charism but is in itself the best gift we can offer to the world and to the Church. ‘As mendicants we are open to every kind of service, ministry and apostolate’ (Cf. RIVC 113; Cons. 95). However, given that we Carmelites carry out our mission among the people above all through the richness of our contemplative life, ‘whatever we do, we pay special attention to the spiritual journey of individuals’ (Cf. RIVC 113; Const. 95). Contemplation is a dynamism of love that elevates us to union with God and never separates

us from the earth and the life of humankind. The gift of contemplation impels us to move easily from one dimension of charism to another (prayer, fraternity and service), as one who does not change one's attitude, but rather the way of expressing that permanent relationship of love with God. Those who live consciously, like the prophet Elijah, in the presence of God (cf. 1 Kings 17:1), say, according to St John of the Cross, that "in all things they find signs of God" (2 S 26:6). Ordinary life is, above all, the place par excellence where this presence of God occurs. Our brother, Jack Welch, O.Carm., who passed away yesterday, rightly pointed out – and I fully agree – that 'the greatest prophetic challenge for Carmel is to help today's world cultivate the interior life'. Initial and ongoing formation, the care of formation houses, the formation of formators, the study and deepening of our Carmelite tradition (with special attention to the Virgin Mary, our Mother and Sister, as an inspirational figure for Carmel) are tasks that we in the Order should continue to nurture during this six-year term, with a view to the interior life.

2. *Martha and Mary must always walk together (7M 4:12)*. In our Order, over the last five years, I have heard brothers say the following: 'Ultimately, it is not so much about what we do, but how we do what we do.' Our mystics also pointed this out: 'Let us not build towers without foundations, for the Lord does not look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done' (Teresa of Jesus, 7M 4,15). Therefore, 'Martha and Mary must walk together' (Teresa of Jesus, 7M 4,12). Our works, she adds, when they spring from 'the roots of contemplation' and 'come from this tree of God's love,' become 'admirable and fragrant flowers' whose fragrance 'does not quickly fade... and has a great effect' (Teresa of Jesus, Conc VII, 2.5). It is an invitation for our works to give off not so much the aroma of our 'ego' but the 'sweet fragrance of Christ' (cf. 2 Cor 2:15).

So that the gift of contemplation is not corrupted, the Rule, recalling St Paul, exhorts us to work in silence: 'you must do some work' (Rule 20). In principle, there should be no contradiction between work and prayer. 'Prayer is not an oasis in the desert of life, but the whole of life' (St Titus Brandsma). Now, we have heard it asked: Can we continue to "do everything we do"? The philosopher Fabrice Hadjadj, referring to activism and, at times, our frenetic lifestyle, observed in his book: *May you succeed in your death*, and that the time has come to ask ourselves not only if there is life after death, but also "if we have life before death". In this sense, we see crises and poverty in our lives, and they should not alarm us. Rather than misfortune, I would dare to say that they are part of the contemplative process. In recent days, in the Eucharist, Haggai and Ezra invited us, with hope, to rebuild the Temple of God. This reconstruction was not based on simple optimism based on numbers, strategies and human capabilities. Christ is the cornerstone of this new building. Authentic hope begins when the path is strewn with failures. God is there too! In the midst of the processes of change and restructuring that will have to be undertaken in some entities of the Order, these words resonate strongly within us: 'Do not be afraid' (Hag 2:5). A fraternal spirit of generous help and collaboration is already evident in many realities of our Order. The Carmelite Family (lay people, sisters and brothers of the affiliated Institutes, nuns, friars, the

Teresian Carmel), inspired by the Rule of St. Albert, its tradition and spirituality, continues to grow in communion.

3. *Community life: artisans of fraternity.* I once read that when the first bishop of the Americas, Bishop Alonso Manso, arrived in Puerto Rico in 1512, he visited a community that was so poor that they did not even have a table on which to celebrate the Eucharist. He invited those men and women, in a wonderful gesture, to join hands and let them become the altar on which to celebrate the Eucharist. Perhaps it was not very liturgical – as someone pointed out to me – but, without a doubt, in those circumstances it was much more evangelical and prophetic! Men and women of every race, language, people and nation – as here in Malang – join not only their hands, but their lives, so that they may be an altar that welcomes Christ in the Eucharist. The internationality of our communities is becoming more visible every day.

A double challenge arises: the temptation to remain immobile and the fact that communities sometimes neglect the basic elements of our fraternal life: the local chapter, lectio divina, community recreation, meals, dialogue, fraternal correction, forgiveness... (Cf. Const. 35). The Fathers of the Church also warned about the dangers of an isolated and solitary life. 'If I live all alone, whose feet shall I wash? (Cf. Jn 13:8-10). If I live all alone, with whom shall I compare myself to be the least?' (Cf. Mk 9:35). I once heard that, realistically speaking, in any human group, if 20% of its members were not there, 'everything would work better,' or at least 'you would be more at peace.' Now, this is not a business! 'Bear one another's burdens' (Gal 6:2). It is Christ who calls us together as brothers and sisters, and no one is superfluous. How contemplative it is to call another person "brother" or "sister"! (Cf. Ps 123). It is always a challenge for the community to radiate the joy of the Risen Christ, while at the same time becoming a peaceful place where we can care for one another and where the 'commandment of love' (cf. Jn 13:34-35) is made visible. The Institutio reminds us that no one remains in charity unless they persevere in humility. Let us not forget that every vocation matures within a visible and real community. The authenticity and attractiveness of our community life is key to vocational accompaniment and youth ministry.

4. *Mission: to open windows of hope.* St Mary Magdalene de Pazzi addressed Jesus, calling him: 'Mad with Love!' — 'You are mad with Love.' One day, in one of her ecstasies, she took the crucifix, unnailed Jesus, and, embracing him, began to say to him: 'Love, Love, Love, unloved and unknown by anyone!'. And she immediately exclaimed: 'Love, Love, give me such power of voice that when I call you Love, it may be heard from East to West, in all parts of the world, even in hell, so that you may be known and loved by all, Love!' 'To love Love.' 'In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I will be Love' (Teresa of the Child Jesus, Ms B, 3v<sup>o</sup>). Our mystics have placed love at the heart of the mission and of the Church. What is

evangelisation if not a cry, an impetus, in which we desire that God's Love reach the ends of the earth? (Cf. Mt 28:19-20).

Evangelisation and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, support and nourish each other (cf. Ad Gentes 9). In fact, we are seeing this at this historic moment when our General Chapter is being held for the first time in Asia (Indonesia). Jesus, the Lord, joins the cry of humanity when it seems to be weakening and helps us to ensure that justice and peace are not just a utopia (cf. Pope Francis, Fratelli 30). The authentic contemplative is a bearer of the light of the Risen Christ, opening windows of hope in the midst of humanity's nights: poverty, wars, abandonment, forgetfulness of human dignity, persecution on racial or religious grounds, the suffering of the innocent... (cf Pope Francis). In our proclamation, we 'enlarge our tent' (cf. Is 54:2-3) to make room for God and those who come with Him: humanity. As Pope Francis reminded us (2019): 'If one day, around us, there were no longer any sick or hungry, abandoned or despised people – the minors (cf. Const. 24) of whom your mendicant tradition speaks – it is not because they do not exist, but simply because we do not see them'. Authentic contemplation leads us to tenderness and compassion, to touch the wounds of the Body of Christ and to heal wounds. Christ himself entrusted us with the care and protection of the smallest and most defenceless: 'Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me' (Mt 18:5). We are firmly committed to ensuring that our communities and ministries are safe spaces for minors and vulnerable people.

I would ask my brothers and sisters, that during this six-year term we are open to a period of study, reflection, meditation and discernment of our life centred on the Eucharist. In Carmel, just as there is a close link between Carmel and the Word, there is a profound connection between Carmel and the Eucharist. The Eucharist brings together our relationship with God, with our brothers and sisters, with the Word... Is Mass just a series of rubrics? Is Mass just a reward or payment for our good deeds and merits? Our spiritual tradition, writers, mystics (Rule, John Soreth, Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, John of the Cross, Titus Brandsma, Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Maria Crocifissa Curcio...) offer us clues for theological, spiritual, liturgical, and pastoral reflection, and also for the renewal of our Carmelite life. How can we be a contemplative community at the service of the people without drawing close to the Eucharist and being nourished by Christ with a renewed spirit?

I conclude with a few words from the letter that Br Pablo M<sup>a</sup> de la Cruz, O.Carm., addressed to Pope Francis on the occasion of World Youth Day 2023 in Lisbon: "In Carmel, the Garden of God, the antechamber of Heaven, Mary, the Sunflower of God, grows. I like to call her and imagine her as the Virgin of Spring. I ask her to transform the deserts of pain into gardens of consolation, and I place the evangelisation of young people in her hands."

Please pray for me.

Fr Desiderio García Martínez O.Carm.

Thank you.

*Prior General*