



Carmelite News

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Young Adults YAP at Carmel

"We're trying to find the Real", says Katie, her eyes shining with earnest conviction – "not small 'r' reality, but the Real, capital 'R'! This is why we come. Here, we draw closer to the Real."

Katie is one of the members of Baltimore Carmel's new Young Adult Prayer (YAP) group. A bright, articulate 23-year old and a new high school teacher, Katie comes to Carmel every other Thursday evening to learn contemplative prayer in the Carmelite tradition. Her profound words express the deep desire and longing for God that claim the hearts of young adults everywhere, even though this desire, this longing, may remain unnamed and untended. While young people aspiring to religious life might find help and encouragement to explore their God-quest, others – the overwhelming majority – are often left with no guidance or direction to understand the action of God in their lives. They may have no place to learn how to integrate a serious life of prayer with their professional and personal life choices. It is for this reason that our community established YAP last September. YAP is designed to teach adult-level prayer to men and women between the ages of 20-30, with specific emphasis on Carmelite contemplative prayer. We are convinced that contemplative prayer must become more widely practiced if humanity is to undergo the transformation of consciousness needed to inaugurate true peace and justice.

To fulfill our goals for YAP, it was necessary to develop a curriculum for teaching Carmelite prayer. This task proved quite challenging because, unlike other meditation and contemplation practices in the Western Church (Christian Meditation, Insight Meditation and centering prayer), Carmelite prayer is not method-based. It is more concerned with the underlying principles that guide one's prayer experience and its development. Thus, we specified these core principles and worked to distill them into a praxis that would help students of prayer move towards contemplation in the Carmelite tradition.

For example, we named desire as the most deeply characterizing aspect of Carmelite prayer. As John of the Cross teaches, prayer can shift human desire from being possessive and unfree to finding its fulfillment in

God, the true source of all desire. This shift and a sharpening of desire happens when one comes to know Jesus ever more deeply, and grows in relationship with him. To help YAP members apply this principle, we emphasized Teresa of Avila's instruction to keep Christ present within us, and her key definition of prayer: "nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends." Our young adults found this concept of friendship with Jesus very liberating. Suddenly, prayer was no longer just about what they had to do; a burden was removed. The idea of friendship with Jesus provided a transformative opening for them, a movement to a freeing new vision of relationship in mutual love.

Other practical advice for Carmelite prayer includes Saint Teresa's encouragement to take a text to prayer. We filled out this advice using the wisdom of our own experience and that of other contemporary Carmelites about how to pray with scripture and texts. In particular, we taught the adapted form of Lectio Divina that we share with our wider community during Lent and on other special occasions. In its first semester, YAP also addressed how to handle distractions, petitionary prayer from a Carmelite perspective, growth in self-knowledge, and the practice of the presence of God (Brother Lawrence).

YAP members come to biweekly meetings and are also asked to commit to at least 30 minutes of prayer every day. The program is demanding and not for the half-hearted – nor could it be so. In consulting with young adults as we designed the program, we heard consistently that they want a challenge, a cause about which to be passionate, a discipline they can learn, a practice that will bring them to a fuller understanding of themselves and a fuller expression of their lives. They will not give their

Please share Holy Week with us.

We warmly invite you to our Holy Week services, offering a beautiful, intensive and deep experience of the mystery of the Passion and Resurrection. We so want you to be with us; your presence will greatly enrich the liturgies. Please see the calendar box (last page) for times.

already overstretched time to anything less. Perhaps surprisingly, they do not want an environment of stimulating music, lighting or video to accompany their prayer. “We have enough of that everyday,” said Meghan, a core YAP member who majors in English and dance at a nearby college. These young adults seek a place different from their own world, a place of

quiet and stillness, and of total acceptance. As they learn contemplation for their lives, we believe they will be like leaven in society, transforming it from within, preparing it for the future God imagines for creation. We delight to see them grow more comfortable in silence as their prayer deepens and they come to know greater intimacy with God. We delight to see them draw ever closer to the Real. *Write to: learnprayer@baltimorecarmel.org.*

The Carmelite Beatitudes

Profession Address by Sr. Constance FitzGerald, ocd for Sr. Agnes Kyungee of Jesus (September 9, 2007)

This morning as we witness Agnes’ first profession I marvel at the extraordinary journey she has traveled to reach the land of Carmel and all that has happened to bring her from South Korea to our community in Baltimore. Is it any wonder she wants to proclaim in the first reading that it is only by God’s loving kindness she has been given a ministry with us and a share in our communal dream so wondrously expressed by Paul: “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” The glory of God, expressed in the face of Jesus: I cannot imagine a more succinct and profound expression of the desire that marks us as Carmelites. That Agnes has chosen this reading for her profession shows not only how deeply she has grown into her Carmelite identity in three short years but also how this desire continues to draw her forward. Her ability to move into the unknown, the unimaginable, and the unfamiliar, anchored always by the stability and strength of her relationship with Jesus Christ, will always, I believe, be the hallmark of Agnes’ particular giftedness to live this life.

Encapsulated here are two themes that Carmelites have always sought to hold in delicate tension and beautiful balance: first, passion for God – burning intensely, manifesting itself as vision, dream, prophecy, radical newness; and then, passion for God’s people – coming to life as relationship, grounded in the concrete compassionate humanity of Jesus, which Agnes has invoked with her choice of the Beatitudes as today’s Gospel. I want to explore these two themes for Agnes and for all of us today, to elucidate what our contemporary Carmelite spirituality can bring to them.

The passion for God – the glory of God – is expressed in one of our most ancient Carmelite texts as part of the two-fold aim of Carmel, as many of you have heard us say before: “to taste even in this life the power of the divine presence and the sweetness of heavenly glory.” This is a passion for union with God, for no less than our very deification, as we take on the beauty of our Beloved One, Jesus Christ. Agnes has spoken to me of how she felt this desire, this passion, unfold within her and awaken to new depths during our formation class study of John of the Cross’ *Living Flame of Love*. Such a desire may sound romantic, filled with light and consolation, but anyone who has truly entered into the spiritual journey knows better – don’t we(!). Much ado was made recently by the disclosure that Mother Teresa of Calcutta experienced intense spiritual darkness for years. I was amazed to hear this pronouncement made as if her experience were exceptional, not a pattern to be found among the saints, possibly even detracting from her holiness. Our society seems to have a hagiographic need to believe that sanctity is, at least usually, accompanied by ecstatic consolation. The truth is that the ecstasy of our time is often found in silence and dispossession. The passionate desire for God is one whose fulfillment exacts the most radical undoing of self; it is a journey marked by true joy but also by darkness and obscurity; it is a commitment that asks everything, and takes all. This is the nature, Agnes, of the commitment you make today.

Purification is very difficult, deeply painful, as all of our newer members have expressed to me at one time or another. It is only the graced intensity of one’s desire for God and union, for transformation, that allows a person to stay this course. What is happening in the darkness, John of the Cross tells us, is that we are being radically opened to encounter the God who is beyond the limits of our expectations, beyond our constrained imaginings, not defined by our memories or held by our boundaries. We are brought to silence so that we might truly hope, brought to emptiness so that we might be filled, so that we might transcend our very selves. This is why the contemplative life moves into vision and the liminal experience of prophetic imagination, as the mystics know. But our visions and locutions are not manifest in the same way as those of 16th century Teresa of Avila, our foundress/reformer. Today our visions and locutions are the witness we make from living on the edge of the horizon. “Vision” for us is seeing over the horizon; “locutions” are hearing the call forward, for ourselves and others, into the new consciousness that awaits us there, into new ways of being and seeing.

This horizon is one that Agnes has befriended. The movement she had to make to arrive here was a massive leap out of herself, from the theology and life of a relatively conservative Korean Benedictine monastery to life on the cutting edge, pressing the boundaries of ecclesial and societal understanding. In this passage, Agnes foreshadowed the very pattern of prayer development that marks every Carmelite life. She was already living into the practical repercussions of her passionate desire for God. This is not to say that her past is left behind or made irrelevant – in fact, to the contrary, she is called to weave a creative synthesis of all her experience – this is something she uniquely has to offer us, to join her heritage with this culture, in this time and place, indeed to help us transcend our boundaries.

The defining characteristics of a Carmelite's passion for God flow over into her passion for God's people, as it emerges from relationship with Jesus, our second theme. Carmelite spirituality is first and foremost Christ-centered, friendship with Jesus, as Agnes emphasized with the Second Reading, taken from Teresa's autobiography. This is why the question of Jesus, "Who do you say that I am," resounds relentlessly within us throughout our lifetime. Informed by and imbued with the vision of our contemplative experience, Carmelites are called to interpret Jesus' life and death continually (again and again) through the hermeneutic of the vision of God's glory: that is, through radical openness, transforming darkness and prophetic imagination. If prayer teaches us anything, it is that God is over the horizon, beyond the edge of our understanding. Carmelites err if they are just "pious" people.

It should not be thought strange, then, that we understand, reach out to and stand with theologians who are challenged for their Christology on the edge, on the margins. I think most recently of Roger Haight, Jacques Dupuis, and Jon Sobrino (and earlier women theologians). Their images (or interpretations) of Jesus present us with challenge, question, darkness, doubt, loss, undoing: a healthy deconstruction that wants to clear away the limits of expectation so that a truer understanding can emerge for our time. These are two sides of one coin – they see Christ as theologians and we as contemplatives, but our vision is mutually confirming. For example, the question and doubt articulated by the theologian finds a parallel in the contemplative's experience when to all appearances Christ recedes from consciousness and loses significance, God is beyond reach, and belief is threatened. And the contemplative's experience of memory's deconstruction and darkness in prayer finds expression for theologians in a courageous attempt to articulate a new image or interpretation of Jesus, and in the silence into which they are thrust by the withering assaults against their efforts.

And so the contemplative's relationship with Jesus is often challenging and disturbing; it is not static or complacent, it changes profoundly and it often questions the prevailing world view, the existing order – as Jesus himself did. All this we bring to our understanding of the Beatitudes as the concrete expression of how relationship with Jesus flows into our world in service, compassion and love. Let us hear the Beatitudes, then, with new ears, in a Carmelite way.

To be poor in spirit is to suffer the darkness of prayer development – John of the Cross' dark night of spirit, which is experienced as such a painful dispossession of soul and loss of God.

To mourn is to carry the sorrow and burden of our world's pain as one's own, in one's very heart. It is solidarity in its most profound meaning. It is the moment, Agnes, that you can say, I, too, am the mother of the disappeared and slaughtered; I too am the victim of human trafficking and war; and the perpetrator. On Good Friday, truly this is MY body.

To be meek is to let yourself be led by God without fighting for a return to what was comfortable and consoling. For a Carmelite, meekness often means learning to love the darkness.

To hunger and thirst for righteousness is to live out the passion for God's people by giving every person their place, through a silence that does not allow the self to disturb the right ordering of relationships. As our Rule says, silence is the service of justice. We are to leave an empty space into which the other may step.

To be merciful is to sit at the table of sinners, to invoke an image from St. Therese. Agnes, it is to see yourself as among all the broken of the world, to claim them as your own and yourself as one of them, and therein to find true compassion – and the capacity not only to be graced by union with God, but also to bring along to God all the others among whom you sit.

To be pure in heart – this is the other of the two-fold aim of Carmel – is to desire the true God, not one that I form according to my own expectations, life experience and need. To be pure in heart is to be undivided and undistracted by our own constructions, but open to the mystery of God. This is why the pure of heart can see God.

To be a peacemaker is to live in a community of non-violence, to reject retaliation and commit to reconciliation even in the smallest interactions of ordinary life. It is to turn from brutal competition because you know by experience the intrinsic interconnectedness of all people and all creation, and our responsibility within this creation. Indeed, the non-violence and mutual interdependence lived by the first community of hermits on Mount Carmel make this call to be a peacemaker central to our charism. Agnes, when we fail in this, we truly fail.

To be persecuted for righteousness sake, to be assaulted and reviled for the sake of Jesus: this brings us back to living on the edge and taking controversial positions. Agnes, I challenge you to dare to imagine the unimaginable, the mystery, and not be intimidated by the fear of criticism from those who want to rest in the security of unchallenged assumptions. Do not look for persecution, but do not shy away from it by cowardice or flight, whether in the material world or in prayer, even if you might experience doubt and darkness, or one day even the specter of atheism. To help you in all this, Agnes, I have prepared for you these Carmelite Beatitudes:

Blessed are those who journey through darkness, for they shall find light and the great joy of union with God.

Blessed are those who hold the sorrows of the world in their heart's prayer, for they shall open the way for humanity's glorious transformation.

Blessed are those who learn to love the trials of the spiritual journey, for they shall be purified.

Blessed are those whose silence allows a place for the "other", for they will receive the blessings of human relationship and learn to see all things in God.

Blessed are those who sit at the table of sinners, for they shall be redeemed and given the power to redeem.

Blessed are those who open themselves singularly to the fathomless mystery of the true God, for they shall look on the beauty of God's face.

Blessed are those who choose the way of non-violence and recognize the mutual interdependence of all creation, for they shall be given a new consciousness fit for the future.

Blessed are you who have the courage to leave the boundaries of your experience, and to suffer pain, rejection and isolation from living on the prophetic edge. Rejoice and be glad, for you shall light a path to eternal life.

For Agnes, the heart of these Beatitudes, the Sermon on the Mount, is to take Jesus' mission as her own. It is the stipulation of God's covenant with her – with all of us, a covenant background beautifully expressed in the words of Hosea: *I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in right and in justice, in love and in mercy, I will betroth you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.* Agnes, as this betrothal comes to its first fulfillment today, I hope these Carmelite Beatitudes will accompany and encourage your journey, for all who learn to live out this covenant shall truly see God.

Our Secular Order Continues to Grow. On October 28, 2007, Janet Marcus was admitted to formation in our Chapter of the Secular Order of Carmel, which meets at the monastery each month. Katie Turyna and Carol Barlow made their First Promise and Terry Kozel made her Definitive Promise. Anyone interested in learning more about the Secular Order of Carmel may call to request a flier with more information and further contact details.

Lenten contemplative prayer continues. This year our focus is EarthPrayer for Baltimore City. Thursdays, February 28, March 6 & 13 at 7 p.m.

Holy Week/Easter liturgies:

Palm Sunday Jim Stormes, SJ	March 16	Eucharist Vespers	9:00 am 5:00 pm
Holy Thursday Donald Cozzens	March 20	Tenebrae Eucharist	8:00 am 5:30 pm
Good Friday	March 21	Tenebrae Liturgy	8:00 am 3:00 pm
Holy Saturday Donald Cozzens	March 22	Tenebrae Vespers Easter Vigil	8:00 am 4:30 pm 9:00 pm
Easter Sunday John Donahue, SJ	March 23	Eucharist Vespers	11:00 am 4:30 pm