



Carmelite News

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Join Us In A Livable Fast

From September 14, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, until Easter Sunday, the worldwide Carmelite family follows an instruction in our Rule to fast. The Fast of the Carmelite Order resembles the Fast that the universal Church undertakes on Fridays in Lent. However, some nuances color our Carmelite Fast with a richness that deepens intimacy with God and a practicality that makes the Fast feasible for a lifetime. This year we invite our newsletter readers to join us in the Carmelite Fast, and to offer it for the cause of justice in our world so beleaguered by violence, oppression and economic hardship.

The Carmelite Fast is intended to help a person live out contemplative values with greater intention and intensity. Consequently, the months of the Fast of the Order are dedicated to observing and deepening the practice of contemplative prayer, silence, solitude, and justice in community life, through daily small sacrifices and self-offerings.

The most visible and straight-forward of the sacrificial practices concerns food. As with the traditional Lenten fast, we have one full meal each day, smaller portions for the other two mealtimes, and no food or snacks at all between meals. We also make an effort to avoid non-nutritive eating (junk food!) during the Fast. The object is to consume only what is needed to live healthily, thereby fostering an attitude of justice towards those in material need, and also freeing the spirit to engage in deeper prayer. To practice the Carmelite Fast, our readers might resolve not to eat between meals during these months, and to be more intentional about the amount and type of food consumption. Sundays and feasts are not Fast days, so you have a weekly break!

Perhaps less evident and certainly more challenging is the call to fast from excessive noise and stimulation, both exterior and interior, in order to deepen silence and stillness before God and one another. We practice exterior silence by refraining from unnecessary conversation and limiting external noise during particular times/days. Silence creates an environment for contemplative prayer and for deepening awareness. It also promotes justice by opening a space for others – we learn not to fill the space of encounter with our own voice, perspective, and vision.

Times of solitude are important, too, so that each person can grow in self-knowledge – who I am before God alone – and embrace aspects of ourselves that need some work. While Carmelites can reserve long hours for silence, most of our readers do not have this opportunity. So instead, one might intensify silence and solitude by reducing audio/visual input – perhaps shutting off the car radio on your commute a few days a week to be silent with God. An MP3 player might not be used one day a week, or television left off until a certain hour. Most importantly, consider making or extending daily time for silent, contemplative prayer. It can be challenging to find even 15 minutes a day at first, but this is a good beginning and over the course of the Fast can change one's life.

As we hope to foster justice, we must think more deeply about how our way of life affects community. We fast, therefore, from excessive self-occupation and enter wholeheartedly into community celebrations, times of recreation, and service to one another and those who come to us. We strive more intently to be present and listen to those in need, to be a source of joy and encouragement, and to experience God's intimate presence in the face of each person. Community living also demands a profound thoughtfulness about serving justice, for all people and for all creation. So I might fast from wastefulness of Earth's resources, like water, with the intention that all will have enough. I might consider the ecological implications of my consumption, and undertake the sacrifices needed to decrease my carbon-footprint. Some might hang clothes outside on warmer days of the Fast, instead of using the electric dryer. Some might car-pool or use alternative transportation. Or one might fast from patronizing companies that impose unfair or oppressive terms on workers or suppliers. Adopting even one new practice of justice during the time of Fast can make a real difference in attitudes and community engagement, and ultimately in our world.

So, please join us in our Carmelite Fast, for the sake of the future of justice and peace that God yearns to bring about. We promise our prayer that your commitment will bear fruit. As we traditionally say to each other on September 14, Happy Fast!

Association of Carmels Celebrates 40th Anniversary

Forty years ago Baltimore Carmel entered into a venture of association with other Carmelite monasteries of nuns across the United States. This venture was daring for its time, as the spirit of the Second Vatican Council was just beginning to bear fruit. The hope was to share experience, wisdom and insight to strengthen the fabric of the Carmelite charism, to give voice to issues of common concern, and to shape our future communally. Today that association, Carmelite Communities Associated (CCA), continues to thrive as it celebrates the 40th anniversary of its founding.

Throughout its history, CCA has expanded its capacity to facilitate communication for our nuns, extending our vision and broadening our experience. For some years now, it has reached out to include other Carmelite associations here in the United States and also those of other countries. At a meeting this past June, Carmelites from Germany, France, Mexico, and South Africa gathered with their American sisters to share ideas, hopes and dreams. The Mexican sisters brought with them a video message of congratulations from Fr. Camillo Maccise, OCD, former general of our Order.

Baltimore Carmel also supports other cooperative gatherings of the Carmelite family. In May we sent two of our younger sisters to a program to train Directors of Formation, where all OCD communities, men's and women's, were invited to learn and share. We know that our future lies not just in preserving and increasing the vitality of our own community, but in strengthening Carmel around the world through the bonds of friendship and mutual support.

Theologians Affirm Contemplative Life

The Catholic Theological Society of America (CTSA) publicly affirmed the contribution of contemplation to theology at its annual convention this past June. For the first time in CTSA's history, a plenary address was given by a contemplative religious woman, Carmelite Constance FitzGerald of our monastery. CTSA wrote that the convention's theme, *Impasse...and Beyond*, was "inspired by a seminal essay" by Sr. Constance more than 20 years ago, *Impasse and Dark Night*. This classic work interpreted the teaching of St. John of the Cross for contemporary situations of impasse – a blockage where there seems no way forward or out. In so doing, the article effectively democratized John's teaching, making it accessible and practically applicable to the societal challenges of our day. At the meeting, Sr. Constance presented a new paper, *From Impasse to Prophetic Hope: Crisis of Memory*. Her address explored the meaning and nuances of the "prayer of no experience" and John's teaching on purification of memory. Her contribution, received with deep appreciation, is a landmark indicator that the country's leading theologians seek the insights of contemplation and recognize its value for the world.

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Thursday, October 1, Thérèse of Lisieux
Eucharist 7:30 pm

Thursday, October 15, Teresa of Avila
Eucharist 7:30 pm

Thursday, November 26, Thanksgiving Day
Eucharist 9 am