

Class: Introduction to Carmelite Spirituality and Discussion on Chapters 16-20 of *Why We're Catholic* by Trent Horn

Objective – *The class objective is to introduce attendees to the major tenets of Carmelite Spirituality and get them to practice and understand how Carmelite spirituality can be used in their prayer life. Students are also expected to engage in fruitful discussion around the reading assignment.*

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

1. Saint Berthold of Calabria – Tradition holds he was a leader of hermits on Mount Carmel, the precursor or early life of a Carmelite Order, who came to Mt. Carmel in 1185 during one of the Crusades.
2. Saint Teresa of Avila – Carmelite nun who led reformation of the Carmelites during the Counter-Reformation.
3. Saint Simon Stock – A Carmelite who had a vision of Saint Mary in which she bestowed upon him the brown scapular.
4. Scapular – A Catholic devotional item consisting of two small connecting pieces of woolen cloth worn over the chest and back associating the wearer with a devotion to Mary, but also more simply representing an apron like appearance, marking the wearers readiness to serve.
5. Contemplative Prayer – A form of prayer where the soul rests in God's presence without the need for words, images, or actions. It is also a form of prayer in which one is fully aware of the presence of God at all times.
6. Active Purification – The human response to grace, in which one deliberately turns away from sin in order to live a more virtuous life.
7. Passive Purification – God's action of purifying the soul beyond what human efforts can accomplish.
8. Discalced – Shoeless
9. Rule of Saint Albert – The guidelines that instruct the daily lives of the Carmelites.
10. Detachment – The interior freedom from all things that stand in competition to choosing God.

Hallmarks of Carmelite Spirituality

Carmelite spirituality is devoted to Christ.

For a Christian, Christ is the beginning and the end of the spiritual life. His love for us was demonstrated through his incarnation and his passion and death on the cross. His desire to become one with us and his continued desire for intimacy with us should evoke a profound desire on our part for greater intimacy with him. He chose us; he loved us first.

Carmelite spirituality is devoted to Mary.

In Mary's assent to God, she is a model of perfect obedience. In her giving birth to Jesus, she is the first disciple, bringing Christ to the world. In her faithfulness to her Son at the cross, she is a model of living in the hope of things to come. These are all important attributes for Carmelites.

Carmelite spirituality seeks God above all things.

Everything that exists does so because God wills it to be. Although all things are not God (pantheism), all things reflect something of God in their being. If we open our eyes (and hearts), we begin to encounter God in everything, even in the ordinary things and tasks of life. If we pay attention to the people and creatures around us, we encounter the God who loved them into existence.

Carmelite spirituality is aware of the indwelling God.

"The Kingdom of God is within," Jesus said. We need to come to terms with the reality that God is both transcendent (totally other) and immanent (within us). In other words, God is beyond anything that we can fathom, but God is as intimate as our next breath. As we gain greater appreciation for God's indwelling, we respect others and love them more perfectly. After all, if God lives in us, then God lives in others. If God has chosen to love others into existence and to make his dwelling in them, who are we to treat them shabbily?

Carmelite spirituality values compassionate listening to others through loving service.

Just as God listens to us, so, too, are we to listen to others compassionately, to suffer with them, serving them in whatever way we can. In all this, we are to be humble in our encounters with others, being with them without trying to "fix" them or without having the (erroneous) impression that we know best what others should do. In every encounter with others, we recognize that God is also present and act accordingly. In this way, we live Matthew 25: "Whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me."

Carmelite spirituality encourages listening to God through silence, solitude, and contemplation.

Because God is gracious and listens to us, we must resist the temptation to be the ones constantly speaking, telling God what we know, what we need, what others should do, and what God should do! In humility, we must be silent, still, and patient and let God be God. We also need to ask for God's help in overcoming anything that prevents us from achieving stillness.

Carmelite spirituality commands: Love always!

God loves us first, and that is why we are here. Christ loves us and died for us, securing our redemption. The Spirit loves us, accompanying and guiding us every step along the way. Showered with so much love, we are to love God and others without holding back. Even—and especially—when others are difficult or choose to act in evil ways, we are to love. After all, God loves us when we sin against him, especially when we are difficult or treat others badly

Centering Prayer

Contemplation is the laying aside of thoughts and opening to God beyond all thought and emotion. We do not resist thoughts or suppress them. We accept them as they are and go beyond them, not by effort, but by letting them all go by. We open our awareness to the Mystery of God whom we trust is one with us. We do not try to feel anything, reflect about anything, or judge anything. We sink into the ever-present Mystery, letting everything else go. No thinking. No reflecting. No judgment. Rest. Be quiet. Be still. Be silent. Sink into the Mystery.

Matthew 6:6: But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

For Jesus prayer is sinking into silence: entering the inner room—silence of noise, closing the door—silence of thinking, and praying to Abba in secret—silence of self, the Silence of God.

Centering Prayer is a way to implement Jesus' teaching on secret prayer. It is communing with God beyond all thinking. Using a sacred word, we consent to God who dwells in our center. Whenever we become aware of thoughts, we simply and gently return to the word.

The Guidelines of Centering Prayer

Guideline 1 – Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

Guideline 2 – Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

Guideline 3 – When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

Guideline 4 – At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes close for a couple of minutes.

Resist no thought, retain no thought, react emotionally to no thought, and when engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. Simply remain in silence, disregarding all thoughts, and resting in God in pure faith. Just let God love you. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two (2) periods are recommended each day, one in the morning and the other in afternoon or early evening.

YHWH Breath Prayer

YHWH is pronounced in Hebrew in such a way that one does not close one's lips or move one's tongue. It is simply breathing: breathing in, "YAH," breathing out, "WEH." So, to practice, breathe in and breathe out. When you breathe in, gently say, "YAH" in your mind. When you breathe out, gently say, "WEH" in your mind. Eventually, you may not even need to think "Yahweh" in your mind. You can just breathe and rest in God effortlessly and beyond thinking.

Lectio Divina

Slowly read a scripture passage 4 times with silence in between. In the silence do the following:

After 1st Reading: Reading the Word of God: The Word of God is read in a listening manner with “the ear of one’s heart.” One is attentive to the phrase, sentence or one word that is noticed.

After 2nd Reading: Reflecting on the Word of God: The Word of God is reflected upon and the phrase that captures one’s attention that touches one is savored and held reflectively.

After 3rd Reading: Responding to the Word of God: The Word of God is responded to in a spontaneous manner. One may express a prayer, a concern, a question.

After 4th Reading: Resting with the Word of God: The Word of God is rested with in silence. Allow it to speak in the quiet of one’s heart.

The Psalms

Slowly, gently, attentively recite a Psalm, pause for a time of interior silence when you are moved, then return to the Psalm. Do as often as there is an attraction to inner silence.

Christian Meditation

This is a practice of meditation that involves repeating the word “**maranatha**” within one’s mind over and over and over. ***Interiorly repeat the word continuously for at least 20 minutes.***

The Jesus Prayer

This is the slow and deliberate recitation of the phrase “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” One can recite this in silence for an extended period of time in the morning and/or evening, but one can also recite this prayer while going about the day’s business. Moreover, the prayer can be shortened. Some variations: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me,” “Jesus, mercy.”

Ceaseless Prayer

The goal of the Christian life is oneness with God, ceaseless prayer. Jesus teaches this in Luke 18:1: “**Pray always without becoming weary**” and Paul echoes Jesus in 1 Thess.5:17: “**Pray without ceasing.**” Here, then, is a simple contemplative practice for ceaseless prayer:

- *Throughout the day, return ever-so-gently to a sacred word.*
- *Throughout the day, let your breathing return you to God.*

An effortless way of practicing ceaseless prayer is to allow silence within all through the day. Just silence. Just interior nothingness, relaxed and at rest in the divine mystery.

Enjoy the Silence.

Contemplative Prayer, according to St. Teresa of Avila, “is nothing else than a close sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with him who we know loves us.”

“One does not undertake contemplative prayer only when one has time: one makes time for the Lord, with the firm determination not to give up, no matter what trials and dryness one may encounter.” (CCC, 2710)

Contemplation is a great act of love. We desire God as God desires us. We give our hearts to God, and it is within our hearts that we encounter God in his Son through the promptings of the Holy Spirit. A person puts aside the self—the “me”—and sees everything in terms of the gospel and the unconditional compassion of Jesus Christ. It requires few if any words, a model we are not used to everyday life.

A suggested model of contemplative prayer :

Start by taking a small amount of time (5-20 minutes). This can be done before the blessed sacrament, by placing a picture of Jesus in front of you, or just in a space you choose with quiet. You may or may not have instrumental music.

- Settle into a comfortable position, taking slow, deep breaths to help quiet yourself.
- Focus your attention on the image of Jesus.
- Acknowledge the things that are trying to get your attention---thoughts, worries, plans, aches and pains, sights and sounds around you. Slowly let these things go. If you feel distracted during this prayer, just quietly bring yourself back to your reflection.
- In your silence and stillness, let God’s Spirit within you make itself known.
- Do not expect anything to “happen”; put yourself in God’s hands.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraphs 2709-2719 and 2724.