



INCONTRO INTERNAZIONALE  
Carmelitane Scalze- Nemi, 2024

*Camminiamo insieme, Signore*  
Si dialoga per comprendere



## GATHERING OF DISCALCED CARMELITES Nemi, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024

### REVISION OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL TEXT: A TIME OF REBIRTH

I am thankful for the opportunity of meeting you at this important time of revision of your Constitutions. It is a delicate time, a crucial and propitious time; a time to generate, a time of labour, a time to bear life and to be born anew. I will try and offer you some reflections that arise from being with you at this special time, your Hour.

#### 1. REVISION, A TIME OF REBIRTH

«When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because **her hour has arrived**; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world» (John 16:21).

«The Gospel speaks of a certain Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), an elderly man, an authority in Israel, who goes to Jesus to get to know him; and the Lord speaks to him of the need to “be born anew” (cf. v. 3). But what does it mean? **Can one be “reborn”**? Is it possible to return to having the zest, the joy, the wonder of life, even in the face of so much tragedy? This is a fundamental question of our faith, and this is the longing of every true believer: the longing to be reborn, the joy of beginning anew. Do we have this longing? Does each of us have the wish to be born ever anew in order to meet the Lord? Do you have this wish? Indeed, one can easily lose it because, due to so many activities, so many projects to implement, in the end we are short of time and we lose sight of what is fundamental: the inner life of the heart, our spiritual life, our life which is the encounter with the Lord in prayer» (Pope Francis, General Audience, 15<sup>th</sup> November 2017).

« You know that a charism is not an exhibit from a museum, which stands untouched in a display case, to be contemplated and nothing more. Fidelity to the charism, keeping it pure, in no way means

enclosing it in a sealed bottle, as if it were distilled water, to prevent it from becoming contaminated by the outside. No, a charism is not preserved by keeping it aside; it must be opened and allowed to go out, so it may come into contact with reality, with people, with their anxieties and their problems. In this way, in this fruitful encounter with reality, the charism grows, is renewed and reality is also transformed, is transfigured through the spiritual power that this charism bears» (Pope Francis, Address to Participants in General Chapter of the Schönstatt Fathers, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2015).

I believe that considering the revision of your Constitutions only as a technical question of readapting a text, of updating canon law aspects and modernizing language, would mean missing a great opportunity which the Spirit, in this Hour, is offering you. The revision of a Constitutional text, indeed, can be seen in a profound and challenging way in the light of the Hour, that Sacred Time, long-awaited, promised and momentous, that is fulfilled. «Many times on various occasions, Jesus uses the word “hour” to indicate the moment determined by the Father for the fulfilment of the work of salvation»<sup>1</sup>. In John’s Gospel, the mystery of Christ’s Hour is a mystery of labour and delivering, of death and giving life, of grief and love. It is a mystery of wounds opened to let blood and water out, a divine remedy that flows in the depths of the hearts and of the cosmos to wash, heal and recreate. The Hour is the Paschal mystery, the fundamental experience of our life and of our consecration. Now, seen in the light of the Hour, the revision of your Constitutions becomes a **Paschal process**, through which we drink once more at the “spring that flows and runs, although it is night” (St. John of the Cross) and precisely because it is night. This revision, then, becomes a pilgrimage to the origins, to the source that engendered us, to the precious essence of our vocation and of our charism. It is not a question of going back to the past, but of returning to the origins, to the fountainhead of our life, a spring that flows today as yesterday and that claims to be acknowledged and released. Thus is life: if hampered or restrained or left to stagnate, it drains or fades.

Seen in the dynamics of the Hour, the revision of your Constitutions becomes a process in which openness to the Spirit through prayer **allows Him to regenerate you, both as individuals and as a spiritual Family**. A new step in this path of rebirth is made only when it is a step in this direction. A

---

<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *General Audience*, 14<sup>th</sup> January 1998. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paulii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_aud\\_14011998.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paulii/en/audiences/1998/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_14011998.html)

guiding question in our process of discernment could be: which option, here and now, promotes the Spirit's regenerating action in me, in my community and in the Order? Rebirth happens, as a matter of fact, only when our actions, our doings, our choices, our words – and before that, our thoughts and feelings – are capable of cultivating and expressing an increasingly genuine and vibrant vocational, evangelical and charismatic life. Rebirth happens when we, our communities and the whole Order allow the charism to dance freely throughout history, to be expressed effectively and originally through our frail earthen vessels and to be free to transform us with and in His Flame!

Pope Francis' words, addressed to the whole Church, are particularly stimulating and encouraging in our process of rebirth:

« How often we are tempted to keep close to the shore! Yet the Lord calls us to put out into the deep and let down our nets (cf. Lk 5:4). He bids us spend our lives in his service. Clinging to him, we are inspired to put all our charisms at the service of others. May we always feel compelled by his love (2 Corinthians 5:14) and say with Saint Paul: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

[...] Let us acknowledge our weakness, but allow Jesus to lay hold of it and send us too on mission. We are weak, yet we hold a treasure that can enlarge us and make those who receive it better and happier. Boldness and apostolic courage are an essential part of mission. [...]

Like the prophet Jonah, we are constantly tempted to flee to a safe haven. It can have many names: individualism, spiritualism, living in a little world, addiction, intransigence, the rejection of new ideas and approaches, dogmatism, nostalgia, pessimism, hiding behind rules and regulations. We can resist leaving behind a familiar and easy way of doing things. Yet the challenges involved can be like the storm, the whale, the worm that dried the gourd plant or the wind and sun that burned Jonah's head. For us, as for him, they can serve to bring us back to the God of tenderness, who invites us to set out ever anew on our journey.

God is eternal newness. He impels us constantly to set out anew, to pass beyond what is familiar, to the fringes and beyond. He takes us

to where humanity is most wounded, where men and women, beneath the appearance of a shallow conformity, continue to seek an answer to the question of life's meaning. God is not afraid! He is fearless! He is always greater than our plans and schemes. Unafraid of the fringes, he himself became a fringe (cf. *Phil* 2:6-8; *Jn* 1:14). So if we dare to go to the fringes, we will find him there; indeed, he is already there. Jesus is already there, in the hearts of our brothers and sisters, in their wounded flesh, in their troubles and in their profound desolation. He is already there»<sup>2</sup>.

### 1.1 Rebirth: a time of crisis, a time of change

There is no birth without pain. There is no rebirth without desert. There is no change without a crisis. An Order, a spiritual Family, undergoing a rebirth is inevitably a Family that suffers from the pain of pruning and of labour. It is a family on its pilgrim way, on a path that implies the experience of the desert, of walking with no money bag, no sack, and no sandals (see Luke 10:4). A path that requires leaving behind what is known and tested to venture into the unknown, *without* most certainties acquired in the past. This Family is undergoing a **transformation**, which is generally lived as a **crisis** by those who undergo it.

But what does the word «crisis» really mean?

«A critical time, a deep distress – from the Greek: *krisis* decision, from *krinein* to separate, to choose. The word *crisis* fills our talks and appears in a variety of contexts that range from the turning point in an acute disease to the life of a government, the distress caused by certain troubles and the cyclical pathology of the economic structures. This is not bad, although this word does not sound pleasant. It denotes a tough and unpleasant time we would gladly avoid. But its profound etymology reveals that a crisis is but a time of choice and of strong determination»<sup>3</sup>.

Today, Consecrated Life is undeniably experiencing a **deep crisis**. Reduction in number and forces is widespread and affects various spiritual families. This is not only evident and relevant to us, but it also compels us to proceed

---

<sup>2</sup> FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, Rome, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2018, 130-131.134-135. <sup>3</sup> Original Italian definition taken from: <https://unaparolaalgiorno.it/significato/C/crisi>

with resolution towards a change in how we are present in the world and in our structures, allowing our presence to gain new significance. We won't be as we were 50 or 20 or 10 or 5 years ago. We are called to **embrace the crisis**, to face it bravely, to let it challenge us, to learn to understand it and **interpret** it. Crisis is a message, an opportunity. A time to choose, to make bold decisions. It is a time to **distinguish** and **discern**. God attracts us through the crisis; He allures us and speaks to our heart: will we be able to listen, to discern, and to follow Him?

*So I will allure her;*

*I will lead her  
into the desert  
and speak to  
her heart.*

*From there I will give her  
the vineyards she had, and  
the valley of Achor as a door  
of hope. She shall respond  
there as in the days of her  
youth, when she came up  
from the land of Egypt.*

(Hosea 2:13-14)

Will we be able to let Him *give us back our vineyards*? Will we be able to let Him change our valleys of Achor into doors of hope?

## **1.2. Body and parts of the body**

As we members of Consecrated Life go through this time of rebirth, of exodus in the desert, of a crisis leading to a transformation; as you experience this unique and blessed opportunity which God offers you in your spiritual Family history, St. Paul's image of the body and of the parts of it may help shed light on our process of transformation and rebirth.

«As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we

were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.

Now the body is not a single part, but many. If a foot should say, "Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. Or if an ear should say, "Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body," it does not for this reason belong any less to the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God placed the parts, each one of them, in the body as he intended. If they were all one part, where would the body be? But as it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you." Indeed, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are all the more necessary, and those parts of the body that we consider less honorable we surround with greater honor, and our less presentable parts are treated with greater propriety, whereas our more presentable parts do not need this. But God has so constructed the body as to give greater honor to a part that is without it, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the parts may have the same concern for one another. If (one) part suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy» (1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

Referring to St. Paul's words, I will share part of the experience of my Institute, the Consolata Missionary Sisters. I don't know if this experience will resonate with your Order and Spiritual Family... we'll see.

We, the Consolata Missionary Sisters, were founded by the Blessed Giuseppe Allamano in Turin in 1910 for the *mission ad gentes* under the sign of the Consolation. In the first decades of our life, we spread worldwide, thanks to a considerable increase in number. Each Circumscription/Region was organized as an individual **body**, with different vital sectors representing its parts. For a long time, each Circumscription wrote its history as an individual body and as a part of the sole body of the Institute.

In the 1980s a reduction in number begins. It carries with it the challenge, the tension to preserve the various life and activity sectors of each Circumscription, of each body within the bigger body of the Institute. Some "sectors" start to merge, such as formation (international juniorate,

continental novitiate and juniorate etc.). Over the years, the reduction becomes increasingly evident and significant. Meanwhile, the Institute hears the call to redefine our presence in the world to grant a better quality of vocational, spiritual, charismatic and missionary life. In this process, we started feeling the urge to go back **from an Institute as a body composed of bodies, to an Institute as a body composed of parts**. Circumscriptions merge. The path ahead of us was no longer that of individual *Circumscriptions/Bodies*, each of them including all or most parts of a whole body – that is the various areas of the Institute's life. Instead, we were aiming at *Circumscriptions/Parts of the body* putting their peculiar characteristics at the service of the *sole body* of the Institute. That is not all. As we were implementing the legal merging, we heard a strong call to carry out a more profound unification: the call to unite our hearts around our Charism. Without this union, the legal redefinition would have been fruitless. Yes, we heard the call to return into Mary's womb, our Mother, whom we venerate under the sweet name of Consolata [Our Lady of Consolation] and to be reborn a **sole body, a small and united Institute**, in which each Circumscription, with its own history, brings its peculiar quality. An Institute constituted of parts that cannot and need not have within themselves all the characteristics of a whole body, but that humbly offer their peculiar quality of a hand, a foot, a heart, a head, a liver, a kidney...

What matters is not being many or being present in several Nations. What matters is **to be what we are called to be within the body of the Institute** and to offer to the body of the Institute the charismatic service that each, as unique and distinctive part, can offer. Even if it is only one service. Even if we should be highly reduced in number. Our weakness and reduction in number are what bring us back to the essential. Throughout salvation history, God acts mostly in contexts of weakness, desert, barrenness, illness, old age, fall, sin, meaningless and crisis. Just there, He comes and saves; He rescues and regenerates us. Therefore, the reduction in number and the fact of being little and weak are the acceptable time and place, blessed by God for a rebirth. These are the occasion where God takes special care of us and transforms us. Are we aware of this? Crises often do not ask to be solved, rather **interpreted**, seen with God's perspective, wrapped in His tenderness, and looked through a contemplative eye. What is God giving me and us in this crisis? How does God intend to transform me and us, maybe in an unprecedented way?

A common risk is that, as when must turning into good wine boils and

ferments, a crisis could give rise in us and within us to *bombs* of anxiety and aggressiveness. When we are in a crisis, we can sadly end up seeing the tension caused by it with mistrust, blaming one another or falling into the deep dark hole of depression and defeatism, crushed by the feeling of powerlessness and of our inability to *solve* problems. But as we said before, crises do not ask to be solved, rather interpreted. They challenge us to find the hidden message that brings to a transformation. We won't be able to solve many of the problems facing us, we won't find solutions. But we can accept these problems, make room for them, wrap them in tenderness, keep them open to fruitfulness, and prevent suffering from turning into evil.

God purifies us through crises; He brings us back to **who we are**, He calls us back to the **core**, to Himself. We won't go back to before, but we will be transformed into new creatures, into new wine. We should be careful not to fall into the risk that Gamaliel indicated: to find ourselves fighting against God<sup>3</sup>, wishing to go back to the past, to return to the old wineskins, clinging to the pictures of past time that no longer is and opposing true rebirth!

Indeed we have to fight, but not against God! We have to fight against all negative powers that try to hindrance our rebirth. Evil opposes the process of rebirth; it attacks this process on multiple fronts, both on a personal and a community scale. Evil does not want us to follow a path of regeneration and transformation; it does not want us to be little again in Mary's, our Mother's, womb. It does not want us to see crisis as an opportunity to transform, to reawaken, a call to exodus. It wishes us to keep our eyes down so that we cannot see the Morning Star. If suffering is not accepted, if it is rejected, it swells the ranks of negative thought and it becomes an *evil* that brings death. When suffering is embraced, wrapped in tenderness, accepted with undefended and unarmed love, a love like Christ's, it becomes bearer of life. Under the sign of the Hour. Under the sign of Easter.

## 2. REVISION, A SPACE OF SYNODALITY

The revision of the Constitutions may be a blessed opportunity to start a synodal process. And a synodal process is, first of all, a spiritual process.

Pope Francis pointed out in various occasions the risks involved in a synodal process that doesn't start with a listening attitude and a personal and

---

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Acts 5:39.



community dialogue with the Holy Spirit:

«The Synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God... That word summons us to discernment and it brings light to that process. It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit»<sup>4</sup>.

## **2.1 Some essential attitudes for synodality<sup>5</sup>**

### **2.1.1 Listening**

Pope Francis has affirmed that: «A synodal Church is a Church which listens. [...] The faithful People, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other; and all listening to the Holy Spirit» (Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015). The International Theological Commission explained this central role of listening as follows: «Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people's positions, "for the general good" (1 Corinthians 12:7)» (ICT, Syn., no. 111).

### **2.1.2 Consensus**

Consensus does not mean uniformity or a democratic majority. If this was the case, this would ignore the fact that the Holy Spirit can speak through the words of one single member of the People of God or a small group. Rather, consensus in synodal key refers to the process of listening to one another in an atmosphere of prayer and interior freedom, in order to discern the common path that God is calling us to in a spirit of communion,

---

<sup>4</sup> POPE FRANCIS, 10.10.2021, <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/spiritual-and-liturgical-resources.html>

<sup>5</sup> This chapter is taken from: <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/glossary1.html>

guided by the Holy Spirit.

### ***2.1.3 Discernment***

The Synodal Process entails a discernment process oriented towards consensus. We listen to each other in order to discern what God is saying to all of us. This kind of discernment is not only a onetime event, but ultimately a way of life, grounded in Christ, following the lead of the Holy Spirit, living for the greater glory of God. Communal discernment helps to build flourishing and resilient communities for the mission of the Church today. Discernment is a grace from God, but it requires our human involvement in simple ways: praying, reflection, paying attention to one's inner disposition, listening and talking to one another in an authentic, meaningful, and welcoming way. Discernment in this spiritual key plants seeds that can bear the fruits of fraternity, healing, communion, mission, and more. God comes to lead and inspire us as we seek to discern His will.

### ***2.1.4 Mission***

The Second Vatican Council affirms that «the pilgrim Church is missionary by nature» (Ad Gentes 2). The mission therefore expresses the deepest identity of the Church, which exists to proclaim the Gospel to all people. In a time of rapid change, Pope Francis invites the Church to rediscover her missionary nature, establishing herself in all places on earth in a permanent state of mission (cf. EG 25).

### ***2.1.5 Participation***

A synodal Church is a Church of participation and co-responsibility. In exercising synodality she is called to give expression to the participation of all, according to each one's calling, ministry and charism. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and called to serve each other through the gifts they have all received from the Holy Spirit.

In the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will. So, in coming to formulate their own decisions, Pastors must listen carefully to the views and experiences of the faithful.

### **2.1.6 Communion**

Communion is the spiritual, sacramental and juridical bond that unites pastors with one another, pastors with the faithful and faithful with one another, on the model of Trinitarian communion. This bond, founded on common Baptism, is realized, manifested and strengthened in the common participation in the Eucharist.

## **2.2 The Spiritual Conversation<sup>6</sup>**

Spiritual conversation focuses on the quality of one's capacity to listen as well as the quality of the words spoken. This means paying attention to the spiritual movements in oneself and in the other person during the conversation, which requires being attentive to more than simply the words expressed. This quality of attention is an act of respecting, welcoming, and being hospitable to others as they are. It is an approach that takes seriously what happens in the hearts of those who are conversing. There are two necessary attitudes that are fundamental to this process: active listening and speaking from the heart.

The aim of spiritual conversation is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome, so that people can express themselves more freely. This helps them to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others and speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment.

The focus of spiritual conversation is on the person to whom we are listening, on ourselves, and what we are experiencing at a spiritual level. The fundamental question is: "What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?"

#### **a) Active Listening**

- Through active listening, the goal is to try and understand others as they are. We listen not only to what the other person says, but also to what he or she means and what he or she might be experiencing

---

<sup>6</sup> This chapter is taken from: [https://www.dor.org/wp-content/uploads/EN\\_Step\\_6\\_Spiritual-Conversation.pdf](https://www.dor.org/wp-content/uploads/EN_Step_6_Spiritual-Conversation.pdf)

on a deeper level. This means listening with a heart that is open and receptive.

- This way of listening is “active” because it involves paying attention to more than one level of expression of the other. In order to do so, one must participate actively in the listening process.
- We listen to the other while he or she is speaking, and do not focus on what we are going to say afterwards.
- We welcome, without judgment, what the other person says, no matter what we think about the person or what they have said. Each person is an expert on his or her own life. We must listen in a way that is “more disposed to giving a good interpretation to what the other says than condemning it as false” (Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius, no. 22).
- We must believe that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the other person.
- Welcoming without prejudice is a deep way of welcoming the other in his or her radical uniqueness.
- Active listening is letting oneself be influenced by the other and learning from the other.
- Active listening is demanding because it requires humility, openness, patience, and involvement, but it is an effective way of taking others seriously.

#### b) Speaking from the Heart

- This means sincerely expressing oneself, one’s experience, one’s sentiments and thoughts.
- It involves speaking about one’s own experience and what one truly thinks and feels.

- We take responsibility not only for what we say, but also for what we feel. We do not blame others for what we feel.
- We share the truth as we see it and as we live it, but do not impose it.
- Speaking from the heart is offering a generous gift to the other, in return for being actively listened to.
- This process is greatly enriched by a regular personal practice of prayerful self-examen. Without a habit of discernment and knowledge of oneself and how God is present in one's life, one cannot actively listen or speak from the heart.

In summary, what are the desired attitudes for spiritual conversation?

- Listen actively and attentively
- Listen to others without judgment
- Pay attention not only to the words, but also to the tone and feelings of the one who is speaking
- Avoid the temptation of using the time to prepare what you will say instead of listening.
- Speak intentionally
- Express your experiences, thoughts, and feelings as clearly as you can
- Listen actively to yourself, mindful of your own thoughts and feelings as you speak
- Monitor possible tendencies to be self-centred when speaking

#### c) Carrying out Spiritual Conversation: The Basic Steps

Estimated time: About 2 hours

1. Preparation: Before coming to the group meeting, participants carry out a time of personal prayer and reflection over the question at hand. Usually some background information as well as some points and questions for prayer are provided. An adequate time of about 30 min to 1 hour can be set aside for this. At the end of the prayer period, participants take stock of the fruits of their prayer and decide what they will share with the group.
2. Gathering: Ideally each group can comprise about 6-8 persons. A facilitator is appointed for the group meeting and he or she welcomes all the participants. An opening prayer is said, and each person may share one or two words that describe his or her interior state at that moment. The facilitator may also briefly recap the sequence of steps as below. Usually volunteers are also requested for note-taking and time-keeping.
3. The First Round: Each person takes turns to share about what happened during the personal prayer time and shares the fruits of his or her prayer. Everyone is given the same amount of time to speak (e.g. 3 minutes). The focus is to listen to one another rather than simply think about what one wants to say. Participants are invited to open their hearts and minds to listen to the one who is speaking, and be attentive to how the Holy Spirit is moving. Between each person, the group may take a brief pause to absorb what was said. During this round there are no discussions or interactions between participants except to ask for clarification about a word or phrase if necessary.
4. Silence: A time of silence is observed, during which participants attend to how they have been moved during the first round, what struck them as they listened, and what were the notable points of consolation or desolation if any.
5. The Second Round: Participants share what emerged within them during the time of silence. No one is obliged to speak, and participants can share spontaneously without any particular order. This is not a time for discussing or refuting what someone else says, nor for bringing up what participants forgot to mention in the first round. Rather, it is an opportunity to respond to questions like:

- How was I affected by what I heard?
- Is there a common thread in what was shared? Is there something missing that I had expected would be said?
- Was I especially touched by a particular sharing?
- Have I received any particular insight or revelation? What is it?
- Where did I experience a sense of harmony with others as we shared with one another? This second round enables the group to realize what unites them.

It is here that signs of the action of the Holy Spirit in the group begin to manifest themselves, and the conversation becomes an experience of shared discernment.

6. Silence: Another time of silence is observed for participants to note how they were moved during the second round, and particularly what key points seem to be emerging in the group.

7. The Third Round: Participants share what emerged from the preceding time of silence. They may also take note of the ways in which the Holy Spirit may be moving the group. A prayer of thanksgiving can conclude the conversation.

8. Review and Report: Finally the group can briefly review and reflect on how the conversation proceeded, and decide on the main points they will report from the conversation.

### **3. REVISION, A TIME TO REMOVE YOUR SANDALS**

«Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There an angel of the LORD appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed. So Moses decided, "I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned." When the LORD saw him coming over to look

at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father," he continued, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.» (Exodus 3:1-6).

«In a culture paradoxically suffering from anonymity and at the same time obsessed with the details of other people's lives, shamelessly given over to morbid curiosity, the Church must look more closely and sympathetically at others whenever necessary. In our world, ordained ministers and other pastoral workers can make present the fragrance of Christ's closeness and his personal gaze. The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Ex 3:5*). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life. » (Pope Francis, EG 169).

The image of the burning bush can help us contemplate the peculiar time we are living. The time of revision is also a time to return to the source, it is the Hour that gets us nearer to the spring of our life, that brings us back to the Sacred Fire that attracted us one day, that has warmed us since and that continues to attract us, to shade light and warmth on us and to purify us. It is a flame that burns but does not consume, does not destroy. It is a flame that sets free. When we are reached by this flame, we are called to **remove our sandals**. When contact with God kindles our heart, it sets us free from defences, certainties and ties. It frees us from the measures we adopted - sometimes through difficult, uneven and painful processes - in order to protect us from what can hurt or "stain" us in our journey. Contact with the Sacred brings us back to being bare. Yes, we are reborn bare, never dressed! Contact with the Sacred brings us back into contact with the ground. First of all, the ground of our human nature; then the ground of other people's human nature, a nature loved by God, so much so that He took it on Himself and consecrated it with His Love. When the Lord sends His disciples, he provides them with the "without" kit: «Go on your way; behold, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Carry no money bag, no sack, no sandals [...] (Luke 10: 3-4). What are we carrying with us in this process of revision and rebirth? Which money bags, sacks and sandals? What are the



certainities that I struggle to leave behind? Which things do I wish to defend at all costs? In what matters am I willing to persuade the others? Which battles do I wish to win? Christ sends his disciples as lambs among wolves: weak and defenceless creatures, whose strength is God's power. A God that one day said: «Put your sword into its scabbard » (John 18:11). What swords am I carrying with me? They may be of all shapes and dimensions, big and conspicuous, small and thin. And each of us carries some of them. If we believe we are not carrying swords, it only means that we are not aware of it. And if we are not aware of it, sooner or later they will turn up and act, whether or not we give them permission to. The time of rebirth, the time of the Hour, is a time to strip of weapons and defences. It is a time to be bare.

In the letter that Fr. Miguel sent you on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2024, he writes of a «sincere communication that opens us to reciprocal understanding and makes us barefoot so that we can understand the other person (empathy) on their ground. (...). Such humble and obedient (*obaudire*) attitude encourages to hope for a fruitful gathering, and not only a clash of brilliant and resolute ideas». I wish you with all my heart to have the courage to walk “barefoot”! This is what all of us need, after all: we need the humble courage of remaining bare, unarmed, of listening with obedience to the Spirit, of being able to hear His voice and follow it, just when it messes up all our plans and makes our swords fall to the ground. We need to let ourselves be converted and changed and relieved of heavy armours that can impede our personal and community process towards the freedom God is willing to give us. Sisters, ***discalced*** Carmelites, help us walk in such a manner, with no sandals, on the sacred ground, kindled by our love story with God and with the brothers and sisters! Teach us with your example that the ascent to Mount Carmel can be performed only barefoot, so that the ardent desire of God's Heart may touch and “wound” our flesh, unfold our humanity, free our desire for Him; and so that these two desires may meet, embrace and merge – with no separation, no barriers, no armours – in one sole flame of love.

Sr Simona Brambilla, MC  
Nemi, 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024