

**St Elizabeth of the Trinity
Secular Carmelite
Community, Nottingham
Online Retreat 2020**

Friday 24th July – Sunday 26th July

**The Rule of Albert: its relevance to us
as a Secular Carmelite community and as
individuals**

General Information

The main aim of the retreat is to examine the Rule of Albert and ask how it can teach us new ways of being the St. Elizabeth of the Trinity Community. As part of this, we may learn new ways of being secular Carmelites in our own families and communities.

U-Tube videos which you may wish to watch before or during the retreat are:

As background to The Rule of Albert (best watched before the retreat):

<https://ocarm.org/en/multimedia/rule-carmel>

For Session 3:

Brant Pitre on “Martha and Mary” (approx. 8 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y1-GWFcZMo&t=23s>

The Order of Our Lady of Silence on contemplation (approx. 5 mins)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgNYyPR1IMA>

All sessions are voluntary

The link to access the Zoom sessions is the one Louise set up for Morning Prayer NOT the link Heather set up for the 17th July

Zoom Retreat 24-26th July 2020: The Rule of St Albert and the Secular Carmelite Life

Friday		
6.30pm		Log in and welcome
7.00pm	Martin	Evening Prayer
7.25pm	Martin	Introduction to the Retreat Read through the Rule of St Albert together (10 mins) and explain we will use the three parts of the charism Prayer, Community and Service to look at the Rule. If you want to check this out see: http://www.carmelite.org/carmelite-spirituality/charism , Any questions
8.15pm		Break
8.45pm	Louise	Compline
Saturday		
9.00am		Mass online individually
10.00am		Log in
10.15am	Martin	Morning Prayer
10.45am	Martin	Discussion 1: Prayer and Spiritual Combat Covered in paragraphs 5, 10,11, 14, 16,18, 19, 20, 21 of The Rule
11.45am		Lunch Break
2.00pm	Louise	Discussion 2: Community Covered in paragraphs 4,6, 7, 12,13,15,16, 22,23 of Rule
3.00pm		Free time for personal study/prayer.
5.00pm	Louise	Evening Prayer
8.45pm	Jane	Compline
Sunday		
10.00am		Log in
10.15am	Heather	Morning Prayer
10.45am – 11.45am	Jane	Discussion 3: Service Not covered in Rule. Why not? Eremitic origins, but developed when the monks moved to Europe and had to adapt - explore how this adaptation is now enshrined in the Constitutions (1990 and 1991) and/or in the Christocentric nature of the Rule - i.e. to follow Christ implies service - so maybe look at how enclosed nuns see service?
12 noon		Mass online – location tbc
1.00pm		Lunch Break
2-3pm	Martin (chair)	Concluding Discussion/ round up of retreat. Holding in balance prayer (mostly solitary in Carmel), community and service. The tension of the hermit origins and the need to serve a community and evangelize. Different people find different aspects easier - how do we try to maintain the balance in our community days? Do we manage this? Suggestions for change

Video on Rule <https://ocarm.org/en/multimedia/rule-carmel>

Session 1: Prayer and Spiritual Combat

- 1.) **Please read** para 16 in the general instruction to the Divine Office, in Vol 1. If you don't have access the first para is as follows:

“By offering praise to God in the Hours , the Church joins in singing the canticle of praise which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven; it is a foretaste of the heavenly praise sung unceasingly before the throne of God and the Lamb, as described by John in Revelation. Our intimate union with the Church in Heaven is put into effect when “with common rejoicing we celebrate together the praise of the Divine Majesty”.

- 2.) Man's life on earth is a time of trial, Job 1.7. This earthly life is a time of trial and struggle, repose is not for the present, but the final fulfilment. Quoted in “The Word of God and Carmel.”

- 3.) Put God's armour on so as to be able to resist the devil's tactics. For it is not against human enemies that we have to struggle. “Ephesians 11.”

- 4.) Your strength will lie in silence and hope. Is 30.14. “Be joyful in hope, persevere in hardship, keep praying regularly.” Rom 12.12.

Session 2: Community (2 documents)

Community Life in the Secular Order

Please read the attached extract from the article by Heather *Communion & Community in the Secular Order* and the note, quotes, and questions below before *Discussion 2* of the retreat.

The Rule of St Albert

Notes:

- Over 800 years old; lived out in many ways over the centuries by men and women; inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- Plan of action/ vision, a jumping off point, too short! Points us in the right direction
- All called to be saints, mystic, contemplatives by our Baptism
- All need a rule of life. There are many paths: Carmel is the way we have chosen.
- Carmelites can choose their apostolate, our prayer (other than Mass and Office) and our type of community
- Firmly rooted in everyday life but open to God.
- Need support of those trying to live the same way.
- Bearing each other's burdens
- Sharing on a deeper level
- Formed in prayer
- Training in the spiritual life through study of scripture and the lives of the saints especially the Carmelite saints
- Spiritual direction and encouragement
- Healing.

Quotes to think about (choose any that help you think about community):

Proverbs 2,1-5

*...if you accept my words
and treasure up my commandments within you,
making your ear attentive to wisdom
and inclining your heart to understanding;
if you indeed cry out for insight,
and raise your voice for understanding;
if you seek it like silver,
and search for it as for hidden treasures—
then you will understand the fear of the Lord
and find the knowledge of God.*

St John of the Cross:

1. *However high be your endeavours, unless you renounce and subjugate your own will - unless you forget yourself and all that pertains to yourself - not one step will you advance on the road to perfection."*
2. *If you do not learn to deny yourself, you can make no progress in perfection."*
3. *The virtuous soul that is alone and without a master is like a long lone burning coal; it will grow colder rather than hotter."*

4. *The soul that journey's to God but does not shake off its cares and quiet its appetites, is like someone who drags a cart of dirt uphill.*

DECREE ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY (APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM) Pope Paul VI

As sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, the laity have their work cut out for them in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness. In the manner of the men and women who helped Paul in spreading the Gospel (cf. Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3) the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18). Strengthened by active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they are eager to do their share of the apostolic works of that community. They bring to the Church people who perhaps are far removed from it, earnestly cooperate in presenting the word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction, and offer their special skills to make the care of souls and the administration of the temporalities of the Church more efficient and effective. *Paragraph 10*

ON THE VOCATION AND THE MISSION OF THE LAY FAITHFUL IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD (CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI). Pope John Paul II

Paragraph 17 (part) – The Life of Holiness in the World

The vocation of the lay faithful to holiness implies that life according to the Spirit expresses itself in a particular way in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities. Once again the apostle admonishes us: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col 3:17). Applying the apostle's words to the lay faithful, the Council categorically affirms: "Neither family concerns nor other secular affairs should be excluded from their religious programme of life"[45]. Likewise, the Synod Fathers have said: "The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfil his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ"[46].

The vocation to holiness must be recognized and lived by the lay faithful, first of all as an undeniable and demanding obligation and as a shining example of the infinite love of the Father that has regenerated them in his own life of holiness. Such a vocation, then, ought to be called an essential and inseparable element of the new life of Baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity. At the same time the vocation to holiness is intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the Church and in the world.

Paragraph 29 (part) – Group forms of participation

Church communion, already present and at work in the activities of the individual, finds its specific expression in the lay faithful's working together in groups, that is, in activities done with others in the course of their responsible participation in the life and mission of the Church.

In recent days the phenomenon of lay people associating among themselves has taken on a character of particular variety and vitality. In some ways lay associations have always been present throughout the Church's history as various confraternities, third orders and sodalities testify even today. However, in modern times such lay groups have received a special stimulus,

resulting in the birth and spread of a multiplicity of group forms: associations, groups, communities, movements. We can speak of a new era of group endeavours of the lay faithful. In fact, "alongside the traditional forming of associations, and at times coming from their very roots, movements and new sodalities have sprouted, with a specific feature and purpose, so great is the richness and the versatility of resources that the Holy Spirit nourishes in the ecclesial community, and so great is the capacity of initiative and the generosity of our lay people"[105].

Peter Kwasniewski - Catholic writer and Benedictine Oblate

Visiting a good monastery is always a challenge and a consolation. On the one hand, it shows us how little we are actually giving to God of what we could give to Him; it points up our lack of generosity, our inconsistency and inconstancy, our petty pleasures and disorganized priorities. On the other hand, it reminds us that God is greater than our problems, that His grace is sufficient for our weakness, and that He is calling us gently but insistently to embrace more self-discipline and self-denial for the sake of a fuller life in Him... A good monastery will remind visitors of the heavenly Jerusalem, where "God is all in all" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:28).

Questions to think about which we could discuss:

1. What is your experience of The Rule and its plan for community life?
2. How has it changed you and the way you live?
3. What is good about our Carmelite Community and how could we improve?
4. What other communities do you belong to e.g. family, parish, other groups? How do they affect each other?



Communion & Community in the Secular Order: Heather Ward

Christian community is built on an understanding of communion – *koinonia* or *sobornost* – a recognition that we are in relationship with one another as children of one Father, brothers and sisters of an Elder Brother. We are united in “bonds of being” that are the deepest, most fundamental realities of our lives. The earliest tradition of the Church has sayings such as “Whoever gains a brother, gains God.”; “your brother is your life.” This can be put the opposite way, too, “When God comes to a person, that person looks round for a brother.” This communion is a reality even if we live alone throughout our lives; it’s the basis for the possibility of intercession, when we are before God all our sisters & brothers are with us.

Community, therefore, makes this communion a visible, practical reality; it builds upon communion, helping us to “become what we are”. This is important for us as Secular Carmelites to remember – even when we can’t attend community meetings we can still help to build it up by living in awareness of our communion, if you like putting our spiritual weight behind it even when absent. Communion means that, even when we don’t see our fellow members, we are still “bear(ing) one another’s burdens, and so fulfil(ling) the law of Christ”. We hear a lot about community these days, so it’s good to remind ourselves that what we intend by it isn’t always the same as the secular approach.

The Church is a communion, too, before it is a community. We use the term in many ways eg we belong to a parish, that’s in communion with a diocese, that is in turn in communion with Rome and makes us in communion with every parish & diocese in the world. We may never experience any concrete relationship with anything beyond our own parish or diocese but that doesn’t make the bond any less real.

BUT, and there is a but, human beings don’t operate on this scale, we’re born into families not city-size tribes; we need the small-scale, intimate group in order to learn to love and appreciate our belonging to the wider family. Remember that Peanuts cartoon, “I just *love* humanity. It’s only people I can’t stand!” The Church is an extension of the Incarnation, it recognises our need for the human-scale, hence its emphasis upon the community-life of parishes etc and its hesitation about totally hermit existence: “If you live alone, whose feet will you wash?” (St Basil the Great.)

What’s true of the Church is obviously true, too, of Carmel. When St Teresa formed her new house she wanted a group whose size would make it easier to make communion a concrete, visible reality – as it was for the apostles gathered around Jesus. And they were to be truly *sisters*, living at this level of spiritual truth – hence her concern for banishing all concepts of “honour” and social status. And I think that her insistence on spiritual love and spiritual friendship and loving all equally is based intuitively on the idea of communion. I love my sister because she and I are children of the one Father, loved & called to union by the one Beloved, called to share the life of this group regardless of personal preferences and inclinations.

Let’s look now at the more practical level. For Teresa and John community enables the spiritual friendship they considered essential for perseverance along the Carmelite way – a friendship intended to support and encourage us in all that daily life throws at us.

The importance of Community meetings.

For us, our community meeting is our most visible, concrete realization of communion. Also

1. It is a major means of on-going formation

- ✚ Meetings are our primary way of getting to grips with Carmelite teaching & its implications for daily life.
- ✚ They help form us in prayer.
- ✚ They form us in love & patience; in increased compassion & acceptance (including of ourselves).

Community meetings are demanding just because we don't meet because of personal attraction and preferences. They ask us to look beyond/beneath these to the reality of communion, to see each member in their truth, in their woundedness, in their desire for God & goodness, in their being loved by God. Slowly, therefore we come to love them for who they are & not for what we'd like them to be in order to meet our needs, our expectations, our idea of a Carmelite etc. This is the truth St Therese gained from living in community with some very damaged people.

- ✚ They form us in detachment & the humility coming from self-knowledge.

There's nothing like being in a group for discovering our shortcomings – and excesses. So meetings provide an excellent school in detachment, which I think has 3 stages.

The instinctive initial approach to meetings is to think of them in relation to what we get from them. That's natural – we want to discern, to learn, to grow, so it's normal to look at the meetings from the perspective of what they'll do to foster this. In the second stage we've begun to think in terms of what we can offer rather than receive. But it doesn't stop there because this isn't yet detachment. So often, one way or another, the focus is still on the self: we need to feel effective, useful members of the group. We're still "getting something out of it" at the level of feelings & satisfaction. If we stick with it we can go beyond this to a detachment coming out of living in *faith*. We go to meetings because we believe God has called us to the Order, to this community; we don't need to see what he is doing with us, for us, through us – that's *his* business. Our business is simply to make ourselves available.

2. The meeting is a place of healing.

We come to any group bringing with us the memories, the gifts, the wounds that come from belonging (or not belonging) to other groups. So we come with expectations, whether we realise this or not. We bring the coping & avoidance strategies we've used to deal with the situations that hurt or threatened us. We bring the self-image these groups have helped to develop, the expectations of others' reactions to us. We can find ourselves playing the same role we played in our families, among class-mates, among colleagues; or, if we're aware of this, we can bring a determination to counteract this image that is just as governed by it.

Bringing all this into awareness, or letting it emerge in prayer, means we can let the group be a place where all this is healed - here I don't need to adopt that strategy, play up to that image, fear rejection or judgement. But also here I can find a loving context in which to discover more of the "dark" side of myself without shame or condemnation; here I can be happy to belong to the communion of sinners.

Session 3:

The Life of Prayer and Service – making time for both

Intro

Service third part of the Carmelite charism, but unlike prayer and community it is not an explicit feature of the Rule because the Rule was written for a group of men living in caves in the desert.

Service in the sense of practical help to those outside the community is still not a feature of the cloistered nuns and we may have time to explore this idea more fully. Unfortunately, we will not be using a Carmelite video, but one from a male cloistered order - Our Lady of Silence.

For the friars, service became a necessity when they arrived in Europe in the 13th century and found the Carthusians had already taken on the role of praying for the Church. To survive the friars had to become mendicant, or begging, and relied on charitable giving from their evangelising and care for the poor. They simply did not have the resources or patronage to set up an enclosed order of men.

The tension that arose from the Rule's emphasis on prayer and the demands of a mendicant life is exemplified in Nicholas the Gaul's impassioned Fiery Arrow, where he questions the wisdom of a contemplative charism being distorted to accommodate the active life.

Joseph Chalmers, Prior General 2001-7, expresses his understanding of the tension and the reconciliation as:

"The core value of Carmel ,that holds all other values together, is contemplation....In pastoral situations there are innumerable things to do and we could very easily get caught up in a whirl of activity and lose sight of our goal, which is to play our part in continuing Christ's mission on earth...Cultivating a silent heart is important in order that our activity comes from a still point within us" (School of Prayer, p.278)

In this session, I have selected some quotes from the two videos on the contemplative and active (=service) lives and hope we can use these to explore the relationship of prayer and action in our own understanding of Carmel, our own lives and the life of the Nottingham secular community.

Martha and Mary

The relevant video is found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Y1-GWFcZMo&t=23s>

You can't have actual Christian action, in other words, that's animated by the love of God if you don't live a life of contemplation. And, on the other hand, all contemplation (love of God) should ultimately be ordered toward love of neighbour.

Some religious orders look more like Martha, some look more like Mary, but they all have to have both.....the mystery of love (love of God, love of neighbour) involves both action and contemplation.

So, every Christian.... most people will tend to identify with either Martha or Mary (just because we all have different temperaments).

(We may be more active or more contemplative at different times, but all Christian action springs from contemplation, which puts us in touch with our baptismal gift which is the source of all)

Jesus rebukes Martha, but he doesn't rebuke Mary who's sitting at his feet and listening. And this is why I think it's helpful to recognize that, although Origen's right about the symbolic application of active and contemplative, there's a dimension to Mary's action that Jesus is focusing on, and namely this: **that her activity is animated and driven by anxiety and distraction.** That's where the problem is. It's not in the service, it's in the way she's serving.

Because if you're engaging in action and you're not focused on Christ, then that action is not going to be animated by the love of Christ, it's not going to be animated by the love of Jesus. So, the one thing that's absolutely necessary is prayer, prayer and discipleship, following the Lord. And when that happens, all the action will be ordered toward Christ,

Just as Brant Pitre says, so The Rule (2) says "Many and varied are the ways in which our forefathers laid down how everyone, whatever his station or **the kind of religious observance** he has chosen, should live a life of **allegiance to Jesus Christ.....**"

Secular Carmelites are called to strive to make prayer penetrate their whole existence, in order to walk in the presence of the living God (cf. 1 K 18:14), through the constant exercise of faith, hope and love, in such a way that the whole of their life is a prayer, a search for union with God. **The goal will be to achieve the integration of experience of God with the experience of life:** to be contemplatives in prayer and the fulfilment of their own mission. (OCD Constitutions **17**)

The Dominican motto: "Contemplata aliis trader" or "to share with others what we have first received (in contemplation)"

Sometimes contemplative prayer may feel like time away from doing service and sometimes service may feel like time away from prayer. This causes tension and it is needful to make an "honest review" of life to ensure the two are in healthy balance.

Thomas Aquinas (following Augustine) taught the "mixed" life-style was the highest because it best reflects the life of Christ and so best reflects the life of the Church.

A closer look at contemplation:

Our Lady of Silence

The relevant video is found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgNYyPR1IMA>

Eucharistic adoration is our greatest method of giving to the poor...we intercede for all

Allowing our hearts to become "like the heart of Jesus gives a true understanding of man, especially the poor"

"A silent offering of broken bread for all the world"

Contemplation is "Water which fertilizes land and allows it to bear fruit", so contemplation leads to action

St Basil: "When you become God's in the measure He wants, He Himself will know how to bestow you on others. Unless He prefer, for your greater advantage, to keep you all for Himself"

The contemplative orders are an expression of a part of the Church:

"Teach us the art of being content with nothing, of living in a confined space, without going out, but yet with the art of being

Charged with the need for that inner journey, which requires neither fresh air nor trains.

"Give us some of your oil" so we can learn that the spirit cannot be imprisoned and that the smaller the space, the greater is the opening onto the heavens".

(Letter to cloistered nuns from the Bishop of Avellino)

Session 4:

Conclusion and Summary of Retreat

How do we, as the Nottingham Carmelite group, embody the maxims in Albert's Rule?

Do we have the balance of prayer, community and service right?

Is service appropriate in this context or is it better fulfilled by individuals in their own communities?

Can we do things better? What is working well? Suggestions for change?

Our focus has been on the Nottingham group, however, if anyone wishes to share reflections on their personal spirituality, they are welcome to do so.

