

Aug

# JOURNEY WITHIN

By

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Probably, the singular and most frequent thing a Carmelite reflects on is the contemplative experience. The beginner, as well as the proficient, wants to know, "Am I there yet," is this it? Or if I am there, <sup>IN</sup> what level or in which mansion am I <sup>in</sup>?" Perhaps we are more preoccupied with where we are when we should be concerned with, "Am I doing God's will? Am I living in Christ and is Christ living in me?" We well might be preoccupied with infused contemplation for all the wrong reasons. Do we realize that the contemplative experience is nothing more than an experience with loving God? If the contemplative <sup>for it is</sup> doesn't transform us, make us want to do all for Christ, to live and die for Christ, to say yes, yes, yes, if we don't feel a thirsting for God in the pit of our soul, a thirst that burns and gives us no rest, if we don't have a hunger for God that makes us want to give all that we have, and want everyone on earth to love the Lord, then ~~believe me~~, what is being experienced is not true Christian love of Christ in the Carmelite tradition. If we don't have this burning love for Christ and <sup>plus 17</sup> deep thirst for love, we have not yet experienced or we are not <sup>now</sup> experiencing the love <sup>is it</sup> John and Teresa are speaking about.

Jesus, ~~I can assure~~, was not concerned with what level of prayer he was praying. His only concern was doing God's will. "My food and my drink is doing the will of My Father," Jesus said. This, as Carmelites, should be our only desire.

The road <sup>that</sup> the contemplative begins with prayer. This is what leads Carmelites inward, ~~I did you not~~, this journey is long and difficult. This

difficult and painful journey will, in fact, prove to be the most difficult and challenging journey ever traveled.

"The inner self is as secret as God, and, like Him, it evades every concept that tries to seize hold of it with full possession." The reason <sup>is</sup> the soul <sup>it</sup> resembles God so much ~~is~~ that loving God is the only infinite capacity ~~the soul~~ possesses. The more we love God, the more we are capable of loving God, and the more we give ourselves to God, the more God gives Himself to us and, if we give as much as God wills that we give, we will resemble Him by grace.

Just <sup>as</sup> we think we know ourselves, new truths are revealed to us as we get closer and closer to God. Our love for God and God's love for us carries us to new levels of consciousness, for at each level of awareness, a new truth about ourselves and about God is revealed. For the more we learn about God, the more we learn about ourselves.

Because <sup>of</sup> our prideful nature, each new revelation about ourselves may be painful and be a cause for stress. This self awareness is not brought about by prayer, meditation, self analysis or any other method we might think of. We may perform certain acts that might prepare us for these revelations, such as acts of humility, acts of love, silence, detachment, purity of heart and indifference. It is through these acts, <sup>that</sup> we let down our guard and we stop trying to project on others a false <sup>self</sup> image and let God begin to do His work in us. It must be remembered that there isn't anything we can do to earn or merit this grace of self awareness. God gives as much or as little, when and to whom He will, but this is true with every gift of God.

Every deeply spiritual experience tends to have in it, something of the presence of the interior self. That <sup>is</sup> removing the scales from our spiritual eyes. By spiritual experience I mean mystical, God acting on the soul.

We Carmelites must bear in mind that we are made in the image of God.

The interior self of each of us is a kind of an image in which God not only sees Himself, but also reveals Himself to the "mirror", (which is the inner self in which he is reflected). Of course this "mirror" is a metaphor. It is my way of saying that our being somehow communicates directly with the Being of God, who is "in us". If we enter into ourselves, find our true self, and then pass "beyond" the inner "I", we sail forth into the immense darkness in which we confront the "I am" of the Almighty. As we journey, our faith reveals to us that we live truly in God and God lives in us. We believe this and there is not the slightest trace of doubt. We begin to see how God can and does love us in spite of our sinfulness and how we can give ourselves to Him, in spite of our weaknesses.

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for more  
on this

It is just because of our weakness that God loves us so. If we really knew God, as we will know <sup>HIM</sup> in heaven, in the beatific vision, we would love Him so much that we could never offend so loving a Lord. But here on earth, we can't nor will we ever experience God as He is -- we will always experience Him surrounded by the dark cloud of our humanity. We know Him in a dark, general way.

But it is necessary to distinguish between the experience of one's own interior self and the awareness that God has revealed Himself to us in and through our interior self. We must know that the mirror is distinct from the image reflected in it. ~~Always bear in mind that~~ Our awareness of God is a supernatural participation in the light by which He reveals Himself to our inner-most being as dwelling in our soul. So our Christian mystical experience is an awareness of our inner self as well as a supernatural intensification of faith. It is an experiential grasp of God as present within our inner most being. We know, by faith, that God has visited us and, even though we can't exactly describe what we experienced, <sup>the experience has</sup> it left an indelible mark on our soul.

~~Bear in mind that~~ As we live the Carmelite experience, faith, hope, and

charity must be our watch words. We experience God only in so far as we love the God we see in our neighbor. Love of neighbor must be a love of the will and not of the passion. Pride, vanity, hate and other offenses against our neighbor serve as a barrier, preventing us from giving ourselves to God and living the life of Christ. No person can find his/her inner-most being, that place where God dwells, until that person is willing to love God as God loves <sup>with</sup> ~~it~~. That kind of love that shows no distinction between persons, a love that is forgiving and all inclusive.

Freedom to enter into the inner sanctuary (that place of self knowledge) of our being is denied to us Carmelites if we are held back by dependence on self-gratification and sense-satisfaction. ~~As I said earlier,~~ Whether it be a matter of pleasure seeking, love of comfort or proneness to anger, self assertion, pride, vanity, greed, ~~and~~ things that place a wall between us and God — <sup>ANY OF THESE</sup> ~~will~~ prevent us from loving God completely.

Faith is indeed a "dark night," in which we meet God, according to our Holy Father, <sup>St. John of the Cross,</sup> ~~This dark and loving knowledge, which is faith,~~ serves as a means of divine union in this life, even as in the next life the light of glory serves as a intermediary to the clear knowledge of God. Faith ~~for us Carmelites~~ is a personal and direct acceptance of God Himself, a receiving of the Light of Christ in the soul and a consequent beginning or renewal of spiritual life. This knowledge of God, is a "general" kind of knowledge. We know but we don't know how or why we know — we just know.

We yearn for God but we don't really know or understand why we are yearning and longing for Him. This is why it is called a loving, general kind of knowledge, <sup>a</sup> knowledge that is grounded in faith. This longing is a new kind of knowledge for the soul. It is a light of such supreme brilliance that it dazzles the mind and darkens ~~all~~ its vision of other realities. But in the end, when we become use/to this new light, this new kind of knowledge, this new way of

praying and thinking of God, we gain a new vision of all reality. We see <sup>THAT</sup> all creation, people, animals, and inanimate objects are elevated in the light itself, the light of faith.

The ~~Carmelite~~ contemplative, because of this blinding light of faith does not cease to know external objects. But we at Carmel cease to be guided by them. We cease to depend on them for pleasure and comfort and satisfaction. We no longer use created things to take the place of God's comfort. Creatures cease to be treated as ultimate. All created things including ~~people~~, power, money, thoughts, everything and anything begin to be treated as objects, that are to be used, and loved as God wills and as God intended. This is what John of the Cross meant when he said:

*To reach satisfaction in all desire satisfaction in nothing*

*To come to the knowledge of all desire the knowledge  
of nothing*

*To come to the possess<sup>of</sup> all desire the possession of nothing.*

During the "dark night," faith transcends all desire and seeks no human, earthly satisfaction as an end in itself. What is sought is God's will or that *which is* connected with His will. Short of this essential detachment, no one can hope to enter into their innermost depths of the spirit, that place where God alone dwells, His hiding place, His temple, His stronghold and His image.

This self knowledge that the contemplative experiences makes the Carmelite realize that all things created by God <sup>are</sup> good. It is how we think of them and how they are used by us that make them evil.

We contemplatives love those who seem to be more holy or less holy than ourselves. We at Carmel want to see everyone in love with God? ~~The true~~ ~~Carmelite words~~ to bring the love and the mercy of God to everyone. As we

contemplatives go deeper within ourselves, we find that we have a true and deep love and concern for the welfare of the poor, weak and under-privileged. We want to see justice done to all and our faith in God and our desire to be like Jesus forces us ~~at Carmel~~ to speak ~~out~~ against injustice. The contemplative is concerned about the weak and forgotten, Acts of charity, both internally by way of prayer and externally by deeds, are done by the contemplative. We ~~at Carmel~~ live out our contemplative experience. Only God knows the number of priests who remain at the altars because of our prayers. ~~Only God knows~~ the number of religious who remain in their monasteries, convents, or places of residence because of ~~our~~ prayers said here at Carmel and all of our other houses where we O.C.D.'s gather.

As ~~the~~ contemplative<sup>s</sup> become more aware of the inner self, that false and private self that wants to exist outside the radius of God's will and God's love, and outside of life, eternal, <sup>w;</sup> We become even more humble because of our inner awareness. We Carmelites realize that God reveals the true self to those who love Him. We realize that all sin starts from the assumption of the false self. The self that exists only in our own egocentric power, ~~and~~ honor, knowledge and love. All this is done by us to construct our nothingness into something objectively real. We realize that one's true identity is hidden in the love and mercy of God. Therefore, there is only one problem<sup>on</sup>, which all of our existence, peace, and happiness depend<sup>o</sup>, and that is to discover ourselves in discovering God. If and when we truly and completely find Him, we will find our true self and, if we find our true self, we will find God.

Because it is then that we at Carmel realize that we are truly in God and God is in us. We are one in God and we have truly become His children by grace. (We become true contemplatives when God discovers Himself in us.)

Let us not forget, although God is present in all things by His knowledge and His love and His power and His care of them, He is not necessarily realized

and known by them, such as <sup>by</sup> plants and animals and some humans. He is only known and loved by those who have <sup>freely</sup> given a share in His own knowledge and love of Himself.

In order to know and love God as He is, we must have God dwelling in us in a special way. When we ~~at Carmel~~ take our interior journey, our identity is perfected because it is in these journeys that God Himself, bearing in Himself the secret of who <sup>we are</sup> ~~I am~~, begins to live in us, not only as our creator, but also as our other and true self by grace.

It is only through God's grace and mercy that we can come to the interior self-knowledge that can make us true contemplatives, <sup>this</sup> is not a reward. As long as we are here on earth, our minds and wills remain more or less impervious to the missions of God's Word and His Spirit. We do not easily receive His light. This is because of the barriers we ourselves erect. Every movement of our own natural appetites, even though our nature is good in itself, ~~we~~ tend<sup>s</sup> in one way or another, to keep alive in us the illusion that is opposed to God's reality living in us. Even though our natural acts are good they have a tendency, ~~when they are only natural acts, and are good, they have~~ a tendency to concentrate our faculties on the person that we are, <sup>pretending to be</sup> ~~not the one~~ on the person we <sup>ARE</sup> ~~cannot be~~ <sup>that</sup> the false self in us, the person that God does not know. This is because we are born in selfishness. <sup>and</sup> ~~We were born~~ self-centered. This is <sup>the</sup> ~~called~~ original sin.

As we continue to combat these weaknesses within us, our inner self becomes more in tune with God's will. As we quiet our impulses, be they good or not so good, we begin to hear the voice of the Spirit of God.

In order for us to become ourselves, we must cease to be what we thought we always wanted to be. In order to find ourselves, we must go out of ourselves; <sup>in</sup> order to live, we must die.

"To come to possess all desire the possession of  
nothing"

"To come to be what you are not you must go by  
a way which you are not"

When we think of dying we are dying to self. We are learning to put others first. We are learning to praise others rather than seeking self praise. The Carmelite tries, <sup>one</sup> with the grace of God, ~~to~~ eradicate the selfishness from <sup>his</sup> ~~his~~ <sup>lives</sup> ~~or her life~~. We learn the habit of humility. We prefer keeping our prayer-advancement and gifts from God secret. Carmelites <sup>strive for</sup> ~~are~~ perfect acts of love and <sup>by</sup> ~~the~~ charity. There is no tendency to destroy the virtues of others by claiming for ourselves works done <sup>by</sup> ~~by~~ <sup>them</sup> ~~others~~. We realize that it is the Spirit of God who gives the desire and brings about the completion of that desire. For in doing God's work ~~the soul~~ <sup>we</sup> will find true peace and humility and love.

Humility gives the contemplative true self-knowledge and a deep love of God which leads to ~~quietness of the soul and~~ true peace. The true contemplative is no longer attached to his or her own works and own reputation. We discover that true joy is only possible when we have completely forgotten about ourselves and think of serving God in Jesus Christ by serving our neighbor. We, ~~here at Carmel~~, realize that we are not saints although perfect obedience is what we strive for, because true sanity is living the contemplative experience. This is ultimate perfection, "To love the Lord with all our heart, and to love our neighbor as we love ourself." There can be no true Christian contemplative experience without Jesus-like love for ourselves and our neighbor.

It is a sea of Love <sup>through</sup> ~~of~~ which flows through the One Person, the Spirit of God, <sup>angels</sup> ~~of~~ all the elect, all the <sup>all the</sup> Angels, and Saints, and their contemplative experience would be incomplete <sup>upon experiencing</sup> ~~when we experience~~ the beatific vision, if it was not shared. Love cannot exist unless it is shared. So the contemplative experience



is a sharing experience. Knowledge of self and knowledge of God become one and the same thing.

The journey within, although it began on earth, in this life with the contemplative experience, ~~it~~ continues in heaven for all eternity in what we call the beatific vision when we <sup>will</sup> enjoy God face to face -- whatever that means.

<sup>descend</sup>  
This descent into deeper and deeper levels of consciousness perfects our prayer life and makes us more like Jesus because we pray in a different <sup>way</sup> ~~way~~. Here our contemplation is divinely originated, general, nonconceptual, loving awareness of God. Of course, not all of these levels are experienced at the same time. One level of awareness may impress us more at one time than another. At times, we may have a delightful mystical experience, and at other times, our mystical experience may be dark and painful. We may experience a thirst that is stressful and dark because we cannot understand what is happening in the depths of our soul. In the beginning, these experiences may be so delicate that we may not realize when we move from one level of a mystical experience to another. Sometimes these acts of God may be brief and at other times they may be prolonged. As we advance in our prayer life, we become more accustomed to the playing of God. Each and every one of these experiences brings about transformation in the soul.

If all goes well, God raises the soul to a level that St. John of the Cross calls transforming union. This will happen to one contemplative sooner than another. Who can tell God how to distribute His gifts? He is God and He does as He wills. One thing is <sup>certain</sup> ~~for sure~~, if we are faithful with our prayer and <sup>acts</sup> ~~acquired~~ of virtue, God will not fail us. We will experience God's presence, in the manner of a peaceful, general, loving attention or as a dry reaching out to Him.

Each of us will experience a great deal of fluctuation in the intensity of this communion and in the diverse ways in which God makes Himself felt and

known. We must be careful and not try to force God to act in this way or that.

Neither can we prolong God's activity in our soul. After all, we are not in a meditative state. Infused prayer is produced in the divine manner whereas discursive meditation was in the human manner. Contemplation is without images or concepts or <sup>is</sup> what John calls "dark"; we experience God, but in a general, dark way.

If we continue this deepening communion with the indwelling Trinity, we will steadily grow in ~~holiness~~<sup>h</sup>, humility, love, patience, ~~parity~~<sup>u</sup>, fortitude and all the virtues. So necessary is this trait that a gradual increase in day to day Gospel living is an indispensable sign of the genuineness of any prayer. At this point, all serious sin is ruled out.

Infused contemplation, as I said earlier, is a divinely given, general, nonconceptual, loving awareness of God. There are no images; our imagination is at rest; we enjoy no concepts, no ideas, no visions. Sometimes this awareness of God takes the form of a loving attention, sometimes of a dry desire, sometimes of a strong thirsting; each of us will experience God in a different way. But one thing is <sup>certain</sup> ~~for sure~~, As we get closer to God and enjoy the contemplative experience, sometimes the experience will be uplifting and joyful and sometimes the pain will be almost more than we can bear. Our faith compels us to continue on the journey. We feel that we have no other choice.

<sup>the</sup> If ~~a~~ Carmelite thinks by becoming a true contemplative, life will be easy--  
<sup>he or she</sup> ~~one~~ could never be more mistaken. To follow Jesus is never easy.

Jesus offers us joy and love of the Father with one hand but holds out the cross in the other. We cannot accept one without the other. The Carmelite cannot choose what he or she is to suffer. God chooses to send to each of us what he wills. <sup>Each holy</sup> ~~Our~~ Mass reminds us that to follow Christ is to be nailed to the cross.

There are <sup>many</sup> (not a small number of) Carmelites, and I am afraid I fall into this group, who ~~do~~ not consider the benefits of the contemplative experience. ~~As I said earlier,~~ When we go deep within our innermost being, the spirit suffers and there is great anguish and moaning, sometimes so painful that the person may cry out aloud, ~~and then~~ <sup>then</sup> God calms the soul like a mother calms her frightened child as she rocks <sup>him</sup> it in her lap. Then the Holy Spirit sends "secret, peaceful and loving infusion of caresses; ~~from God.~~" This contemplative experience liberates the spirit from its subjection to the senses, and continues to calm the senses themselves little by little in this night, thus permitting the soul to have free and peaceful commerce with God who communicates Himself to it through the gifts of the Holy Ghost. This adaptation of the senses to the action of God in the spirit, this silent peace, this overflowing of sweetness into the whole soul, all this is the essential effect of the passive night of the sense. Here the Carmelite must not interfere with the work of God. The person may experience the urge to act; this desire or impulse must be suppressed and <sup>he or she must</sup> permit God to work as He will. This light of loving Wisdom, falling on the suffering soul, enlightens the soul in regard to itself. This, of course, is very painful to the contemplative. <sup>as the</sup> ~~The~~ soul is gradually laid bare more and more of its faults and imperfections are revealed. But in this painful purgation, God Himself supports and strengthens <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ soul.

This is the first and principal benefit caused by this arid and dark ~~night~~ of contemplation; the knowledge of oneself and of one's misery. These aridities and this emptiness of the faculties ~~make~~ <sup>person</sup> the ~~soul~~ <sup>person</sup> recognize <sup>how</sup> its own lowliness and misery, which in the time of ~~the~~ <sup>be</sup> prosperity ~~it~~ was unable to <sup>be</sup> seen. That is when God was blessing the soul with sweetness.

The journey within is not totally passive with respect to the soul. When the Carmelite contemplative reads John's passive purification of the senses and spirit, this is a painful journey. Painful because we cling so tightly to that

which is material, ~~even though~~ <sup>itself</sup> Desiring these things may not be sinful in ~~themselves~~, <sup>it</sup> it may be just something we prefer or enjoy. The painful experience <sup>is</sup> when the Spirit of God grants to us the light of Wisdom to see our acts as God sees them. This inflowing of the divine light invading the soul is lofty and direct. It is the language of God to the soul, addressed by pure spirit to pure spirit. God breaks through ~~into~~ <sup>to</sup> the soul. We may wonder how it can be that so intimate a visit brings suffering and darkness, for by purging and illumining the soul, God prepares it for union with Himself. God's loving wisdom intends only happiness for the soul. John of the Cross explains that the real cause of the darkness and of suffering lies in the soul itself, not in God. Divine Wisdom, ~~which transcends~~ <sup>transcending</sup> the talent of the soul, ~~and~~ in this way is darkness to it; ~~the second~~ <sup>secondly</sup>, because of its vileness and impurity, in which respect it is painful and afflictive to it, ~~and~~ is also dark. As we become more aware of our <sup>trueness</sup> interior <sup>self</sup>, ~~and~~ only then can we be still and let God be God in our soul. For God will purify the soul so that it will be fit to welcome Him ~~if for~~ God will dwell only in that which has <sup>disposed</sup> ~~prepared~~ itself for Him and He will do the rest. God will only do for us that which we cannot do for ourselves. For even when God is acting on the soul, we Carmelites are not completely passive. Our very self-surrender is an action on our part.

The purification of the sense <sup>s</sup> is only a prelude. The purgation of sense is only the entrance and beginning of contemplation leading to the purgation of the spirit. This serves rather to accommodate sense to spirit <sup>rather</sup> than to unite spirit with God. In the spirit, weaknesses can still be found although the person may not realize this, ~~is so~~ since the person is not aware of many of its <sup>hidden</sup> ~~secret~~ weaknesses. So much work is still to be done by <sup>the soul or the person,</sup> ~~us~~ and by God.

As we get closer to God, we begin to realize, <sup>we are</sup> painfully, how far ~~is~~ from God. In this position, the Carmelite feels the weight of the mighty hand of God which oppresses and crushes it. This causes the soul which is advanced,

new suffering.

To the advanced soul, there are other causes for interior suffering. The remembrance of past prosperity, that is, of graces with which the soul was favored before entering into the dark night, adds to the weight of the present pain.

The contemplative cannot think of the inner journey without the consideration of detachment. Here I want to consider the memory as it relates to the inner journey. It is the memory that holds the intellectual and spiritual goods already acquired. The memory <sup>IS OF</sup> ~~has~~ considerable importance for <sup>SPENDS</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>IN</sup> ~~the~~ contemplative who consecrates long hours to prayer. In the silence of mental prayer, especially during times of aridity, it is <sup>from the</sup> ~~the~~ memory that one seeks refuge, occupation, distraction or consolation. ~~But now~~ Much time is lost when we permit ourselves to be entertained by our memory. It is here that our attachments feed on our memory and grow strong.

To free our soul from being interrupted by our memory, <sup>which keeps</sup> ~~and keeping~~ our mind from soaring upward and <sup>hindering</sup> ~~hindering~~ our efforts <sup>of</sup> ~~from~~ mounting to God, we must practice mortification of the memory, and this requires discipline. The memory is the principal obstacle to the purification of faith and hope. This checking of the natural operations of the memory and <sup>fixing</sup> ~~fixing~~ them solely on God is beyond the power of man. ~~So~~ <sup>It</sup> is necessary for the contemplative to cooperate with God's action which remains the principal supporter in the casting off of natural knowledge and action.

Once assured of the soul's faithfulness, God will not fail to accomplish His work, <sup>in it,</sup> ~~This is why~~ <sup>WILL</sup> God lead the advanced soul to Himself by a way without form or image. This lead the soul to fewer distractions. This suspension of the soul's natural operations that the divine touches, <sup>COMES</sup> ~~brings~~ about suddenly, ~~for a short time in the Carmelites soul,~~ a peaceful union, that becomes progressively  
**THE PERSON MAY EXPERIENCE**

habitual and definitive. But none of this can be achieved unless the Carmelite first realizes that self knowledge is by far the most important first step that must be made. ~~and~~ <sup>As</sup> the contemplative draws closer to God, <sup>the</sup> leaving bad habits of prayer and imperfect love of neighbor behind, the soul becomes more sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. <sup>Or, in other words,</sup> ~~And~~ the Carmelite can truly begin to live the life of Christ.