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GENTLE BREEZES OF CARMEL

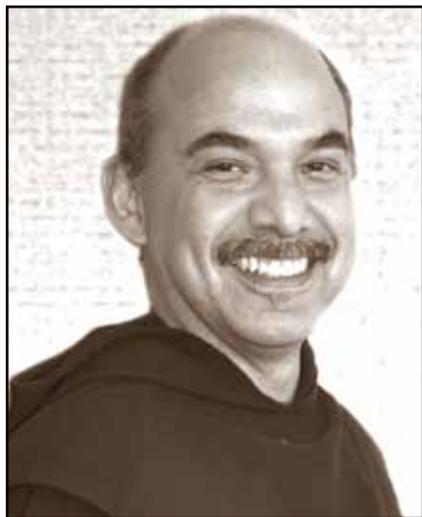
*Christmas
Blessings!*



ST. THÉRÈSE PROVINCE OF THE DISCALCED CARMELITE FRIARS
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“Proclaim the good news among the nations: Our God will come to save us.”

1st Antiphon of Evening Prayer I of the First Sunday of Advent



Dear Friends of Carmel,

Advent is a very special season in our liturgical year—referred to in the liturgy as a ‘privileged’ season. Though often equated with Christmas, Advent is a separate season. Advent is a time of preparation with a dual purpose: Not only is it a time of preparation to celebrate the Nativity, the Incarnation, but also to celebrate the outcomes of that

Incarnation.

In our culture, this season means commercialism and shopping sprees: an opportunity for profit for merchants and a time of suppressed worry of future financial hardship for those taken in by the message that we must buy.

There is nothing wrong with gift buying-giving-receiving unless it remains no more than a celebration of commercialism-materialism-consumerism. We are called to imbue the season with the spirit that is proper to it: the spirit of a believing community awaiting the fulfillment of our Being with the final coming of Christ, and an awareness of the great gift that we have received in the Incarnation of God’s Only Begotten Son. The material gifts we give symbolize our gifts of self to others: our poor attempts to imitate God’s generosity.

“For this reason the Church, especially during Advent and Lent and above all at the Easter Vigil, re-reads and re-lives the great events of salvation history in the ‘today’ of her liturgy. But this also demands that catechesis help the faithful to open themselves to this spiritual understanding of the economy of salvation as the Church’s liturgy reveals it and enables us to live it.”

– CCC 1095

Advent reminds us also that our time here on this earth is a time of vigilance for His final coming in glory. Advent reminds us that we are pilgrim disciples journeying towards our fulfillment as persons, as humanity, and as creation. We are asked to hold in tension the reality of the God-Man, who was born in poverty, humility and who suffered a shameful death, on the one hand, and on the other, the reality of the final and full revelation of this same Jesus as the Son of God and King of the Universe. Christ will come again not in poverty, humility, and hidden-ness, but openly as King clothed in splendor. We look forward to that day when the entire world will “look on him whom they have thrust

through” (Zech. 12:10). And through this Second Coming, we await the healing of all of creation from the consequence of sin—the restoration of God’s plan for us.

The mission of the believing Church is to prepare humanity for the acceptance of the dignity of each of us. Its mission is to prepare the world for its *Apocatastasis*—restoration of all things in Christ. This task requires from the believing Church a daily dying as we witness to the future kingdom to which we belong. We individual believers, through our baptism, find ourselves poised between the First Coming and the Second Coming of Christ in Glory.



“When the Church celebrates *the liturgy of Advent* each year, she makes present this ancient expectancy of the Messiah, for by sharing in the long preparation for the Savior’s first coming, the faithful renew their ardent desire for his second coming. By celebrating the precursor’s birth and martyrdom, the Church unites herself to his desire: ‘He must increase, but I must decrease.’ – CCC 524

Practical points

- 1) Take regular time during this season to slow down.
- 2) Make achievable resolutions for your spiritual development, such as time of meditation on scripture.
- 3) Commit to a regular prayer life.
- 4) Avail yourself of the sacraments.
- 5) Take time to read and ponder the scriptures of the season.
- 6) Contemplate the meaning of “yearning” for the Coming of the Lord?
- 7) What am I doing and going to do to help towards the restoration of all things in Christ?

May we use the time given us to prepare for the Coming of Christ the King!
Come, Lord Jesus!

In Him,

Fr. Stephen Sanchez, O.C.D.
Provincial

The Mystery of Christmas

By Fr. Gregory Ross, OCD

A baby changes everything. Upon discovering that she is expecting a new child, a mother will change her diet, avoiding some things and adding other things, all for the health of the new life she bears within her. A couple will adjust their budget, change their living space, and do many other things to arrange for the arrival of a new child. When the baby is born and is brought to his or her new home, the life of everyone in that home is changed: the parents make sacrifices, their whole lives revolving around caring for this precious new child; siblings, learning to welcome and cherish their new brother or sister. And all of these changes are undertaken with the motives of joy and gratitude for the gift of a new child. These changes are made out of love for the new baby.

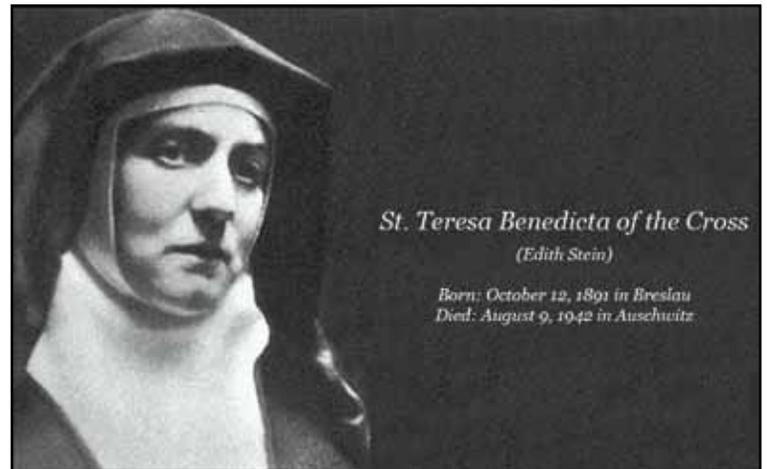
The birth of Jesus changes everything, too. His arrival changed not only the lives of Mary and Joseph, but of the whole human race. The child Jesus calls us, too, to make the changes in our lives that are necessary to welcome the gift of his presence. This is the mystery that we celebrate each Christmas.

Our Discalced Carmelite St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) similarly reflected on the significance of the mystery of Christmas in a talk she gave to a group of Catholic academics in 1931, before she entered the Carmelite monastery of Cologne, Germany. The saint was herself an academic, being the first woman to have been awarded a doctorate in philosophy at her university.

In her presentation, St. Teresa Benedicta states the age-old mystery expressed by the Church fathers and by the liturgy of the Church: *God became a Child of man so that the human race could become children of God... He came to be a mysterious Body with us: he as head, we as members... God is in us and we in him; that is our portion of the kingdom of God, established by the Incarnation. If we welcome him into our lives, he changes our lives by welcoming us into his own divine life.*

In addition to this truth that by his birth Jesus changed our lives by making us one *with* God, our saint also asserts that the

Christ child makes us one *in* God. *If God is in us and if he is Love, then it cannot be otherwise but to love one another. Therefore, our love for our brothers and sisters is the measure of our love for God.* St. Teresa Benedicta points out that Christian love is supernatural. It seeks not one's own good in a selfish manner, but the good of the other and the glory of God. *Natural love seeks to possess the beloved entirely and as far as possible not to share him. Christ came to win back lost mankind for the Father; whoever loves with his love will want people for God and not for himself... Whenever we have entrusted a person to God, then we are one with him in God... Whoever hands over to God, wins.*



Finally, St. Teresa Benedicta reflects that the birth of the Christ child changes our lives by his call to "Follow me." *To be a child of God means to go hand-in-hand with God, to do his will, not one's own; to place all our hopes and cares in his hands and no longer be concerned about one's self or future. Thereupon rest the freedom and the good cheer of the Child of God.* But, of course, the future saint realized that discerning and then doing God's will is not easy! We cannot know and fulfill his will without his help, his grace. Fortunately, God knows our frailty and has graciously provided all that we need to follow him. In one of the central passages of her presentation, St. Teresa Benedicta declares: *The divine Child has become Teacher and has told us what we should do. In order to allow an entire human existence to be pervaded with divine life, it is not enough to kneel down once a year in front of the manger and allow oneself to be taken in by the spell of the Holy Night. One must be actively engaged with God one's entire life long, listen to the words which he spoke, which have been handed down to us, and then comply with these words. Above all, one must pray as the Savior himself has taught and so insistently emphasized again and again. "Ask and you shall receive." That is the sure promise of a hearing. And whoever prays from his heart his daily "Lord, thy will be done," may certainly be confident that he has not failed to meet the divine will, even where he is no longer even sure of himself.*

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Our saint also points out to her listeners that Christ has given us the Church and the Holy Spirit to support us in fulfilling his will. And by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Church celebrates daily the sacrament of the Eucharist, which plays a central role in our welcoming Christ into our lives. *The Savior, who knows that we are human beings and will remain human beings who have to struggle daily with weaknesses, comes to our assistance in a truly divine manner. Just as the human body is in need of daily bread, so also does the divine life in us require constant nourishment. “This is the living bread which came down from heaven.” Whoever really takes this as his daily bread, experiences each day the mystery of Christmas, the Word made flesh. And that is doubtless the surest way to maintain constant union with God, to grow each day more firmly and deeply into the mystical Body of Christ.* She is promoting daily participation in the Eucharist as a way of welcoming Christ into our lives anew each day. But, St. Teresa Benedicta realizes that this practice requires changing our lives. *I am well aware that for many that is an all too radical request. In a practical sense, it will mean for most – when they first start – a complete change in their external and internal life. But that’s exactly what it is supposed to be! To make room in our life for the eucharistic Lord, so that he can change our lives into his, is that asking too much?*

Reflecting on the words of our saint during this advent and Christmas season, perhaps we might consider her invitation to participate, if not daily, then at least more frequently, in the Eucharist as a “New Year’s resolution” to make. Will we make the necessary changes in our lives to welcome more fully Christ, whose human birth we celebrate with such warm sentiments at Christmas? Will we let the joy and gratitude we feel for the gift of the child Jesus motivate us to welcome him each day in love in the Eucharist?



The Child in the manger extends its little hands and its smile seems to be saying what would come forth later from the lips of the man: “Come to me all you who are weary and heavy burdened;” and the poor shepherds out on the hills of Bethlehem, who heard the good news of the angel, follow his call and make their way with the simple answer, “Let us go to Bethlehem.” This Christmas,

may you and your loved ones, like the shepherds, experience the loving light of the child Jesus shining in whatever darkness you might be experiencing. May he help you to make a place for him in your homes and in your hearts, that you may follow him and experience the peace and freedom that are the fruits of being made Children of God by the Son of God made man.

All passages from St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross are taken from *The Mystery of Christmas*, translated by Sr. Josephine Rucker S.S.J. and published by Darlington Carmel.



Fr. Stephen and Fr. Bonaventure at their Jubilee Mass, with postulant Alejandro Vidaurre (L) serving.



Jubilarians Fr. Bonaventure Sauer and Fr. Stephen Sanchez



The friars at Mass during their retreat.

From October 15-22, the Discalced Carmelite friars gathered at Mt. Carmel Center in Dallas for their annual Provincial Retreat. The retreat was led by Fr. Al Bradley, C.Ss.R., a Redemptorist priest from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. During the retreat, several friars celebrated jubilees. Fr. Stephen Sanchez and Fr. Bonaventure Sauer both celebrated 25 years of priestly ordination. The friars also celebrated the 60 years of religious profession of Fr. Jesús Sancho, who, unfortunately, was unable to be present for the occasion. We give thanks to God for the life and ministry of our brothers, as well as for the graces of this week of fellowship and prayer.