



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

REF: PG/444/2023
Circular No. 19

15 July 2023

Circular of Fr Prior General on The Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Dear CMI *Koodapirappukale*,

We are celebrating the feast of our Blessed Mother of Mount Carmel, a spiritual heritage that we have received as a sign of God's loving providence and protection for the spiritual movement began in the *Beth Rauma* in 1831. As we are preparing ourselves for the Bicentennial of that event in 2031 and are in the CMI Year of Communitarian Witnessing, let me share a few thoughts that come into mind on this great day.

Significance of Carmelite Tradition for the CMI Congregation

Elijah had to ascend the Mount Carmel to meet the God of the Mountains. He had to enter the cave and traverse the recesses of the cave to feel the presence of God in which he exclaimed "I am burning with zeal for God the Lord of hosts." On the mountain, closer to God, in a cave, away from the maddening noise of the world, to burn with zeal for the Lord is the call of a Carmelite.

Closeness to God induces such fearlessness in the modern CMI prophets to challenge the 400 or more priests and prophets of Baal. Ablaze with zeal, they bring down the divine fire not only to incinerate the sacrifice but also to make the filthy modern trenches run dry for the living water to drench. It takes our closeness to the God of the Mountain to reclaim the lapsed Ahabs blinded by the glitter of the Jezebels.

As we celebrate the feast of Our Mother of Mount Carmel, it is very relevant to look at the lamentation of the St Kuriakose Elias Chavara as he writes to the members of the still young congregation not long after the foundation. He was referring to the ruins of the European monasteries that have become habitats of wild beasts. He would continue to speak about the strength of the monastery that inheres not in the thickness of the walls, but the harmony and the unity of the members who live within the walls of the monastery.

Carmelite Spirituality and Communitarian Witnessing

Carmelite spirituality somehow has come to us as a communitarian spirituality. This is what is exemplified by the preparatory volume drafted for the years 2023-2024 for our meditation in the context of the decennial preparation for the bicentennial of our configuration this year as the second number of the Grace-filled Presence Series, which is titled *Communitarian Witnessing*.



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

Life in the Carmel was not always communitarian. Through a long process of transformation, it has grown into this magnificent communitarian spirituality that we have today. In the process, we find various phases of the spiritual development. On this occasion of the feast of the Mother of Carmel, especially, as we are retracing the journey of the community as a part of our Decennial preparation for the Bicentennial of the foundation of the Congregation, we take a look at the various phases of the development the Carmelite Spirituality in general in order to cherish what is valuable in it and to make our present Carmelite communitarian living more relevant. In preparation for the feast of our Mother of Carmel, we look at the way that we travelled collectively.

Carmelite Communitarian Living: Various Phases

1. Prophetic Phase

The first of the stages is the Prophetic Stage, which could be qualified as the golden age of the Carmel. The mystical experience that Elijah had in the Cave enabled him to confess to God that 'he was burning with zeal for God the Lord of host.' This spirituality of Elijah does not make him a morose mystic, but a spiritual activist. Backed by the spiritual energy acquired in the contemplation, he stood for Yahweh and his people against the numerous prophets and priests of Baal, restored the faith of the people and became the champion of Yahwism in Israel. He became the symbol of orthodoxy in action. The zenith of his contemplative life was the levitation that he experienced in his ascent to heaven in a fiery chariot witnessed by Elisha, his disciple in his ecstasy. It is for this harmonious blend of passivity in contemplation and zeal in righteous action that Elijah was christened the founder of Carmelite monasticism. The invitation in the first phase of the Carmelite existence is that we rise to the occasion, capture the dreams and the need of the people of God in context, and make a suitable response despite the fact that they are in the stupor of ignorance and darkness.

2. Eremitic Phase

The second is eremitic phase. Perhaps after a millennium or more, some of the pilgrims who came visiting the holy land from all over the world, gave in to the lure of the holiness of the mountain that Carmel was. They established themselves near the fountain of Elijah in the mountain. The settlers grew into a monastic community and lived on Mount Carmel following the spiritual way of Elijah. They lived as monks in cells and observed the vows of silence, seclusion, abstinence and austerity in addition to the evangelical precepts. In this Phase, we learn that despite the lapse of a millennium of absence, the spirit of Elijah, the ancestor lived on and Carmel remained a holy mountain. A few holy men who had been living there in the past made the place holy! Holy people leave behind a lasting aroma of sanctity in their habitats like our houses that have a perennial spiritual attraction.



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

3. Mendicant Phase

The third is the Mendicant Phase. The losses that the crusading armies from the West suffered in Palestine had a heavy impact on the life of the hermits of Carmel. Mount Carmel was rendered unsafe for the Western hermits and they had to leave their monastery and migrate to Cyprus, Sicily, France and England and became mendicants. It is here, in England that Mother of God gave Simon Stock the famous scapular. Gradually the order adapted to the conditions of the West and transformed itself from hermits into mendicants and became popular in Europe, similar to the Dominicans and Franciscans. We learn that despite the misfortune of threat and migration, the Providence guides the destiny of those called. In the loss of something dear, something greater is achieved. The loss of Carmel led to the proliferation of trans-European Carmelite communities! Nothing, let alone your monasteries, even the Congregation is meant to remain immutable!

4. Phase of Reformation

The fourth is the Reformed Phase. As natural to any moral person, down the line, the Carmelites had gathered tepidity. They were in need of a reformation. The activities of the great contemplatives of the modern Carmelite family like Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross along with their confreres led to the recapture of the spirit of Elijah and a return to his path of zeal. They advocated a more rigorous way of life for Carmelite women and men in order to restore the austerity and contemplation of primitive Carmel. They implemented it in their reformed communities and recaptured the ascetic spirit of Carmel through their stricter observance of the monastic discipline. We learn that in order to survive meaningfully, in response to the contextual needs, and in conformity to the pristine spirit, the Carmelites of all times need to improvise our *modus operandi*, reform our ministerial style and become relevant to the present day and age.

5. Phase of Suppression

The fifth is the stage of suppression. The flourishing monasteries in England and in France were suppressed by external forces in a series of unrest and the proscription peaked in the French Revolution. In France, all the monasteries were bottled-up by Napoleon and the liberal government following the Revolution. However, this would not be the end. Carmelite tradition is the tradition of the phoenix. It is hard wired to rise from the ashes, for the Carmelites are fiery chariot ridders! We learn from this phase of suppression that however relevant you become by means of reformation, you might be chastised; and if you are taken to task, your relevance notwithstanding, think of a time when you are actually *irrelevant*!

6. Phase of Restoration and Resurgence

The sixth phase is of restoration and resurgence. What is good and true cannot be suppressed for long. When the monasteries were suppressed in Europe, and had to go underground, they



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

began to resurface in continents across the seas. The communities spread to the Middle East, Latin America and the US. Eventually, they were restored in Europe as well. They continued to spread in the modern world. As Spencer Johnson, speaking of the proverbial “cheese”, would indicate, they looked for alternative ways of survival. They turned around and looked for a restoration. We learn the art of survival and wait for the right conditions to re-emerge and become relevant in the new surroundings. The lure of the mountain is irresistible to those whose hearts can bloom only in the mountain. The mountain cave of Carmel has a perennial lure for men and women of spiritual and intellectual discipline.

7. Versatile Phase

The final phase of the existential vicissitudes of the Carmelites is the versatile phase. The Carmelite families took on various styles of monastic existence, still sticking on to the original spirit of Carmel. Some of the great monks of the Carmelite tradition began to go around preaching and teaching. The Discalced Carmelites took to serving the people in parishes and went to the foreign missions. Some of them retreated into the interior caves of their hearts and opted for a cloistered existence. In the 19th and 20th centuries numerous congregations took birth in Carmel and flourished – one of them being us, the Carmelites of Mary immaculate. At birth, versatility was the hallmark of our community. We took to teaching, caring for the sick, parish ministries and preaching, ecclesiastical education and other charitable works. We learn that only by adequately adapting religious life to the new conditions and accommodating ourselves in them, we sustain ourselves and thrive. All the while, they sustained the contemplative hallmark of the community, for without this mark, Carmelites are not worthy of the name!

Contemplative Spirit in the Life of the Blessed Mother

The sustained conservation of contemplative spirituality Carmel in various degrees lead us to the reflection on the *contemplation* of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Carmel and the ensuing *activity* seen in her life. The pronounced relationship between Carmel and the Mother dates back to in the 13th century, when the European group that began to live in Carmel a life of prayer in the Eremitic Phase. They dedicated their first chapel in the Carmel to her and called themselves *Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel*. They found Mary as the only example of the perfect contemplation of the Word and the subsequent action of sharing that Word with others.

The CMI Constitution number 80 would give the general guidelines for formation and would invite the community to have an interiorisation of the Word of God and the world. To aid our journey towards this awakening and ‘realisation within’, the Constitution points out three steps of *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasa*. The entire life of the Mother was a preparation for this interiorisation, which enabled her to receive the WORD. In her case, the Word did not



CARMELITES OF MARY IMMACULATE

CMI PRIOR GENERAL'S HOUSE

Chavara Hills, P.B. No. 3105, Kakkanad P.O.
Kochi 682 030, Kerala, India



ST KURIAKOSE ELIAS CHAVARA
1805 - 1871

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

have to be filtered through spiritual resistors, capacitors and inductors that generally impede the receptivity. Her receptivity before the Word was such that the entire Word came to be tangible, audible and visible in her. It is her life that brought the angel to her with the Word of God.

On this occasion of the feast of the Mother of Mount Carmel, she invites us go to the Beth Rauma that Kuriakose Elias Chavara indicated to us. During the Decennial preparation for the Bicentennial of the foundation of the Congregation, let us walk into the Beth Rauma. There, with the Mother of Carmel, we resolve to reform, to be relevant and to perpetuate the legacy of Carmel with a CMI touch.

... Let us hold the finger of the Mother of Carmel as we ascend the mountain of God.

... Let us enter the cave together with the Mother to feel the profound stillness of silence.

... Let us come out with the Mother with the prophetic zeal for the Lord of hosts.

Festal Blessings.

Fr Thomas Chathamparampil CMI
Prior General

