

Part III

Mary, Mother of God & the Carmel

In **Part III**, let's consider now some of the **modalities** of the relationship, the many ways in which Carmelites over the centuries have addressed and invoked her.

Many beautiful titles have been given to the Mother of God, to honor her and to thank her for the help she has given to us. These titles will illustrate different facets of the relationship between Carmelites and the Blessed Mother.

Mary is Queen of Carmel

Remember from our promise: I confidently entrust this, my Promise, to the Virgin Mary, Mother and Queen of Carmel. Of course, this is not an honor that Mary sought, not something that she fought for in some celestial game of thrones. The gentle humble holy virgin of Nazareth never seeks honor for herself.

There are perhaps two senses in which Mary is Queen of Carmel. When a King is enthroned, his mother is accepted as Queen. Jesus is King throughout all eternity and the title Queen tells us that the Blessed Virgin is with Him, and subordinate to Him, able to intercede. Mary is Queen by grace, by divine relationship, and by singular choice of the Father. Mary deserves this title Queen of Carmel because of her Divine Motherhood - she is Mother of God.

In another sense Mary is Queen of Carmel because of her preeminent perfection; She is the embodiment of virtues, of humility, of purity, and we in Carmel contemplate her virtues and we try to copy the same expressions of Christian perfection.

On occasion there come over me such ardent desires to receive Communion that I don't think they could be exaggerated...One day, the feast of the Assumption of our Lady, Queen of Angels, the Lord desired to grant me the following favor; in a rapture He showed me her ascent to heaven, the happiness and solemnity with which she was received, and the place where she is. I wouldn't be able to describe how this happened. The glory my spirit experienced in seeing so much glory was

magnificent. The effects of this favor were great. I was helped in having a deeper desire to undergo difficult trials, and I was left with a longing to serve our Lady since she deserved this so much.

St. Teresa of Avila: The Book of Her Life, Chp 39

Mary is Our Sister

Carmelites are officially "Brothers of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel." A fundamental theme in the Institution of the First Monks - a medieval history of the Carmelites written c.1385 by Father Felip Ribot - is Mary as the Carmelite sister. Since Mary is the exemplification of Elijah's life, and the Carmelites seek to be like Elijah, they are joined in mission and purpose. Since the Carmelites are 'brothers' Mary must be their 'sister' because of their shared prophetic vocation. Mary is their sister by religious profession.

Mary is Our Mother

The Carmelites in the 1300s also used the expression 'Mother of Carmel' - 'Brethren you are honored with the title of the Virgin Mary, the source of mercy, our mother' but this is something independent of the sister relationship. Mary is the mother of all Christians, and since the Carmelites have vowed themselves especially to her she must be their mother in a very significant way. 'Mary is their sister by religious profession, their mother through devotion.'

The Blessed Virgin is Mother of Carmel because of her role in the origin and source of the Order. She directed this new spiritual experience: for example, in 1282, the Father General, Peter de Millaud, said to Edward I, King of England, regarding the Virgin Mary "for whose praise and glory this same Order was especially founded".

Also, we Carmelites call her our most loving Mother to emphasize her personal relationship with each of us, her children. We look to the Blessed Virgin Mary to guide the Carmelite order with a mother's love and follow its progress homeward to the eternal splendor of heaven.

Mary is Our Lady of Mount Carmel

This is the title given to the Blessed Virgin Mary in her role as patron, owner and protector of the Carmelite Order. The title Lady implies a family situation; it refers to Mary's presence as mistress of the place—house, monastery or convent--where the members of the Order have placed themselves voluntarily at her service and are engaged in living as followers of Christ.

As we have seen, the hermits living on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land built a chapel which they dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, who then in medieval terms became the "Lady of the place." By doing this, these early Carmelites affirmed the 'Patronage of the Virgin' and Carmelites looked upon themselves as belonging totally to her; and Mary belonged in a very special way to the Order of Carmel and to each of its members.

Before entering the new monastery of the glorious St. Joseph, while in prayer outside in the church, being almost in rapture, I saw Christ who seemed to be receiving me with great love and placing a crown on my head and thanking me for what I did for His Mother...Another time while all were at prayer in choir after compline, I saw our Lady in the greatest glory clothed in a white mantle; it seemed she was sheltering us all under it. I understood how high a degree of glory the Lord would give to those living in this house... The main disposition required for always living in this calm is the desire to rejoice solely in Christ...May it please the Lord that all be to His glory and praise and to that of the glorious Virgin Mary, whose habit we wear, amen.

St. Teresa of Avila: The Book of Her Life, Chp 36

The writers of the 1300s emphasized the official title 'The Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mt. Carmel' to show Mary's ownership of the Order. Medieval feudalism placed utmost importance on the title or designation – since the Carmelites were called Brothers of the Blessed Virgin then they surely belonged to her in a legal and contractual way. The Carmelites belong to Mary by reason of their profession of vows.

The Carmelite profession ceremony had a particular significance for the medieval mind

schooled as it was in the tradition of feudalism. In the earliest one known, dated to 1281, the Carmelite vowed to 'God and the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel.' When the Carmelite recited his vows he was making the same pledge of loyalty and donation to the Blessed Virgin as the vassal made to his king or lord and so he belonged to the Blessed Virgin and had a unique claim to her protection.

In feudal terms, the benefit granted to Christians is the wondrous gift of "Salvation. The Lady of the House is the Blessed Virgin Mary; Carmel belongs to Mary. Carmelites promised to serve her. The Carmelites are vassals. In exchange, because she is owner of the Order, it is her obligation to take care of it. If the Order belongs to her then she must protect it and the individual members in it. The Carmelites therefore have a particular claim and right to her continuing assistance. This is Mary's governorship of the order. She is Our Lady of Mt. Carmel.

Since the fourteenth century, the Solemn Commemoration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel became the principal feast to celebrate the benefits received from the Virgin, the protection of Mary and to express the Order's thanksgiving to her. On July 16, 1726 Celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel was extended to the universal Church by Pope Benedict XIII.

Mary is our Model

Carmelites see in the Blessed Virgin Mary a perfect model of the interior life of prayer and contemplation to which Carmelites aspire, a model of virtue. As the person who was closest in life to Jesus Christ, she is seen as the one who points Christians most surely to Christ, saying to all what she says to the servants at the wedding at Cana, "Do whatever he tells you."

The goal and the ideal of Mary's life came to be seen as the goal and ideal of the life of every Carmelite. While Albert's Rule for the Carmelites does not mention Mary by name, it does call all Carmelites to a continual meditation and living assimilation of the word of God, "pondering the Law of the Lord day and night." Carmelites were quick to realize that no one ever heard or kept that

divine word better than did their Patroness and Mother, Mary.

On becoming a Carmelite, a Secular promises to tend toward evangelical perfection in the spirit of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, obedience, and of the Beatitudes. Mary is the perfect model for this. I think Jesus had his mother in mind when he was describing the character of a person who is blessed by God.

Often when we think of the Beatitudes, we try to compartmentalize and analyze each one. Instead, we should ask ourselves: "Do these attributes describe me? Am I that person?" Mary personifies all the Beatitudes: she is that person: "Blessed are thou among women." "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed: The Almighty has done great things for me, and holy is his Name."

It is good to recall here how God acted with the Blessed Virgin, our Lady. In spite of all her wisdom she asked the angel: How can this be? But after he answered, The Holy Spirit will come upon you; the power of the Most High will overshadow you, she engaged in no further discussion. As one who had such great faith and wisdom, she understood at once that if these two intervened, there was nothing more to know or doubt. She did not act as do some learned men (whom the Lord does not lead by this mode of prayer and who haven't begun in life of prayer), for they want to be so rational about things and so precise in their understanding that it doesn't seem anyone else but they with their learning can understand the grandeurs of God. If only they would learn something from the humility of the most Blessed Virgin. O Blessed Lady, how perfectly we can apply to you what takes place between God and the bride according to what is said in the Song of Songs. And thus you can see, daughters, in the Office of our Lady, which we recite each week, how much in its antiphons and readings is taken from this Song of Songs.

St. Teresa of Avila; Meditations on the Song of Songs: Chapter 6

For Carmelites, the Blessed Virgin Mary is Queen of Carmel, Our Sister, Our Mother, Our Lady, Our Owner, Our Protector, our Model. She provides more: some special gifts.

Having placed some of the modalities within our landscape, let's look at the picture briefly through the eyes of St. Teresa in [Part IV](#).