

Personal Testimony

Leonore OCDS

Lent School of Prayer

Broussey, France 2022

Hello, my name is Leonore. I have been married to Richard for 33 years and we have 2 children.

Additionally, I am a member of the **secular** or **lay** order of the Discalced Carmelites.

This branch of Carmel has **two aspects**: silent prayer and community life.

I was invited to talk to you about the **place of silent prayer in my life**. I would like to begin by sharing with you what has helped me in my discovery of this path of silent or Carmelite prayer.

Saint Teresa of Avila defines silent prayer as **‘a friendship where we speak often alone with the One who we know loves us.’** This left me wondering what friendship was.

Friendship is the encounter of two people who have an attachment and a reciprocal affection for one another. They share common projects along with a mutual love and desire for the other’s best. Over time, trust grows between the two friends and it needs to be maintained.

When we are with our friend, we are totally attentive to him. We are not occupied elsewhere as we speak to him and listen to him while he is speaking to us.

It is the same thing with the Lord. It is about being near Him, in His Presence in silence and discovering that He resides within us.

It is important to recognize that silent prayer is a **grace** and a **gift from God**. We were made for this relationship.

Saint John assures us that it was God who loved us first; He took the initiative to reach out to man because we matter to Him.

In silent prayer, it is about being there for Jesus. It is about learning to know and to love Him with no strings attached.

Faith, a theological virtue, is a gift given us by God at Baptism that will guide us. It reveals the Trinity to us. Jesus would like us to enter into the perfect love that exists within the Trinity. He wants us to learn to love others as He loves them and to see the world with His eyes.

To make the decision to practice silent prayer is the work of the **will**. It arises from our capacity to choose what is good and to respond to Our Lord’s call.

The time spent with Our Lord remains in our memory; enlightens our intellect; and, strengthens our will.

We can often become discouraged with silent prayer and give into the temptation to tell ourselves that it is too hard or a waste of time. This is part of the combat.

In fact, acquiring the habit of silent prayer is full of difficulties: the imagination; the distractions and the occasional ‘dryness’; our personal resistance; the loss of interest and/or desire.

The essential element is a belief in Jesus and His action in our poverty. Silent prayer is an experience in poverty, truth and humility but also in joy, peace and tenderness. All we are asked to do is to be there with faith as our only support. There are of course times when we just cannot spend time in prayer. There are family obligations or illness. We can also return to the fundamentals of our faith: the theological virtues of faith,

hope and charity received at Baptism and the Sacraments.

It is also important to continually ask ourselves questions such as these: where we are in our love for the Lord?; what is distracting me from His Presence and preventing me from returning to the path of prayer?

Saint Teresa of the Child Jesus discusses in her writings the spiritual combat she underwent daily to grow in love. She testifies about the relationship of man with God.

In complete trust, she allowed herself to be guided by Christ. She drew from her prayer and the Sacraments to accept her faults and her deficiencies in the sweetness and mercy of God's love.

It is by living out an intimacy with Christ that she allowed herself to be instructed in love for her sisters. Love of God is at the basis of brotherly love.

We have God's word available to us; verses such as Psalm 27, The Lord is my light and my salvation of what need I fear ... We can also re-visit a Scriptural reading of the day or take a Carmelite saint as a prayer partner. Start each day as a new day without judging our prayer. Jesus only asks us to do what we are able to do. He is very merciful.

The virtues (faith hope charity) are part of both human and spiritual growth, but charity gives life to all the virtues: It allows for the concrete deployment of patience, kindness, gentleness, humility, detachment and moderation. 1 Cor. 13

Ask yourself what stands in the way of you hearing Jesus? What is drawing you away from Him? What is preoccupying you, drawing you away from His Presence? This

encounter is all about being faithful in our love for Him.

It is important to incorporate a time of silent prayer in our daily agenda; a time where we withdraw from the world in silence to allot a pre-determined time daily to be in Our Lord's presence and stick to it.

It is normal to meet resistance within ourselves and over-schedule ourselves to not be able to find time for the Lord.

Silent prayer is an act of love. God will welcome the fruit of our efforts. It will mean a lot to Him even if they seem insignificant to us. A good example of this is St. Therese who picked up a needle with love.

We prepare our time of prayer as we would prepare for the visit of a friend. God is present within me. To prevent the atrophy of His Presence due to my numerous activities and hobbies, we need to give our lives a good housecleaning. Said simply, we need to clear out the place where Jesus waits for us.

We can establish a beautiful prayer corner leads to recollection, yet if one day we feel drawn to sit in front of the fireplace or out on the balcony we follow our heart.

The best time to pray is probably in the morning before beginning our daily activities. Yet if our family or professional lives aren't conducive to morning prayer we make the necessary adjustment.

The essential element is to find a time that will not create tension or put your faithfulness to the relationship with our Lord at risk. Start slowly to not become discouraged and give up before completing your pre-determined time of prayer. It is consistency that matters, not the hope of what I may accomplish.

We, of course, may become distracted, if so, welcome the distractions and then return to Jesus. It's can be compared to someone driving who looks around but never fails to return to the road in front of him.

My daily practice of prayer allows me to experience my own poverty. Jesus, gently and with a lot of tenderness and mercy, shows me who I am with all my wounds. This intimacy allows me to be truthful with myself; accept who I am under the Lord's watchful eye.

It is in the simplicity of this deep relationship that I find the strength to express fraternal love. Perhaps like yourselves, my husband is the one closest to me. Jesus gives him His look, joy and peace. I am a member of the secular order of Carmel. My entry into the order was not without resistance. The requirement to practice silent prayer and to pray the Divine Office was a challenge as I always had something else to do. I couldn't overcome the distractions and the feeling that I was wasting my time.

However, like the child who wants to become a violinist and so practices hours and hours, I learned to pray by praying. I was touched by the experience of meeting Christ present in the most intimate part of myself. This transforming encounter is lived out in silence and recollection. It doesn't make me different, but rather reveals the person God created, saved and loves unconditionally.

He changed my view of myself and of the world. The things that I used to believe and hold for truth have become with God's help, insignificant. My priorities have changed.

This new attitude has consequences for me and for others.

Jesus is teaching me how to live a welcoming and giving life as He did; a welcoming of the gift of God in my life; the gift of myself to God and others. Amen