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*'And hope does not put us to shame,
because God's love
has been poured out into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit,
who has been given to us' (Rm 5:5).*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Secular Order

Greetings of joy and peace in the Lord!

1. In the letter I sent you last year, I reminded you of some essential areas for the life of the OCDS, in response to your suggestions and expectations to the chapter on the occasion of the General Chapter in 2015. This year, on the anniversary of the liturgical feast of Pentecost, I would like to offer for your consideration, the issue in which the Church is asking everyone to make a greater effort: the mission of evangelizing, of being a 'Church which goes forth', a sign of the joy of the Gospel. 'How I long to find the right words to stir up enthusiasm for a new chapter of evangelization full of fervour, joy, generosity, courage, boundless love and attraction!' (Pope Francis, *Evangelium Gaudium* (EG) 261). Words which I make my own!

And in the Gospel, where we find the testimony of the 'saving love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ who died and rose from the dead' a profound and perpetual source of hope (cf. EG 20-24.36), He entrusts his missionary command to his disciples of all time and places (Mt 28, 18-20; Mc 16,15) and gives the Holy Spirit as power of witness until his message reaches to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Thus, by recalling today, the beginnings of the mission of the Church and the reason for its existence (cf. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* - EN 14), we beg for the power of the Spirit, for the Church to be always sanctified and keep its freshness of youth (LG 4) and to be the instrument of the Kingdom of God for all time. 'The Holy Spirit also grants the courage to proclaim the newness of the Gospel with boldness (*parousia*) and aloud in every time and place, even when it meets with opposition' (EG 259; EN 75).

It is 'the *Holy Spirit* who constitutes the baptized as Children of God and members of Christ's Body' (*Christifideles Laici* - ChL 11), through the grace of the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation, calling us to live in the dignity of divine sonship and holiness, as well as to be 'living stones' (1 Pt 2:5) in the people of God, contributing to the Church's mission according to

the vocations and diverse ministries sharing an equal dignity (cf LG 32). At the same time, the Spirit of the Resurrection 'transforms our hearts and enables us to enter into the perfect communion of the blessed Trinity, where all things find unity. He builds up the communion and harmony of the people of God. The same Spirit is harmony, just as He is the bond of love between the Father and the Son' (EG 117).

Through the centuries, the Church has kept alive the memory of Our Lord, set apart and sent by the Father (Jn 10:36). Today, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too can follow in the footsteps of Jesus, building the Kingdom begun by Him, through prayer and with works, sustained by His faithful Presence in the Eucharist. For it is here, indeed, as their very source, that the laity, consecrated and ordained ministers find the power and support for their own vocations and missions and whilst, at the same time, they are built up in unity.

2. Rooted deeply in the Teresian Carmel, the members of the Secular Order, sharing the mission of showing forth the Kingdom within the secular reality (LG 31; ChL 15), seek evangelical perfection and holiness, according to the charisma of the Teresian Carmel and place themselves at the 'service of God's plan' (Const. chap. IV), making God, the Church and the Order present amidst the life history of the world. They seek to insert the eternal love of Christ, who as the incarnate Word takes on the reality of history (LG 8), loving profoundly to the end. Only the boundless love of the Trinity made manifest in Jesus expressing the descent of the Son of God into our lives, making it possible to 'repay love with love'.

This gift of gratuitous love opens us up to union with God, since, it is through the virtue of charity, that we are united to God (Cf *Living Flame of Love* 1,13). Charity gives meaning to all activities, charisms, vocations and actions in the Church (Cf 1Cor 13; Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Ms B). By this means, the Kingdom of God is built up and allows us to live the everyday in a spirit of oblation: 'For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne - all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (cfr. 1Pt 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God' (LG 34).

3. As a consequence, the *first and foremost form of apostleship of the members of the OCDS is to bear witness to the presence of God and of his love according to the situation in which each one finds himself* (Const. 25; cf. Epilogue). With the commitments undertaken with the Promise, you are bearers of the life of the Gospel within the family, in your professional work and in your social relationships. Living out your actions in integrity and skill, loyalty and respect, become acts seeking the sanctity of life (Const. 11). Thus 'consecrate the world', by being 'sanctifiers' of temporal reality (cf Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in faith* 3. 40). This attitude is possible, when

it is nourished by a life of authentic prayer, which impels one to carry out 'works' in the service of the Lord. So, by doing this, imitate Christ, the Word Incarnate, who labours with human hands and sanctifies human relationships (GS 22.32).

4. With regard to personal testimony, *fraternal life in community* takes on special importance, where each and everyone is called to reinforce the communal bonds and objectives, that 'confesses the faith in full adherence to the Word of God which is *celebrated* in the Sacraments, and lived in charity, the principle of Christian moral existence' (ChL 33). Where there is true fraternal communion, then 'communion leads to *mission*, and mission itself to communion' (ChL 31) and becomes 'radiant and attractive' (EG 99).

5. The Secular Order, in as much as it is a public association of the faithful, has the responsibility of *faithfully proclaiming the faith in the Church's name*. It is a responsibility which demands *good doctrinal and spiritual formation* (Const. 35), which renders every member competent in mission and dialogue with the world. In this sense, I reaffirm the importance of personal responsibility for formation (Cf ChL 57). With regard to this, sound formative activity in the community, which boosts the identity of the members, as well as undertakings by the Provincial Council in the organization of formation in each Province, is more necessary than ever. We can see that this fundamental mission at the heart of the communities and Provinces stimulates human, Christian and Carmelite development (cf *Ratio Institutionis* OCDS 13-15) of both the members and the communities, which is then transformed in mission.

6. One particularly important theme in the exercise of mission is the *collaboration of the OCDS with the friars and nuns*. In difficult times 'strong friends in God' are necessary in order to sustain each other mutually, as our Holy Mother wanted (cf *Life* 15,5; 16,7). In some countries and Provinces, where this already exists, it is bearing good fruit. In others, it needs to grow or even to begin. But in each situation, for this collaboration to be efficacious, it is necessary to recognise the fundamental equality and dignity of all who are called to the Teresian Carmel. The three branches of the Order, in the specific and complementary of each one according to the state of life, seek union with God in fraternal life, which in turn leads to mission. These diverse expressions of living the same charisma according to one's state of life, each one remaining faithful to their own specific one, enriches and complements the others. All three should have the building up of the Kingdom and service to the Church as their purpose and help each other in this. Having this common goal, each one avoids falling into the temptation of struggling for power or supremacy. If we see in this diversity the expression of the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole Church, then this will be a manifestation of communion and unity, which is in itself already evangelization (Cf. ChL 32).

7. Together with the aspect described above, I want to return to the area in which I think that the Secular Order needs to grow: in *collaboration with the mission of the Order*. Some worthy

experiences are being carried out. Many cannot commit for family or work reasons, on account of age or for economic reasons. However, it would be good, that whoever has the possibility of doing so, should be ready to set out beyond the limits of their own areas and comfort zones, in order to share the faith and to give witness to the joy of the Gospel, or to bring one's professional competencies into places where there is a need for a short time, even making use of the holidays. We pray to the Holy Spirit for this intention and let us be ready. There is the encouraging example of our Holy Mother Teresa, who went in search of the needs of the Church of her times and sought to do the little which was within her reach. She placed her trust in God and with the help of friends, she collaborated in the work of the renewal of the Order and of the Church (cf. *Way of Perfection* 1,3; *Life* 32,11; *Foundations* 1,7).

8. With regard to the missions of a social nature or works of mercy, I know that some of you have commitments to organizations or other associations in your towns, which have this dimension. It is certain that the virtue of charity is concrete and operates first and foremost in those who are close to us (7 *Mansions* 4,14-15). It is also certain that in many places the enormity of the need and levels of social injustice can be a discouragement. Therefore, it is good to remember that we are humble instruments in God's hands, who must look to Him for strength and who 'in all humility will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord'; that 'God holds the world in his hands and that [...] in spite of all darkness He ultimately triumphs... Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light—and in the end, the only light—that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practise it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world' (Benedict XVI *Deus caritas est* 35. 39).

9. I want to address a particularly special message to the members of the OCDS, who are *aged, ill and who are suffering*, or who are taking care of relatives in these circumstances and who cannot dedicate themselves to external works of apostleship, because they are prevented by their situation. Like other members who are active, I am reminding you that 'love [is] the driving force of mission' (RM 60) and that you are also called to unite yourselves with your love to Christ's sufferings, offering your suffering for the redemption of the world (Col 1:24), praying for and living in intercession for the mission of the Church and the Order. With this, you give witness to the missionary power of intercessions and are 'bearers of the "joy given by the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess 1:6)' (Cf EG 281-283; ChL 53; RM 78), with the power which comes from the Crucified and Risen Christ.

10. The apostleship of the Teresian Carmel is characterised by the *promotion of the spiritual life* (cf. Const. 28). It is a field of mission which many of you develop with commitment and generosity, whether in preaching retreats, or in collaboration with the various services in houses

devoted to these purposes, or with publications and with the sharing of spirituality which are possibilities open to all. In this sense, there are many worthy and important collaborative initiatives with other branches of the Order in order to respond to the needs of our times, so well discerned, such as the apprenticeship of prayer, silence and a contemplative life. This allows us to bring the message of salvation anew according to the charisma of St. Teresa and St. John.

11. I want to encourage those who offer their pastoral services to the parishes, where they collaborate actively with the parish priests and other parish groups, to offer the possibility of sharing moments of prayer and talks with you so as to get to know the doctrine of our saints and to promote the spiritual life, creating small prayer groups in the Teresian style. By doing this, our Holy Mother Teresa advises, that you can kindle in others the 'genuine fruit of prayer when prayer is rooted in humility', which will bring them to friendship with Jesus (*Life* 10,5; cf. *Way* 20, 3-6).

12. The evangelization of the world of culture with all its challenges and ambiguity, is calling you to live 'as signs of courage and intellectual creativity, in the privileged places of culture, that is, the world of education-school and university-in places of scientific and technological research, the areas of artistic creativity and work in the humanities' (ChL 44; cf EG 132-134). In this way, the complex world of machines and social communication media (internet, newspapers, magazines, etc.) in which many of you are engaged becomes part of the diffusion of the doctrine and the writings of our saints. One must bear the salvific message of Christ to all men, using all means at our disposal according to the Teresian charisma, proclaiming the truth of the Gospel as the source of freedom and dignity for every human being, of life in full, of unity and of encounter in Christ within the great variety of cultural expressions in different countries and ethnic groups.

13. The witness to a life in God *in family life* is vested with singular importance. So many ups and downs are lived in silence and in dedication to the family, just like the Virgin Mary - and with her, St. Joseph - who 'while leading the life common to all here on earth, one filled with family concerns and labours, was always intimately united with her Son and in an entirely unique way cooperated in the work of the Saviour' (AA 4). Notwithstanding the crisis of the institution of the family and of social relationships, here the member of the Secular Carmel is called to give witness to their profound life of faith, hope and charity as taught by our saints. Then, through pastoral activities, you are called to instill the nuptial spirituality of our holy founders in married life. Many couples find the encouragement and strength to live out their commitments in matrimony and mission whether within their own family, externally, contributing to family pastoral care in the parishes, or in other movements dedicated to this purpose. We have clear indications in the Magisterium of the Church for the pastoral care and spirituality of marriage and the family, especially in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* of Pope Francis, chapt. 9. These pointers, together with our spirituality, will bring forth good fruit in your families, as well as the commitment to evangelization of the family.

14. Pastoral action in the sphere of *ecology* also finds support in the spirituality of the Teresian Carmel, above all, with the testimony of a life lived in sobriety, in harmony with the spirit of the Beatitudes and with the Promise to live according to the evangelical counsels. Thus in the field of social relationships, the example of 'St. Thérèse of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms' (*Laudato si'* 230). In addition to this, the writings of our saints offer examples of how creation can be the source of prayer and contemplation of the hand of the Beloved which has clothed it in beauty (cf John of the Cross, *Spiritual Canticle* 5).

15. A word about *young people*. Also, with regard to young people, there are some valuable and interesting experiences of collaboration between the three branches of the Order, to involve youngsters, which is bearing good fruit. *Evangelii Gaudium* counsels us to 'listen to young people and the elderly. Both groups are a source of hope for every people. The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience, which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes. Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope, for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future, lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs which are no longer life-giving in today's world' (EG 108). Generally speaking, it becomes difficult for them to make a commitment in the OCDS when the community have their meetings during the day or are scheduled for when the youngsters are studying or working. It would be desirable for communities to be more open to them and that in the light of the spirituality of our young saints and blessed (Thérèse of the Child Jesus, Teresa of the Andes, Teresa Margaret Redi, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Elisha of St. Clement, etc.) the next Synod of Bishops in 2018, for which the theme will be *Young people, vocational faith and discernment*, will consider initiatives to take account of this perspective, among others.

16. All these possibilities and the examples of the work of evangelisation mentioned above are not intended to be exhaustive and do not exclude others which exist in communities and Provinces scattered throughout the world and which are defined in the specific statutes. There are many and we give thanks to God for them all. But we remain open to the enkindling power of the Holy Spirit, in response to the needs of the times and places in which we live. In this respect, I would like to highlight the unique missionary work between one person and another, which leads to the encounter of another communicating Jesus and the joy of his Gospel to him (Cf EG 88). And so he will experience the fact that 'Jesus walks with him, speaks to him, breathes with him, works with him. He senses Jesus alive with him in the midst of the missionary enterprise' (EG 266).

17. On this path, the witness of our holy founders sheds light on this, as mentioned in the Message to the General Chapter in 2015: 'St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross accompany us on this path, the same one that Christ taught his disciples: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Mt 5:16). "Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (Jn 15:5.8)' (*Message to the General Chapter 2015*, 7).

18. Finally, we are called to learn the way of evangelization from the Most Blessed Virgin Mary (Cf EG 287-288). A way based on faith, on docility to the Holy Spirit, which leads to serving in humility and charity, lived out in hope midst darkness and suffering. A way which is also anxious to bring Jesus to others (Lk 1:39). Mary is our guide in everything as Mother and older Sister by paying attention to the words of her Son (cf Jn 2:5), by constant meditation of events in the heart, in order to discover the signs of God (Lk 2:19, 52). Mary is our model in order to live out the 'interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others... making the ecclesial community look to Mary as a model of evangelization' (EG 288). With her, we pray for the Holy Spirit to 'enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills.' (EG 280).

With a warm, fraternal greeting, I bless you and those you hold dear.



fr. Saverio Cannistrà
Fr. Saverio Cannistrà OCD
Superior General

Rome, 4th June 2017 - Pentecost Sunday

An important notice:

The OCDS Provinces which have a **website, Facebook, Blog**, etc. are asked to email the website address or link for the Province to the *Secretary for Communications* of the General House as specified, (<http://www.carmelitaniscalzi.com>), for inclusion on the web page for the Order, in the section for the Secular Carmel. Thanking you in advance.

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