

Flos Carmeli

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*Homily given at the medieval Priory Church of St. Mary of Mount Carmel
at South Queensferry, near Edinburgh, on 17th July 2000.*

Not so long ago a national event took place in the Catholic Church. I won't say what or where, but let me hasten to add, it took place in England, not Scotland. A bishop preached at it. The comment afterwards was "We didn't get either a sermon or a homily. No, we got a history lesson!" Far be it from me to give you a history lesson on this very historic occasion, the 25th pilgrimage to this little gem, the Priory Church of St Mary of Mount Carmel.

So historically, just the bare bones. In 1330 the Dundas family invited the Carmelites to make a foundation here. It was on the condition that prayers would be offered "for the souls of the Grantor and his wife, his ancestors and successors". Those wishes are still being fulfilled today, now by the Episcopalian Church in Scotland whose members restored this chapel in 1889.

This province's Glasgow Third Order Chapter started in 1962 and seven years later it was canonically erected. Note seven years, the number of perfection. In 1974 to mark the Silver Jubilee of the Carmelite friars returning to Aylesford, the Glasgow members decided to visit the Priory Church here at South Queensferry. Suffice it to say that it became much more than just a visit. Mass was celebrated by the then spiritual director, Fr Joseph Abbley, O.Carm. Canon Ernest Brady, the then Episcopalian incumbent, made this possible by his gracious and very warm reception. The very cordial reception has been there ever since. We are extremely grateful for this and therefore thank very sincerely the present incumbent, Rev. Terry Harkin, and his parishioners.

We have come here today to pray to God and to honour him. But we have also come to honour Mary and the saints, especially the saints of Carmel, in particular Mary and Elijah, the models for us Carmelites. By honouring them, we worship God who made them saints.

In the first reading for the Solemnity of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah adopts a posture of profound prayer. His confidence that after the very long drought rain is imminent remains unshaken. He recognises God's hand in the small cloud, which appeared after the seventh attempt by the servant. Once again the number seven. The passage shows that God is at work at more than one level: in the downpour Elijah outruns Ahab's chariots! Many have seen in the small cloud a foreshadowing of Mary, the great intercessor for us, her children.

In the Old Testament no king is mentioned without also the mentioning of his mother. The Queen Mother was a very important figure in those days. She was honoured and respected. And the king's subjects saw her as the intercessor par excellence. As you know this year we celebrate the 100th birthday of the present Queen Mother. Because of her lovely personality, over the years her influence must have been great.

The parallels between the queen mothers of the Old Testament and Mary, the Queen and Mother of the new era, are obvious. She gave birth not just to a king, but to the King of kings. As we heard in our second reading: “When the appointed time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman ...to enable us to become God’s children” (Gal.4:4). Let us not be afraid to approach Mary, in whom God was able to work marvels.

The Second Vatican Council told us that the greatest honour we can give Mary and the saints is to imitate their lives. The first beatitude in the New Testament goes to Mary with Elizabeth exclaiming: “Yes, blessed is she (you, Mary) who believed that the promise made by the Lord would be fulfilled”. What made Mary so great was that she was able to say “yes” to God, and kept saying that all through her life. Yes, as we heard in the Gospel, right up to the crucifixion of her Son, and beyond that event. We call her the Flower of Carmel, the Flos Carmeli.

Let the **F** of the Flos stand for her **Faith** in God and the faith she has in us, her children.

Let the **L** stand for her **Love** for both God and us.

Let the **O** remind us of her **Obedience** to God, her “Yes” to God.

And let the **S** recall to us her **Service** to God and to us, like her Son, pleading for us.

Mary is able to be a model for us in all those virtues, because she was a woman of prayer, pondering on God’s word and on God’s events in her life.

I congratulate you on this jubilee. May this pilgrimage be continued for many years to come and may it inspire you to live in the presence of God, as Mary and Elijah did.