

It's About BEING

by Sister Colette Fahey

The enclosed world of the Carmelite Sisters seems far removed from your lifestyle, so I want to explain what drew me to the contemplative life of prayer in this Carmelite Monastery at Ormiston, Queensland.

It has been three years since I entered the Monastery, aged 44. I made my First Profession in January this year when I pronounced the vows of Chastity, Poverty and Obedience. These vows will be renewed every twelve months until Solemn Profession when I hope to make a life commitment. Before joining the Order, I trained as a nurse at St. Vincent's Hospital in Sydney. I have certificates in palliative and geriatric care, and spent several years working with the Little Sisters of the Poor at their aged care facility at Randwick.

Many people were intrigued by my decision to leave everything to join an enclosed Carmelite community. It came about that during my nursing career, I met a Carmelite friar, who told me something that resonated deep in my heart... that Carmelites were not so much about doing as about being. St. Teresa described prayer as friendship with Christ, an intimate sharing between friends - frequently being alone with Him who we know loves us. However, I did not want to abandon the sick people I had been nursing. St. Teresa experienced this same dilemma.. Like her, seeing the needs of the Church, I realised that by my life of prayer, I could do more for more people than I could for a select few as a nurse.

The desire to marry and have children is something that runs deeply in any woman, and to put that aside to join a religious community has been a sacrifice. However, for me religious life was not an either/or choice, but something that was so strong in my heart that I was unable to make any other decision.

I have an older brother who has twin sons aged nine, and although I miss being able to attend family occasions such as Christmas and birthdays, I feel more at the heart of my family by being where I am and doing what I am doing.

I must add that the experience of living in a community with a group of women of diverse ages and backgrounds has been very fulfilling for me. In the space that enclosure has given me since coming to Carmel, I am increasingly aware that the emptiness I often felt in my heart was God's way of creating a void there which He wanted to fill with Himself. And He does fill it - every moment of my life.

SEEDS OF CARMEL



Soundings from the Carmelite Monastery, Ormiston for
YOUNG ADULTS

Issue 1

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Carmel is a word that conjures up a particular image in many people's minds. For some, the Carmelite nun seems to be an almost mythic figure, engaging in the most sublime mystical encounter with Jesus. While most would not view our life in such a lofty manner, we are still regarded as somewhat removed from the ordinary day to day circumstances that people encounter. For the twenty two sisters who live here at Brisbane's Ormiston Carmel, nothing could be further from the truth. Prayer does permeate the day, but far from making us aloof from the world, it actually brings us closer to everyday problems. As women of our time and society, we too are touched by unemployment, youth suicide and a drug culture, but where many would experience hopelessness, we live with the hope that belief in Jesus Christ brings.

Sisterly relations here are strong. Like everyone, we face the sometimes difficult task of relating to others and the myriad of other problems that creep into any human situation, but in the midst of all our relationships, in every event of our lives, the focus is always on God. The Carmelite nun knows for sure that God is just as much to be found in the ironing and cooking as He is during the most sublime contemplative prayer. Our life is very ordinary. That's where God comes to meet us, or rather, where we become aware of him. It's something that takes time. It needs to be cultivated..... like a seed planted in the garden.



A WORD from the PRIORESS

Dear Friends,
This Year of Great Jubilee challenges us to mark the 2000th anniversary of Christ's Birth in some significant way. In our Carmel of the Holy Spirit, we are doing this by planting, not a Jubilee tree, but a seedling: Seeds of Carmel - a means of communicating with you in a personal and informative way. As it grows, you too will grow in drawing spirituality from our experience of living the Carmelite life of prayer, in being affirmed by our stories, which testify to the contemplative journey with its real challenges and joys, and encouraged by the witness of the saints of Carmel who have paved the way for us.

As we welcome you to our first edition, we hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed preparing it - praying the while for all who would receive it and asking that God will bless you and your loved ones with His Jubilee Hope and Presence.

Sr. Katherine O.C.P.



We'd like to hear from You

If you have questions, comments, stories, prayer requests, anything at all write to us here:

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The Seed

In fruitful soil
a seed grows
what was once nothing
is now as tall as the
heavens
reaching towards the sky.

And now I am the seed
I seek the soil
in which I may grow
reaching high
towards my God.

ASK US...

WHAT IS MEANT BY ENCLOSURE?

An enclosure is a space enclosed by some sort of wall or fence. The more monastic term "cloister" has a connotation of seclusion. So our Carmelite enclosure is a sacred space where we live secluded from the preoccupations and social activities of the world around us. It is only a comparative seclusion, however, as we remain a part of the society in which we live. This seclusion fosters freedom of heart, so that we can strive to focus our whole selves in loving attentiveness on God and on the demands of community living. And this loving attentiveness embraces the anxieties and hopes, the sufferings and anguish of each person in our world, for we hold each person in our hearts - those we know who have asked our prayers, and those we will never know.

IS IT TRUE YOU ARE A SILENT ORDER?

You could say we are a silent order if, by that, you mean an order most people have never heard of, like a silent phone number! But if it means we live in total silence, then it is a misnomer and a misconception. Silence is an integral part of our life but it is balanced by the sisterly relationships of community living. Solitude fosters the silence which is essential for coming to know ourselves and coming to know God. Unless we can be alone with ourselves, in loving acceptance of ourselves and secure in God's love for us, we are not able to relate in a genuine and non-possessive way with our sisters. So solitude fosters silence and silence blossoms in loving relationships, above all with our triune God and, flowing from that, with our sisters.

Praying with...

St John of the Cross

"Praying with.." is designed to introduce you to Carmelite spirituality and help you to seek God in silence and prayer. During the course of a day we recommend that you take thirty minutes or so to read through the short text and to spend time reflecting on it, using it to open your heart to rest in God.

O then soul, most beautiful among all creatures, so anxious to know the dwelling place of your Beloved so you may go in search of Him and be united to Him...you yourself are His dwelling and His secret inner room and hiding place.

St John of the Cross

It is all too easy to fall into the trap of thinking that God is somewhere 'out there'. We immediately face difficulties when we start to pray because we believe that we must *do* something in order to find Him. Thus we become agitated and restless when we don't find Him. John of the Cross begins by saying that we are His "dwelling place." It is not so much an activity of doing as an attitude of being. God is always with us because He is within us, closer to us than we are to ourselves. John says that we do not need to go very far in order to find Him, but we do need to enter within ourselves. We do this by becoming silent and still, for often He cannot be heard over the roar of our daily life.

Try this simple exercise:

Find a quiet place where you are not likely to be disturbed.

Closing your eyes, gently ask Jesus to come.

Become aware of the secret room within you where God is dwelling right now and ask for the grace to enter that room.

In silence remain with Him there, simply listening to Him and adoring Him.

It is a good idea to practice this often, setting aside half an hour everyday. After a while you will grow in awareness of God within you throughout your whole day.

Themes ...

Our Origins

A regular feature in which we will discuss some aspect of Carmelite life and spirituality. Upcoming topics include Prayer, Silence, Our Witness, Community Life, and of course we hope to introduce you to some of our saints.

Carmel has a long past, tracing its origins back to the thirteenth century when a group of men, possibly crusaders from Europe, settled on the slopes of Mount Carmel in modern day Haifa, Israel. Not too much is known about these early beginnings. The Carmelite Order has no founder, as such. The hermits lived in caves, seeking God in prayer and silence, coming together for the daily celebration of the Eucharist and a weekly meeting. They took Mary, Our Lady of Mt Carmel, as their patroness.

These first Carmelites, though they were not yet identified as such, were eventually forced from their solitude by marauding Saracens, and they sought refuge in their previous homelands in Europe, seeking to continue the way of life they had already founded.

The change in conditions in Europe forced them to abandon their eremetical (hermit) lifestyle in favour of a mendicant or apostolic one. They no longer lived in small hermitages away from people but moved gradually into the cities, teaching, preaching and administering the sacraments. The once simple hermits became involved in active ministries much like the Dominicans and Franciscans. The Order had shifted its focus and expanded and in 1452 Papal permission was sought for women to join the Order. Hence the first Carmelite nuns appeared and spread rapidly.

The new role of Carmelites during the Middle Ages and the general condition of the Church at the time contributed to many abuses. By the time of St. Teresa the Carmelite Order had moved far from its simple beginnings. It needed a reformer of the stature of this great woman in order to set it once more on the path of allegiance to Jesus in prayer, poverty and simplicity.

Next issue : St Teresa and the reform

FROM OUR DIARY



January 10

A beautiful day for Sr. Colette's First Profession. We had a 9 a.m. Mass as her family came up from Sydney - dad, her brother John, his wife, Joslyn and their twin boys aged 9. At the Procession of Gifts, her Dad placed a crown of roses on her head and the boys presented her with roses which they had "nipped" from the Church yard on the way in! That was her "family day". The next day we had a lovely Community day for her, cutting the big cake, with Waratah decor, signifying her "State of Origin!"

January 22

Annemarie was clothed in the habit of Carmel at 6 a.m. in a private ceremony and received the white mantle of Our Lady and her new title "of the Cross." This marks the beginning of her formal training. Sister was beaming all through the ritual, and as we embraced her one by one, we sang "Ecce quam Bonus" (Behold how good it is, sisters living together in unity.) Her Mother, up from Canberra, and her sister and niece from Brisbane, were at the 7 a.m. Mass to rejoice with Annemarie.

June 12

The Year of *Great Jubilee*, with its proclamation to God's people, in *Leviticus*, to return to their family and ancestral lands, prompted us, as a community, to make a pilgrimage to the site of our original "monastery" in Brisbane, where our foundation was made in 1927.

The house in the inner city suburb of Auchenflower was an old *Queenslander*. Most of it was demolished after the sisters left, and a Church was built on the site, but the land is hallowed ground, sacred to those who spent their early years there and many who died there.

The pilgrimage had been carefully planned. For weeks beforehand, we were reading old diaries found in the archives. We reconstructed a model of the house, listened to the stories of the older sisters, studied maps, and prayed for a fine day. Bishop Michael Putney, who now lives on part of the property, was our host, celebrating a special Mass for us there, and joining us for a picnic lunch in his garden. Memories were recalled as the pilgrims walked prayerfully around the grounds. Now rejuvenated from the living springs at the source of our community's life, we are looking ahead with confidence to a new millennium, with new stories, and new sisters to share it all with.



Left: Sr. Colette after her Profession
Below: Sr. Annemarie the day she received the Habit of Carmel



Pilgrims set out for Auchenflower: Sr. Katherine and Sr. Margaret Mary each carrying a Jubilee Pilgrim Staff