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Carmelites of the Holy Face

St. Joseph's Carmelite Hermitage, O.Carm
Inchincurka, Dunmanway, Co. Cork, Rep. of Ireland



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*“Sing ye to the Lord a new canticle: because He hath done wonderful things.”
— Psalm 97:1*

Dear Friends & Benefactors,

In our modern world it is customary for secular Christmas songs to be played all throughout Advent. However much we might try to avoid listening to them, when necessity compels us to appear in public it is difficult to entirely escape hearing something of them. The lyrics and tunes tend to stick in our minds, even against our will, distracting us from the spirit and purpose of Advent. Rather than trying to force ourselves to forget or ignore them, it will be far more effective to direct our attention to another song instead; namely, to the new canticle which the angels and saints are singing in Heaven; the same canticle whose echo resounds on earth in the hearts of all who are in the state of grace. In Holy Scripture there are many references to this spiritual canticle, and Advent is a most appropriate time to reflect on them.



Psalms 95 and 97 both begin with an exhortation to sing to the Lord a new canticle. As is so often the case with scriptural passages, we shall miss the beauty and significance of these words if we take them only in a literal sense. Not all of us have the gift of poetry or the ability to write music! How, then, are we to sing a new song to the Lord? Isn't He more pleased with the sacred hymns of Tradition than with modern novelties which match the emptiness of the Novus Ordo Liturgy which inspired them? Surely He is. The real meaning therefore lies much deeper, and two passages from the letters of St. Paul give us a clue as to how we ought to understand it. He wrote to the Ephesians: *“...be ye filled with the holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father...”* — Ephesians 5:18-20 The Epistles to the Colossians is very similar, though it is even more explicit about

how to practically carry out this injunction. It makes it clear that it is by grace that we sing in our hearts to God.

At first when God created Adam and Eve, they had a continual song in their hearts which lasted for as long as they remained in the state of grace. It was a song of conformity to the will of God, and it ceased when they offended Him by mortal sin. Throughout the Old Testament, there were many holy men and women who did their best to please God and to live in conformity with His will. The Canticle of Moses mentioned in the book of Exodus and again in the Apocalypse, represents the hymn of praise which each of them offered to God by the faithful observance of His precepts. It was the best attempt which mankind could make to restore the harmony which had been interrupted by the Fall, and yet it was insufficient. The debt incurred by original sin remained to be paid. The gates of Heaven remained shut. No human power alone was capable of restoring and re-establishing the primitive order of creation. Then at last, when the fullness of time had come, God Himself became Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. By the wonderful work of Redemption which He accomplished, He intoned upon earth a new and more perfect canticle than the one which had existed at the beginning of creation.



Every one of us is able to participate in this new canticle by uniting ourselves to Jesus Christ, through Him, with Him, and in Him accomplishing our Heavenly

Father's will as perfectly as possible. As members of His Mystical Body, whether that be actually or only potentially, every human being is called to be a part of the heavenly choir and is expected to act accordingly. Our life on earth is, like Advent, a time of preparation. All good musicians must practice hard before any great performance and so must we, lest we find ourselves unprepared and unable to sing the heavenly song when we appear before the Just Judge.

It is the will of our Heavenly Father which dictates the part assigned to each one of us in this new canticle. Jesus Himself assists us in carrying out the Father's will. On earth He had no other aim; no other desire; and to this day He continues to accomplish it in and through us, His members. If we go through life with a pure intention of pleasing God, we allow Him to make music in our hearts in all that we do by putting no obstacle to His grace. For this to happen, though, we must be humble and empty of self, like Our Lady.

Available from our Carmelite Shop:

<i>Arma Christi: The Weapens of Our Warfare</i> (193 pages).....	€10.00
<i>Beyond the Veil: The Holy Face Devotion in ... Sacred Scripture</i> (328 pages)....	€15.00
Christmas Cards.....	4 or more €2.50 each, otherwise €3.00 each
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Greeting and/or Mass Cards.....	€3.00 each or €10.00 for 4
Thin Blessed 100% Beeswax Candle (290x8 mm).....	offering, €1.00
Blessed Salt.....	Free

Hermitage News

- ✦ 12th October 2024 – Rev. Mother Irene of the Holy Face celebrated her 34th anniversary of Profession, and a Mass was offered in our Oratory this morning in thanksgiving, both for the graces received during these years, and in gratitude for the generosity of our benefactors.

The following day Fr. Elias Mary of St. Michael, OCDS, presided at our 12th Holy Face prayer meeting, providing us with Benediction and a short inspiring talk on God's gratuitous love in addition to our regular prayers of reparation. For the benefit of those who wish to join us in these prayers, the entire prayer meeting was recorded and can be viewed on YouTube under the title: *God's Gratuitous Love - 12th Holy Face Prayer meeting*. Much to our joy, Fr. Elias has agreed to travel from Wales every month.



- ✦ Late October 2024 - Three young bantam hens and a Silkie rooster were added to our flock of chickens. Hopefully we will have some new baby chicks in the Spring!
- ✦ 21 November 2024 – The Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady brought a few inches of snow and dressed the whole landscape in white to celebrate this feast. Snowfalls like this are not very frequent in our Irish winters, but when they do come, they almost always coincide with a feast of our Blessed Mother! Our two goats, Flossie and Blanche, were certainly glad of their warm furry coats.



We have been busy making many Christmas cards, and so we have plenty of new designs available in packs of 10 for €25.00 and 6 for €15.00. Please order as soon as possible to ensure you receive them in time.

May God bless you this Advent and Christmas. May His Spirit renew you, and may the Breath of the Almighty fill you with new life in Christ Jesus Our Lord. (ref. Job 33:4)

Mother Irene of the Holy Face O.Carm and Community

Caryll Houselander wrote a lovely little book of reflections on Our Lady, whom she described as “the Reed of God.” This is a beautiful analogy which fits perfectly into the theme of Advent. The reed is hollow inside, but this hollowness, this emptiness, is not without a purpose. It is this very fact which enables it to receive the piper’s breath and to utter the song which is in his heart. However, before it can produce beautiful music the reed must be cut and pierced and shaped into a flute. Our souls need to go through a similar process. If we are to sing the new song of grace, we must remove the obstacles, the attachments to sin, the noise, and the unnecessary clutter which have found a place in our lives and in our hearts. By earnest prayer - that prayer which comes from the heart and not merely from the lips - we dispose ourselves to listen, to receive the Breath of God, and to let His will find a more perfect expression in our daily conduct. At first it is a painful process which demands that we exercise great patience, not only with others, but even with ourselves. But by patient and persevering effort, we shall gradually become more docile and more perfect instruments in God’s hands. In proportion as we do, we will find the new song welling up within our hearts. Sometimes it will be a joyful song; at other times there will be notes of sorrow; but there will always be peace and harmony in the depths of our souls when we will all that God does and do all that God wills.



No one else can sing our part for us, and no one can sing the spiritual canticle exactly as we do, for the path which God’s will traces out for us is unique. That is why our correspondence to His plan can very fittingly be called a new song. There is no visible audience whose applause will cheer us on; only the love of God which sweetly compels us to exert ourselves to sing our hymn of conformity to His will ever more perfectly. *“For,”* to borrow the words of St. Bernard, *“it is not a melody that resounds abroad but the very music of the heart, not a trilling on the lips but an inward pulsing of delight, a harmony not of voices but of wills. It is a tune you will not hear in the streets, these notes do not sound where crowds assemble; only the singer hears it and the One to whom he sings – the lover and the Beloved.”* – *On the Song of Songs, Sermon 1:11*

For nine months after the Incarnation, Our Lady carried this new song hidden within her, unknown to and unnoticed by the rest of mankind. Only once did her joy overflow in the wonderful hymn of praise which we call the *Magnificat*. But on Christmas day when Christ was born, the shepherds witnessed a great multitude of the heavenly army praising God in the words of the new canticle, now openly revealed to mankind: *“Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.”* – *Luke 2:14*

Truly this song is the substance of all perfection! To glorify God – this is our fundamental task. Perhaps for practical purposes it will be easier to think of it as pleasing God. Instead of making our own selves the centre of our lives and the measure by which we determine what is good for us, the will of God must become all things to us; the goal to which we permanently direct our attention. We must learn to recognise God’s will in all which happens, and in all which does not happen to us. We must firmly believe that His Providence is watching over every detail of our existence: those circumstances over which we have no control, the mistakes of the past, the uncertainties of the future, the joys and sorrows which we encounter – absolutely everything, even down to the tiniest hair on our heads. Not only must we recognise His will – that is but the first step – but we need to learn to welcome and love it too, in painful things and pleasant ones alike.

If we look back at the quote taken from St. Paul’s letter to the Christians of Ephesus, we can see that an attitude of thanksgiving is very closely linked to the song of our hearts. He tells us to *“give thanks always, for all things”* – something which is by no means an easy thing to do. And yet, nothing is more efficacious in harmonising our will with God’s will than to thank Him for everything which befalls us. It will be less difficult for us to do this if we are thoroughly convinced that God really has our own best interests at heart and that He is constantly arranging everything for the eternal advantage of those who love Him. We might not feel very grateful, but that doesn’t matter. Often we cannot help what we feel. And so it will be sufficient if we compel ourselves to thank God with our will – a thought which is taken from Psalm 27.

This good will is all that God expects from us, which is why David sang: *“with my will I will give praise to Him.”* – *Psalm 27:7* God is very much honoured and glorified when we praise Him not merely with our lips, nor even with our emotions, but with our will. We cannot sing the new canticle properly if we do not sing it with our will. We need to listen, to make silence and space for God in the sanctuary of our soul in order to hear and repeat the tune which the will of God is softly breathing into hearts which are sufficiently empty of self to receive it. Let us give our attention to this most necessary preparation this Advent, so that when Christmas day arrives the sacred carols which we sing may be a fitting expression of the song of our heart. In exchange, the Divine Babe of Bethlehem will fill us with that peace which He alone can give us; that deep and abiding peace which reigns in His kingdom, both on earth and in Heaven.

“And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” – *Philippians 4:7*

Cantate Domino Canticum Novum

(Sing to the Lord a New Song)

When God Himself became a Man,
A brand new canticle began.
The saints and angels sing this song,
And we are called to sing along.

At every moment which occurs,
God seeks our yes to echo hers.
So much depends upon that yes!
God’s tune demands it; nothing less!

This song is sung within the heart;
And every creature has a part
Which they, and they alone, can sing
In praise of the Eternal King.

This song procures the death of pride,
By which our God is glorified;
And peace remains His gift to man
When we pursue His loving plan.

This music is itself a prayer
And it demands a listening ear;
But hearts filled up with things of earth
Cannot enjoy or grasp its worth.

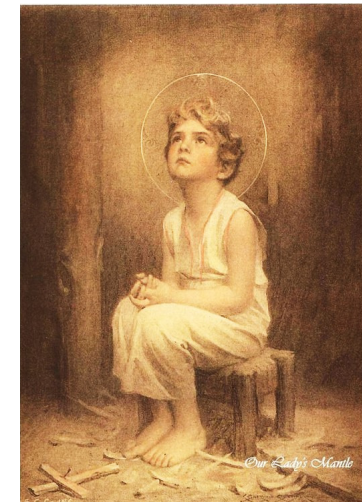
So may we, like the empty reed,
Receive God’s Breath and thus proceed
To join the sweet angelic cry:
“All glory be to God on high!”

Our souls is like a piper’s reed
Which plays a lovely tune indeed
When nothing fills it to oppose
The Life and Breath of Him who blows.

The Father’s will dictates the tune;
The Son performs it well; and soon
The Breath of Both, the Paraclete,
Has made the harmony complete.

Each moment, then, it starts anew.
God’s will and ours, no longer two,
Are sweetly blended into one,
As we unite with Christ, His Son.

Our Lady has a special role
In bringing music to the soul.
Her “Yes” is ours; the same procured
The Incarnation of Our Lord.



Cf. Judith 16:15; Psalms 95:1; 97:1; 143:9 149:1; Isaiah 42:10; Luke 1:38; 2:14