

OUR LADY OF MT CARMEL—HINTS IN SCRIPTURE

The wisdom and tradition of Carmel has offered us four important biblical vignettes of Mary that we are called to reflect upon during the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. They are:

1. The Cloud of Renewal (1 Kings 18:42b-45a): This passage recounts the story of the Prophet Elijah resting on the top of Mount Carmel after defeating the false prophets of Baal. Elijah sees a small cloud rising out of the sea and prepares for the rain to return to the land of Israel. For Carmelites, this little cloud is understood as a prefiguration of Mary. Why? The rain that arrived with the cloud offered the land new life. So also with Our Lady. Our life comes in and through Jesus Christ, and He chose to reside in the womb of Mary, who is the little cloud offered to us on the horizon of human history.

2. A Guide to Life on the Mountain (Psalm 15:1, 2-3, 4): In the responsorial psalm of the Feast of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, the people respond, “Draw us after you, Virgin Mary; we shall follow in your footsteps.” This response opens us up to the message of the 15th psalm, which is about being admitted into the temple and resting upon the holy mountain. The psalm reminds us to ask ourselves who can have a place on the holy mountain of the Lord? The Lord has made a place for us and desires all people to dwell and celebrate with Him. But how? We must become like Him. The life of a disciple is not one of abstractions but a life of Truth; the Truth that has taken on our human nature, Jesus. So, like Jesus, we must speak the truth from our hearts, walk blamelessly, do what is right, never slander, never harm friends, or give reproach against our neighbors.

3. Living in the Freedom of the Children of God (Galatians 4:4-7): In chapter 4 of his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul reminds his disciples about the true and real human birth of Jesus. His birth had consequences. In coming to birth through a woman, Christ chose to enter our enslavement to the Law. Why? By becoming like us, slaves to the Law, He gave us the ability to become children of the Father and thus live in the freedom of God. By this gift of freedom, we are once again able to call God our Abba/Father. One can never separate Mary from her Child, for the mother will always make her Child known. Through her Immaculate Conception she tasted the salvation of Christ, her Son, and could speak her “Yes” as a free child of the Father.

4. Our Receptive Mother (John 19:25-27): Finally, we Carmelites choose to dwell with Mary during the darkest moment of her life, namely, the time she was called to remain at the side of Christ at Calvary. At that moment, the depths of her fiat were tested by the suffering of her Son. She could have fled and left Him alone on the Cross, but in her love, she chose to remain with Him, allowing Him to know some level of love as He suffered and died on the cross. Additionally, Mary was then asked to receive another; that is, she was asked to receive the Church in the person of John, the beloved disciple. We hear no words from Mary in that passage, but we know her actions all too well. She chose to dwell within the Church, which was birthed on that horrendous day through the water and Precious Blood that poured forth from the side of her Son. She, who received her Lord in the womb and raised Him as her Son, was offered another “Child” to raise and care for: the Infant Church.