

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Carmelite Mysticism Holy Land Pilgrimage Stella Maris Carmelite Church on Mt. Carmel Thursday, October 30, 2014 **1 Kgs 18:41-46; Jn 19:23-27** (If we are going to have faith, it's going to be by appreciating the God who is in the darkness and the God who is in the silence.)

This place of Mt. Carmel is associated with various figures in the history of our Church; and the readings and the place tie together, but not easily. First of all, we start off with Elijah who spent his life actually battling the government, which was in his case frustrating. **What is most important about Elijah** is that it's not really what happened here on Mt. Carmel, where he battled the priests of Baal, which was part of the, you might say, establishment of that time, but rather what happened when he fled to Horeb and **he learned that God was present in the quiet zephyr**. And that idea of God being quiet in the zephyr is away from both the politics of that time, where he was a promoter of Yahweh's cult in the public forum, but it's also different from the general viewpoint of people that acts of nature were really acts of God. Today even the insurance companies say a tornado is an act of God. In those days everyone thought that way: that storms, that draughts, that floods were acts of God. But when he went to Horeb and there were crashing winds and loud thunder and peals of lightning God was not in any of that. That's the beginning of **a new way of looking at the relationship between God and nature**. It really starts with Elijah. It will come to a fore in Christ himself, as we read recently about the tower of Siloam that collapsed. Jesus said, "You think those people were more guilty than anyone else? No, what **happens in nature, accidents of nature, acts of nature, are not God doing something**. God allows it of course, but it's not God's signature and it's not God revealing something or saying something. But **God does reveal himself in the quiet, in the silence**, actually of that place where he was. After the storm had passed God was in the zephyr.

Now it's that precise reality that is exemplified by the Carmelite order. **The Carmelites are mystics.** The great leaders were all mystical people. St. Teresa of Avila, St. Therese of Lisieux, St. John of the Cross—three great ones, but there are many others who championed the idea of God being present in the zephyr, **God being present in the silence, and willing to let God lead them into this silence, even into the darkness where we are completely out of control, where we have no say.** That is really the greatness of the Carmelite order that they lead us to this profound mystical appreciation of God. And I believe that where they have led us really actually all have to go. When I was in the seminary I argued that with some of the professors. They said oh this mysticism is just for the select few. You could argue that way. In fact, St. Teresa of Avila does say you shouldn't promote it yourself; let God lead you. But I think **God will lead everyone sooner or later because the world itself does not support faith.** There may have been a time when the world supported faith, where culture supported faith, but doesn't anymore. **So if we are going to have faith, it's going to be by appreciating the God who is in the darkness and the God who is in the silence.** And there is something purifying about that. It's a letting go of what we think must be and allowing what God wants to be. I think it's a very important component of a living faith. And it's one that always keeps the horizon of **hope that God is leading us onward to something else, to somewhere else.** And of course **it has to be motivated by love.** If it isn't motivated by love, then it falls flat. That's the problem with a lot of so-called "natural mysticisms." There are mystics of many religions and many different faiths. But the problem is very often what is motivating their mystical journey, if you want to call it that, is not love at all, but it's something else. It's developing the self. But Jesus said those who try to develop the self, lose the self; **those who lose the self, find the self.** That's something we can keep in mind.