

Homily Given by Fr. Ernest Larkin, O.Carm.

At outdoor Mass in St. Mary's Carmelite Abbey Ruyins
on Thursday Evening, July 24th, 1994
Claremorris, Co. Mayo

Last Saturday, July 16th, we celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This feast is the solemn commemoration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The phrase "the solemn commemoration" means that this is the time when we thank God for all the gifts and graces that He has given to those who are devoted to Our Lady under this title: members of the Carmelite Order, members of the Scapular Confraternity and all who are connected in any way to Our Lady under this title. This evening we're continuing this celebration and we're looking at the gifts God has given the world through Our Lady of Mount Carmel through the optic of this seven hundred-year-old abbey.

This abbey is very old and it contains in its rocks many memories. They go back into the Old Testament to the time of Elijah. The first reading of the Mass today was a reading about the prophet Elijah. He lived 900 years before Christ and 2000 years before the first Carmelites appeared on Mount Carmel. Why do we look to him as part of our heritage? Simply because he was the concrete model and ideal of the Carmelite Order from the very beginning. Mount Carmel was Elijah's home and the early Carmelites saw in Elijah, this great prophet, this great man of prayer, someone they would imitate.

They looked at Elijah's life and the events associated with him with Carmelite eyes and they interpreted what happened to him in the light of their own experience. The first reading of the Mass this evening, from the *Book of Kings*, was about Elijah looking for a sign that the drought was over. Elijah

brought down on Israel, a great drought, a punishment from God, for the infidelity of the King and the falling away of the people. Now it was time for healing and Elijah was looking for a sign from God that the drought was ending. He went up the slopes of Mount Carmel and eventually saw a tiny cloud, a small white cloud the size of a person's hand, and he saw in it the announcement that the drought had ended. Carmelites through the ages see in this little cloud an image of our Blessed Lady. She is the harbinger of Good News. She is the one who brought the Messiah into the world. She is the one who was given to the Church as spiritual mother, the one who would guide her children to her Son.

Our Blessed Mother is like a lightning rod. I checked this out with a scientist. I asked if it would be possible that a small cloud could be a lightning rod. A lightning rod, as you know, gathers the electrical forces in the environment and brings them to the earth where the rod is attached. A cloud can actually do that function. It seemed to me that our Blessed Lady is like a lightning rod in the history of the Carmelite Order and in the history of the Church. She draws God's graces and gifts and blessing wherever she is. When we look to her as our spiritual mother, we can expect to be touched by God's graces.

It was Mary's function in the very beginning of the Carmelite Order when it began on Mount Carmel in the early 1200's. For some thirty years the hermits lived on Mount Carmel in a very simple lifestyle praying and celebrating the Eucharist together. The Eucharist was their life-line. This simple

way of life gave way to something more elaborate when they came back to Europe. These early Carmelites were Crusaders, ex-Crusaders, and when they came back to Europe they got involved in the ministry of the Church. They became very active mendicant friars. The Carmelites who came to this monastery in 1288, less than forty years from the time when the first Carmelites came to Europe, were very busy friars with a very strong ministry. The history of this abbey tells us how faithful these men were in this ministry of celebrating the Sacraments with the people, preaching love of Our Blessed Lady and devotion to her Brown Scapular. This work is part of what we are recalling tonight. The ruins remind us of this history.

But this history also challenges us at this moment. If we're just going to talk about the past, then we're indulging in nostalgia. If the past challenges the present moment, then the past comes alive and the remembrance is dynamic and living. And so this evening we're challenged by the history out of which we come. We're challenged to live the way God seems to be calling us to live in this day. And that way is to be very much like our Blessed Mother who was a "woman of faith."

Mary was a mystic because that's what a mystic is, a person of faith, a person who is constantly willing to entrust himself to God and to believe that God is in the realities that are happening all about one's life. The great theologian, Karl Rahner, from Germany who died some fifteen years ago, made the statement that the Christian of the future would either be a mystic or would be nothing at all. He was convinced that the Christian who simply followed the patterns of society was not going to be able to survive because Christian structures, Christian social patterns, were all falling apart and would continue to

break down. We don't have to be told that this is happening all around us today. And so we are either going to live from the inside out with a powerful faith or we are going to lose our way, because the markers are not there for us in the way they used to be. Mary is the perfect model of this woman of faith who constantly accepted what happened to her, not unthinkingly, not without processing and trying to figure out what God is doing and saying, but always accepting the reality with trust and with hope. This is the challenge in our life today. We're called to get involved in the world in ways our forebears didn't have to do. We're called to get involved in social issues, political issues, economic issues and to lend our hand to make our world a world where there is more justice, where there is more love, where there is more freedom for everyone. And this prophetic task of trying to better our world, trying to see where God is asking us to go, in what direction to move, this challenge is the other half of our faith-challenge today.

What I'm saying is that we're called to be contemplative and prophetic. These are big words and they may frighten us but they are translated into being people of faith who are willing to work for a better world right now. Not only in the next world but right now as well. And we have as our inspiration and model and support the great Lady who was so prayerful and yet was also a strong woman who said that God was siding with the poor and casting down the mighty and building up the lowly. That's where we want to be. May this evening's celebration encourage us to be people of faith who are willing to work as Mary did. God bless all of you. May God be good to all our loved ones who are buried in this cemetery. May this evening inspire us to be as faithful as they were.