



Carmel in the Capital

A Newsletter of the Washington Community of
Discalced Carmelites
Fall, 2020

Fr. Francis Miller, O.C.D. On Trinity Sunday, June 7, 2020, Fr. Francis died of the Covid-19 virus. He had been a member of our Carmelite community in Washington, D.C. for the past 67 years, where he served as our faithful gardener and grounds keeper. During his years as a priest, he was involved in various ministries, especially helping out in parishes and serving as chaplain to communities of women religious. Also, he was confessor for many of our Secular Carmelites.

Fr. Francis was born in Columbus, Ohio on November 30, 1923, entered the Discalced Carmelites at Holy Hill, Wisconsin on August 29, 1942, made his solemn profession on August 30, 1946 and was ordained to the priesthood on December 14, 1949. We greatly miss Fr. Francis' gentle spirit and will always have fond memories of him. Please pray for his eternal rest.



Fr. Francis Miller, O.C.D.

The death of Fr. Francis puts a human face on the Covid-19 Pandemic and is a sobering reminder of our mortality. Meditating on death and the shortness of life has been recommended to us by saints and sages alike. In *The Imitation of Christ*, we read, **“Each morning remember that you may not live until evening; and in the evening, do not presume to promise yourself another day. Be ready at all times, and so live that death may never find you unprepared”** (Bk. I, ch. 23).

In Muriel Spark's novel *Memento Mori*, a group of elderly acquaintances receive a series of phone calls in which a ghostly voice says, **“Remember, you must die.”** The story is a moral tale of how immune we can become to the reality of death when we are absorbed in daily life. The characters of the novel are incapable of feeling the realization of death because they are preoccupied with trivial matters, engrossed in pointless squabbles and cling mindlessly to the ingrained routines of mundane living. In consequence, their lives are meaningless and empty. However, one of the characters is able to perceive the importance of the message that Death is trying to communicate. He says,

If I had my life over again, I should form a habit of nightly composing myself to thoughts of death. I would practice, as it were, the remembrance of death. There is no other practice which so intensifies life. Death, when it approaches, ought not to take one by surprise. Without an ever-present sense of death, life is insipid. You might as well live on the whites of eggs. Muriel Spark *Memento Mori* (New York: Avon Books, 1959), 156-157.

Perhaps a hidden grace of the Pandemic is that we have been awakened out of the forgetfulness of our mortality and invited to observe that life is short and to remember that we may not live until evening. Remembering death helps us to recall our Origin and our Destiny; we have come from God, and we are going back to God. We do not have a lasting city here. When we remember death, we are able to see all things in the light of eternity.

Cogitatio sancta servabit te: “A holy thought will save you.” (The Rule of St. Albert)

In his work *Areopagitica*, John Milton writes: “**I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary.**” With the constrictions that Covid-19 has imposed upon our lives, we have come to know that Milton’s perspective was limited. It is precisely because we have *not* been able to sally out into the world, as has been our custom, that it has been necessary to confront our real adversaries – *ourselves*.

During these months, all of us have come face to face with the limitations of our virtue. Impulse control in almost every area of our lives has become frayed. Impatience is our constant companion. We do not know exactly why we are so jittery. We know it has something to do with being both coopted-up with loved ones and being separated from them. It has to do with our impatience coming into conflict with the impatience of others. It has to do with our routines being ruptured. Nothing feels either predictable or normal, and we do not know how long this situation will last.

But perhaps our deepest suffering has to do with a felt sense of loss of meaning and purpose. For months, countless Catholics have been deprived of the Eucharist and the support of their parish community. When our faith is not nourished by these means of grace, we can begin to wonder if what we have believed in all of our lives is nothing but an illusion.

This is a dark night of the soul that the saints often experienced. For example, five years before the onset of her trial of faith, St. Thérèse wrote, “**At that time I was having great interior trials, even to the point of asking myself whether heaven really existed.**” And during her trial of faith, these doubts deepened.

So where do we find our faith in the midst of doubt? Thérèse gives us a clue. During her dark night, she wrote, “**When I sing of the happiness of heaven and of the eternal possession of God, I feel no joy in this, for I sing simply what I WANT TO BELIEVE.**” In times of darkness, we will find God in our *desires*. Our *wanting* to believe is *belief*. Our desire for God is God’s desire for us.

God’s Peace, Fr. Marc Foley, O.C.D.