

WHY DID MARY APPEAR AS OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL?

By Father Alfred Combe



Mount Carmel "Stella Maris" Monastery in Haifa overlooks the Mediterranean.

WHenever Our Lady appears to her children on earth under a particular title, it is not without a purpose. At Lourdes in 1858, when young Bernadette Soubirous asked the 'beautiful lady' who she was, the answer came: "I am the Immaculate Conception." This was clearly a reaffirmation of the newly proclaimed dogma of the Immaculate Conception decreed by Pope Pius IX a few short years before in 1854. When Our Lady came to Fatima in 1917 as "The Lady of the Rosary," it was to emphasize that most powerful prayer and urge us to use it in imploring God's mercy and gaining Our Lady's help and protection against the catastrophic events which were to come in the form of World War II and the global spread of atheistic communism.

Why then did the Blessed Virgin come to Garabandal as "Our Lady of Mount Carmel"? What significance does this title have for Christians today?

A Divine Theme

If we go back to Lourdes we can begin to see a divine theme being developed. The Blessed Virgin's last appearance at

Lourdes was on July 16, 1858, feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. During the final apparition at Fatima, October 13, 1917 when the "miracle of the sun" occurred, Our Lady first appeared as she had been appearing to the three shepherd children with her sorrowful heart exposed. And then she appeared as Our Lady of Mount Carmel with "something hanging from her right hand." We can safely assume that the "something" was the scapular. Forty-four years later in the little mountain hamlet of San Sebastian de Garabandal in northern Spain, Our Lady appears with a large brown scapular prominently draped over her right wrist.

The Title and the Sacramental

In 1251, Mary appeared as Our Lady of Mount Carmel to Saint Simon Stock, General of the Order of Carmelites, holding in her hand a scapular. She directed him to found a confraternity whose members should wear it and consecrate themselves to her service. Ever since then, the title "Our Lady of Mount Carmel" and the scapular have been inseparably linked.

It is also a tradition among the Carmelites that when Elijah the prophet (of Mount Carmel) threw his cloak over Elisha thus imparting his spirit to him, it was a prefiguration of Mary clothing her children with the brown scapular. It is of the greatest importance for Catholics living today as we enter into humanity's darkest hour, to be consecrated by scapular to our heavenly Mother, placing ourselves under the mantle of her protection. A prophecy attributed to Saint Dominic further underlines this importance, "...one day through the rosary and the scapular, she (Our Lady) will save the world."

But aside from its connection with the scapular, does the title, "Our Lady of Mount Carmel," have any other significance?

Carmel—A Symbol of Beauty

Carmel is a celebrated mountain near modern Haifa. Its Hebrew name means 'garden' or 'orchard'. In early times it was so named because of the fertility of its slopes; well irrigated, they bore a vegetation so abundant and varied, that Carmel passed into Biblical verse to

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evoke the very idea of beauty and abundance. In the Song of Solomon, the bridegroom, so dazzled by the beauty of the bride, says to her, "Thy head is held high like Carmel ... How beautiful thou art ... Oh love, oh delight!" (Song 7: 6,7).

Isaiah, the prophet, speaking of the Messianic era, proclaims, "The glory of Lebanon is bestowed on it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of Yahweh, the splendor of our God" (Is 35:2). In its piety, inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Church has taken this Biblical image and applied it to the Blessed Virgin, "Flower of Carmel, Fruitful Vine, Splendor of Heaven." Indeed at Garabandal, the four little seers were in ecstasy before Our Lady of Carmel, enraptured by her beauty.

Thus through her title, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Blessed Virgin, the Entirely Beautiful, the Entirely Holy, the Entirely Good, the Joy of God recalls to us, as in the Magnificat, 'the marvels' that God did for her—and for us. If, by her beauty she wishes to attract us to her heart, is it not to make us hear and to heed her message of salvation?

Carmel—A Symbol of Faith

Just as Mount Horeb in Sinai reminds us of Moses and "the Law," Mount Carmel calls to mind Elijah and "the Prophets." It is the Holy Mountain, the Inspired Mountain.

During the time of Elijah, the kingdom of Israel was in a pitiable state. False priests and prophets by the hundreds, under the protection of the court, openly preached the worship of Baal. To this idolatry were added corruption, injustice and crime. The situation was so drastic that the very foundation of Israel's faith was threatened.

The Man of Faith

Then Elijah made his appearance. Alone in the face of the priests and prophets of Baal, alone before the king and the people, alone against all the forces of decomposition, Elijah rose up—a champion of the ABSOLUTE. A man of prayer and penance, of contemplation of action; of boldness and humility, incorruptible before the great ones, good to the poor and the 'widowed', completely consumed by the fire of God, Elijah

preached conversion to the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

After all of Israel had fallen to the worship of Baal, Elijah assembled the entire population and the 450 false prophets on Mount Carmel and proposed a test. Both he and the false prophets would each prepare a sacrificial bull but light no fire. The false prophets would call upon Baal to provide the fire and Elijah would call upon the Lord. Everyone agreed that whichever sacrifice was set ablaze would determine the true God. The



This oriental version of Our Lady of Mount Carmel shows the universal dimension of the title celebrated every July sixteenth.

prophets of Baal, after many hours of preparation, hopping around the altar and slashing themselves with swords were unable to produce the fire. Then Elijah called upon the Lord and fire came down from heaven not only consuming the sacrifice but the altar as well. When the Israelites saw this, they fell prostrate in worship of the one true God.

Elijah became so popular in Israel that his name will forever be associated with Mount Carmel and its dramatic role in Elijah's contest on behalf of God. Since that time, Mount Carmel

has been a symbol of conversion or turning back to God.

False Prophets

Today, all the powers of evil are breaking out against our Christian faith, sometimes openly, but more often under the guise of prophets or as wolves in sheep's clothing. False prophets attack the most sacred of dogmatic truths, and they lure to shipwreck the principal mystical, ascetic, moral, spiritual and humane values of our time.

The Woman of Faith

Like Elijah, but more than Elijah, because she is the Queen of Prophets, Mary repeats to us the word of God which spans the ages, "be converted" (Acts 3:19). At Garabandal she said, "We must do much penance... If we do not change... a chastisement will come." She recalls to us the ABSOLUTE of the Eucharist and the priesthood, "We must... visit the Blessed Sacrament frequently... Many cardinals, bishops and priests are on the road to perdition..." Because she is the Co-redemptress, she puts before us the ABSOLUTE of the Cross and the sacrifice. "We must make many sacrifices.... Think of the passion of Jesus." And because she is the Immaculate One, she calls us to perfection, "But above all we must be very good."

The Full Meaning

Now we can begin to see why the Blessed Virgin came to Garabandal as Our Lady of Mount Carmel—that symbol of motherly protection, of beauty, faith and conversion.

In a locution on July 20, 1963, Our Lord told Conchita that as a result of the miracle, "she (Russia)... will be converted, and thus everybody will love Our Hearts." If we meditate on this, we realize that we cannot begin to imagine the full impact the total Garabandal event will have on the world. Perhaps the real significance of the Blessed Mother's title at Garabandal is reserved for the future. And here is a point to contemplate. On one side of the scapular which Mary had on her wrist at Garabandal was a cross. On the other side was a mountain. □

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