

## *Saints and Seasons*

Sister Barbara Nell Laperouse, O. Carm.

As Jesus went from one village to another teaching the people, he used the natural objects and movements of the earth and of human life to explain some of his most difficult sayings: the birds of the air, the flowers of the field, a farmer's sowing of the seed, a lost sheep, an old woman sweeping her house to find a lost coin, little children. Some of our deepest and most spiritual insights arise from reflection on things and events that are so commonplace we take them for granted. Reflection enables us to "look again" and to see things in a new light. This happens to us with the seasons of the year. We see our world and experience within ourselves new life in the spring, growth and maturity in the summer, the reaping of our fruit and pending retirement in the fall and the wisdom that comes with time to reflect on life in winter.



Photo by Sister Thérèse Gregoire, O. Carm.

The word "seasons" has several definitions: the four climate divisions of the year; the spices used to enhance food; added skill that comes through experience. We are familiar with all of these: from tasty Cajun food, to recognizing the seasoned veteran on the job. Each definition implies change that brings some enhancement of life. But, what does this have to do with Carmelite spirituality?

The essence of Carmelite spirituality is transformation of our hearts through the action of God's love within us. For most of us, this comes about gradually through prayer and receptivity to God's grace. Like the seasons open to the elements of our climate, it is a process that allows the elements of divine love, compassion, gratitude, and self-giving to be operative within us. This divine action changes the way we see things and respond to the events in our lives. As the movement of the sun changes the temperature of our earth, and in turn brings about a change in our seasons, so God's divine action within us transforms who we are and how we are in the world about us – this is transformation in Christ.

Seasons, saints,  
and sisters reflect  
Carmelite life.  
In this issue  
the Sisters of  
Mount Carmel  
consider the  
seasons of  
one's spiritual life.





## Message from the Administration

Sister Barbara Nell Laperouse, O. Carm.

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Many of the great mystics write of this process of change. Teresa of Avila speaks of the mansions through which we pass on our spiritual journey to find God in the depths of our hearts. John of the Cross writes of the dark night of the senses and of the soul through which we are purified and open to God within our hearts. Therese of Lisieux speaks of the Little Way which entails finding God's presence even in the little things of life, like washing clothes or being patient with an irritating person. All express one thing: we start with the very human life we live daily and go through the process of becoming "seasoned" through grace into the very life of God. We begin to develop through God's grace the very characteristics of Jesus: compassion, patience, courage and love that flow from living with Christ so that we may be one with one another. This is a life process that brings to fullness the gifts of our Baptism, our life in and through Christ. We are transformed into Christ in our world today.

*There is a time for everything and a time for every affair under the heavens. God has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put the timeless into our hearts, without our ever discovering from beginning to end, the work which God has done. I recognized that there is nothing better than to be glad and to do well during life.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11-12

We live through seasons of our spiritual lives. We experience at times the loving presence of God, or the call to turn away from the sacrifices our faith may demand of us. We listen in contemplative presence before God with ardent fervor; we question God when tragedy strikes or our faith wanes. But with fidelity we move through the times of joy with gratitude or with faith and hope when difficulties arise.

As we mature through the seasons of the years in physical strength and wisdom, so too, through the spiritual seasons of our life, we realize with St. John: **No follower of mine shall ever walk in darkness; no, he shall possess the light of life. John 8, 12**

*Sister Barbara Nell Laperouse, O. Carm. is on the Executive Council for the Sisters of Mount Carmel and coordinator for the Carmel Community in New Orleans.*

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# Spring Gardens: A Path of Prayer

Sister Thérèse Gregoire, O. Carm.

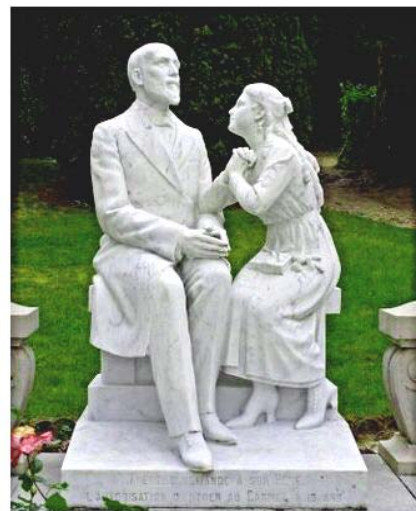
The gift of Thérèse to the Church was to simplify prayer. Thérèse describes prayer as "a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and love, embracing both trial and joy."

Thérèse learned to pray long before she entered Carmel at Lisieux at the age of 15. Her descriptions of her growth in prayer bring us to spring fields and gardens. Springtime reminds me of a trip to France some years ago. The highlight was a visit to Thérèse's childhood home, Les Buissonnets. I was eager to see the garden she described in her autobiography, the garden where she had heart-to-heart talks with her own father and with her God. I found in the garden a life-size statue that captures one of those moments with her father. The garden was small and unpretentious, a quiet place of simple beauty. Thérèse relished being in such a garden.

Thérèse was strongly influenced by the Carmelite saints, Teresa and John, whom Thérèse referred to as "our mother Teresa" and "our father John." Teresa of Avila admits, like most of us, the need for help to stay focused when she prayed. She speaks of using springtime flowers, images of water, and butterflies to help her pray. She reminded her daughters of Carmel that "the important thing is not to think much but to love much." Although John of the Cross is often thought of as an austere mystic, his poetry is filled with strong word-paintings of nature. Brother Lawrence, the quiet, shy brother taught us all to live in the now-moments of God's presence. "Prayer is simple attentiveness, an habitual turning of my eyes to God," he said. These are all lessons Thérèse absorbed well and made her own.

Books on prayer never appealed much to Thérèse "I do not have the courage to force myself to search out beautiful prayers in books. It gives me a headache!...I do like children who do not know how to read. I say to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and he always understands me." At an early age, on warm afternoon fishing trips with her father, Thérèse tells us, "I preferred to go alone and sit on the grass bedecked with flowers, and then my thoughts became very profound indeed! Without knowing what it was to meditate, my soul was absorbed in real prayer." In her autobiography, her letters, her poetry she frequently speaks of flowers and gardens. She had wanted to entitle her autobiography "The Rose Unpetalled" and penned a poem with that same theme. Writing to her sister Celine she explained "You know, dear Mother, how much I love flowers; I gave up forever the pleasure of running through fields decked out in their springtime treasures. Well, never in my life did I possess so many flowers as after my entrance into Carmel."

As I wander on our property in Lacombe or stop along a highway with camera in hand, I try to recall the advice of Brother Lawrence and of Thérèse to be attentive to the beauty of God's presence in the now-moment, in the raindrops or the sunrays, in the butterflies and vivid spring flowers. At those times perhaps my favorite thought is the one Thérèse wrote in a letter to a cousin at Christmas of 1894, "A flower is the smile of God."



*Sister Thérèse Gregoire is treasurer and archivist for the Sisters of Mount Carmel.*

# Summer of Our Lives

Sister Carlita Panaligan, O. Carm.

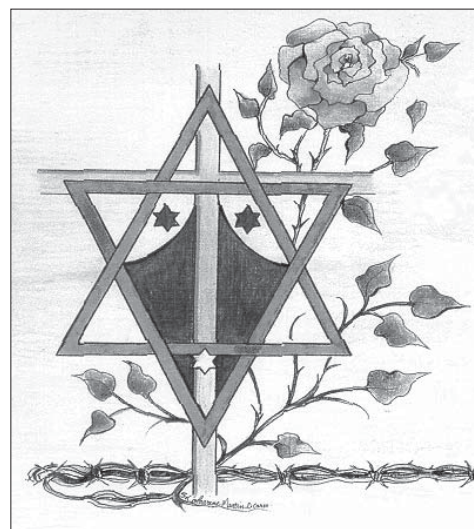
Summer in the Philippines is really hot. With the news that summer this year will be even hotter, more drought will affect our agricultural lands. This means more hunger among our people. The Philippines has only two seasons, wet and dry, meaning, rainy days and hot days.

“El Nino” brings an unusual summer of drought. I compare it to a desert, where vast lands have no sign of life. Our great Carmelite saints wrote about dryness in terms of their spiritual life. It is an experience of “nada,” where life seems so dry, according to St. John of the Cross. For Filipinos drought brings about barren land where no produce can be harvested. For Edith Stein, her lifeless dryness was the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis who did not respect life. It was the “summer” of Edith Stein’s life.

St. Edith Stein or Teresa Benedicta of the Cross is a contemporary saint. Her life was full of “summers” when she experienced persecution both as a woman and as a Jew. She was a martyr who showed to the world her greatness by her love of Christ Jesus and by the way she lived her life. She was a woman who ardently searched for Truth and finding it, she lived by it and grew as a spouse of Christ. To leave Judaism, to become a cloistered Carmelite nun, and to disobey her mother whom she loved so dearly were difficult choices. No doubt, these periods of discerning were arid “summer” experiences.

My visit to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. during my sabbatical in 2007 impressed on me an image of the sufferings of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis. At the entrance of the museum, the carts and shoes of the Jews during the holocaust are exhibited. I felt totally present during the holocaust. The smell and the things around were so real that no one who saw it would not cry and feel the evil done by the Nazis. In that short visit to the museum, I was privileged to see a glimpse of the suffering of the Jews. I tried to imagine Edith Stein bearing those sufferings in her heart. It must have been like dry summer heat in her heart where God seemed absent in all that was happening. Yet Edith was totally centered on the cross. She was a woman who bore the heat of persecution in her time and the drought of life during which the cross was very present. Her courage and bravery were rooted in her love for the crucified Jesus who suffered because of his great love for us. Her writing showed her profound love for the crucified Christ as she wrote, *“The spouse whom she chooses is the Lamb that was slain. If she is to enter into heavenly glory with him, she must allow herself to be fastened to his cross. The three vows are the nails. The more willingly she stretches herself out on the cross and endures the blows of the hammer, the more deeply will she experience the reality of her union with the Crucified. Then being crucified itself becomes for her the marriage feast”* (The Hidden Life).

The Filipino people similarly experience the summer of life. The poor are constantly the target of oppression by the rich and powerful. Massive corruption creates intense poverty and degradation of life. This is the “El Nino” of our poor people.



Artwork by Sister Catherine Martin, O. Carm.

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# Winter's Mystery

Sister Barbara Breaud, O. Carm.

Winter is a mysterious time. The sky seems darker, the mood deeper. It is a good time to reflect on John of the Cross' teaching on the importance of growing more and more in touch with Mystery in our lives.

Our understanding and encounter with the Living God grows as we age and enter the winter of our lives. We come to appreciate that any word or image we use to try to talk of God must not be grasped or clung to as if it were the final word, but always held gently, with an open hand, keeping mystery and the realization that what we say is so much less than the reality.

Jesus can always say to us what he said to Philip: "Have I been with you so long and still you do not understand!" John of the Cross expresses his understanding of the sense of Mystery that is always part of our understanding of God in one of his shorter poems, calling God **"I-don't-know-what-that-is-so gladly-found."**

It is important to understand that we ourselves, made in the image of God, are also Mystery. It is not that we know, with a closed hand, who we are or who we will be, but we need to treat ourselves with a sense of Mystery. We are far more than any idea we have of ourselves.

Since who we most deeply are, is God's creation invited to join in God's great dance of love, the most important thing in life is to become people capable of loving with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and all our strength. John of the Cross teaches that "in the evening of life you will be judged on love."

Judge yourself not by what you do or by what everyone else thinks is good. Don't think that just because something is good, it is good for you. Judge by the love with which you do it and the love it grows in you.

Throughout our lives and especially in the winter of life, God is bringing us to a new and deeper capacity to love. John of the Cross tells us that the Holy Spirit is creating something new, bringing us to a new place in our relationship with God. Because this is God we are talking about, we don't have the knowledge or the ability to get there or to do it for ourselves. "Eye has not seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into our minds what God has in store for us" not only after we die but even in this life. To journey into God we must be willing to journey into mystery. And that is what John calls the Dark Night, God drawing closer.

To deepen in our relationship with God, we have to be willing to enter into Mystery, to live in Mystery with trust, because God is **GOD**. God is God beyond any idea or thought we have or can have of God, beyond any of our own plans, beyond any ego control. The way is the way of **Faith** and of **Hope** and of **Love**. The way is the Dark Night which is God revealing Gods self more and more as God is.

Faith, is not so much belief in a truth as belief in a Person. It is trust in the One who is our loving God.

Hope is not an expectation that if this particular thing come to be, it will be all right. Rather, with hope, we know that in God, with God and through God all shall be well.

Love is the gift of self to God and receiving back God's own self. This gift is ever growing with new possibilities.

*Sister Barbara Breaud is the Director of Initial and On-Going Formation for the Sisters of Mount Carmel and Coordinator and Executive Director of the Carmelite Spirituality Center, Lacombe, LA.*



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## Copenhagen

### A Call For The Common Good

by Sister Jane Remson, O. Carm.

At the Conference on Climate Change in Copenhagen, Caritas Internationalis echoed Pope Benedict XVI's words, "We must recognize our grave duty to hand the Earth on to future generations in such a condition that they too can worthily inhabit it and continue to cultivate it."

In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict said, "In nature, the believer recognizes the wonderful result of God's creative activity, which we may use responsibly to satisfy our legitimate needs, material or otherwise, while respecting the intrinsic balance of creation."

Lesley-Anne Knight, Secretary General of Caritas Internationalis remarked, "The world is waking

up to the reality of climate change. Scientists agree that it is happening and that humanity is causing it. Engineers claim that we have the technology to reduce carbon emissions. Economists say we cannot afford to ignore it and have devised clever incentives to encourage business leaders to play their part. Politicians have realized that they have to pay lip service to the cause. However, none of the above has a 'magic bullet' solution. The answer to the climate change crisis lies in the hands of humanity in a revived sense of solidarity and a realization that we all have a duty to work toward the common good."

Saving the Earth for ourselves and for future generations is up to us. Each person has a responsibility to participate in developing policies of one's own country that reflects our duty toward the common good for all. The common good for all must be our 'special interest' group.



**Sister Rose Marie Penouilh** with **Father Michael O'Rourke, O.P.** lead the second-lining through the Mount Carmel gym as they celebrate the Saints' victory.



Students at Mount Carmel Elementary in Abbeville, LA attend Eucharistic Liturgy to celebrate Catholic Schools Week. Pictured below left: **Father William Blanda** gives communion to Mount Carmel Elementary students in the Vermilion Catholic High School gym.



**Sister Odile Theriot, O. Carm.** proclaims the first reading at St. Leo Seton Elementary School gym during Catholic Schools Week in Lafayette, LA.



Sisters gather in the New Orleans and Lafayette areas to review driving skills. **Diane Prestridge**, representing Christian Brothers Religious Comprehensive Trust, offered the presentations at both locations.

# News of Note



**Archbishop Gregory Aymond** is greeted by **Sister Lucie Leonard, O. Carm.** at Our Lady of Wisdom Healthcare Center.



Mount Carmel Academy students and friends end a busy school day praying the rosary in the motherhouse chapel.



Volunteers, **Ruth Kathmann, Carmen Erdman and Kay Murray**, assist with the mailings from the Sisters of Mt. Carmel Generalate Office in Lacombe. These women are among the volunteers who offer their time and talent in support of the work of the sisters. For all our volunteers, we are grateful.



**Sisters Andrée Bindewald and Barbara Breaud** offered presentations on Carmelite prayer and Carmelite symbols to an interinformation group of novices in Quezon City, Philippines. The presentations crossed the Pacific by Skype allowing for interaction and visual participation with novices of various Carmelite communities.



**Sister Rosa Fulleros, O. Carm.**, pictured standing at right, offers leadership to the *Sorsoguena*, an organization of women in San Roque, Balusan, Sorsogon, Philippines. The women address environmental concerns and various justice and peace issues. The Sisters of Mount Carmel Justice and Peace Fund has assisted their activities.



Training youth is a focal activity of the women's group.



Seminars and season days of recollection bring the women together for education and spiritual enrichment.



Organic farming and herbal medicine production help to address hunger and illness within the community.

## *Summer of Our Lives* continued from page 4

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In the midst of our sufferings and violence, the life of Edith is a constant reminder for us. She remained a faithful disciple of Christ by bearing the cross until her death. She was constant in proclaiming the love of Christ to her fellow Jews by consoling and giving them courage. *"She represents love in a world of hate."* We the Sisters in the Philippines are challenged by our situation. We have a great teacher in Edith Stein who shows us how to proclaim and live the Good News of love in a world of greed and violence.



*Sister Carlita Panaligan is a Regional Councilor, Formator, and Coordinator of the Formation Community in Project 4, Quezon City, Philippines.*

## Life is Like Fall

Sister Ann Carmel Segura, O. Carm.

Sister Ann Carmel Segura entered the Sisters of Mount Carmel in 1930 and professed first vows in 1933. At present she lives with other retired sisters at St. Leo-Seton Convent in Lafayette, Louisiana. She is the eldest member of the Congregation, having spent her vowed life as an educator, an artist, a musician, and a hobby gardener. This interview was conducted by Sister Andree Bindewald to receive Sister Ann Carmel's reflection, as an artist, on the current season of her life.

### What is it like to come to this season of your life?

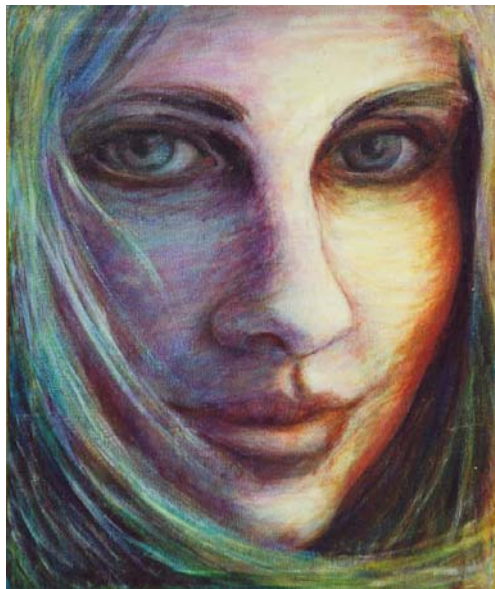
I am now into 97 years of life. I thought I would have died earlier. I am tired and want to go to heaven, but God has another idea—to live, and through suffering and prayer, to get me ready. He is not finished getting me ready. It is not what I want but it's what He wants and I pray to conform to the will of God.



Sister Ann Carmel poses with an earlier portrait of Christ.

### Through your artistic eye, does suffering have a color?

There is brightness in suffering. I can use it so that I can atone for what needs atonement. Then God will bring me to heaven. There are some people I don't necessarily like, but I pray for them and I try to like them and do for them. I try to love all whether they are annoying or pleasing. God and I both love them. I pray to love all those I should. I have great appreciation for those who care for me. Being in this convent is the best "nursing home" in the world. Sisters in it are helpful, loving, caring and anticipate my needs.



"Gaze Into Distance" by Sister Ann Carmel Segura, O. Carm.

Fall is in the end of the year; the end of life is like the fall season. Fall is filled with orange, red, brown, and some green color. These are some of my favorite colors. The most colorful thing in life is LOVE. Love makes life liveable. At my age, I am nearer my time to get to heaven. I want to use this time to help others and myself to be better, more loving persons.

### Are you still able to create works of art?

I paint in my dreams. They are nice paintings. While asleep, I dream I am painting. I paint people. I don't necessarily know the person I paint. The faces I paint are anonymous. I am attracted to faces. The face reveals the person. A face tells who

the person is...especially the eyes. As I paint, the eyes look back at me...they are happy, sad, loving, pleading, peaceful—the eyes express the whole person. In my dream I see that I am painting and the painting is complete.

During the day in my awake hours, I see faces all around. In the clouds or in the trees the way the leaves form lines and shades, I see a face. I always see faces. I want to see the face of God.

### Where do you look for the face of God?

The face of God is in Jesus Christ. Like Simeon who takes the child in his arms, I do the same, I hug the little Jesus. In loving Him, I know He loves me.

# Contemplatives in Action

is published quarterly for our friends and benefactors.

The **Congregation of Our Lady of Mount Carmel** is a community whose prophetic call moves us to be in active ministries that help us bring about a more peaceful, just and loving world. We are nourished by contemplative prayer, community and our devotion to Mary, a woman of simplicity and faith.

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**Editors:**

Stephanie R. Johnson  
Sr. Andrée Bindewald  
Sr. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick

**Contributors:**

Sr. Barbara Nell Laperouse  
Sr. Thérèse Gregoire  
Sr. Carlita Panaligan  
Sr. Barbara Breaud  
Sr. Jane Remson  
Sr. Ann Carmel Segura



## Share the vision; be a *Contemplative in Action*

If you, or someone you know, is interested in learning more about religious life as a Sister of Mount Carmel, please contact: Sister Alice Abate, 420 Robert E. Lee Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70124 - 2596 / 504-288-8432  
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