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Contents:

- Discalced Carmelites in Sri Lanka
- The relics of St. Therese's parents
- Fr. Dario Cumer
- New carmel in Burundi
- Seminars in the Las Palmas desert house, Spain

Discalced Carmelites in Sri Lanka

The Definitory General organized the establishment of the Discalced Carmelites in this large island in the Indian ocean. It totals 64, 652 sq kms with a population of 17,970,000, of which 69% are buddists, 15% hindus, 8% christian and 7% muslim. Our houses in Mannar, Anuradhapura, Chilaw and Trincomalee-Baticaloa in the northern part of the island, in the Jaffna diocese, are under the jurisdiction of the Tamilnadu province. The foundations in Kurunegala, Kandy, Badulla, Ratnapura and Galle, in the centre and south of the country, in the Colombo diocese, are under the Malabar (India) province. With our priory in Indigolla (1954-1966), in the diocese of Colomba, the Order had a presence until it was suppressed due to the fighting between the Tamil Tigers and governmental forces. The present provision for future foundations is in response to an invitation by the bishops for us to lend greater assistance to our cloistered sisters and to forment of native vocations.

The last Sri Lankan carmelite was professed in 1946, ordained priest in 1955 and lived for many years in our Flanders province. Fr. Gabriel Gunasekara died March 14, 2008.

As has often happened in the past our Discalced Carmelite sisters have preceeded us friars to the island. In 1935 the missionary Carmel of Cholet (France), already suppressed, had founded a convent in Colombo. This Carmel in its turn founded Kandy (1950) and Galle (1967). In Sri Lanka's three carmels there are about 50 Discalced Carmelite nuns. Since 1978 the Secular Order has been established and meets in our convent in Colombo.

The relics of St. Therese's beatified parents

Just as the relics of their saintly daughter have travelled around the world to awaken people spiritually to the gospel message, so too a part of the mortal remains of Blessed Louis Martin and Celia Guerin, placed together in an urn, began their pilgrimage outside of France. From November 25, 2008 to January 27 2009 they have visited different towns in Italy. On Saturday January 10 they made their way into the Vatican basilica, where they were received by Cardinal Angelo Comastri, archpriest of St. Peter's. They remained there until Wednesday, January 14.

At the general audience that day Pope Benedict XVI publically venerated the relics in the great hall of Paul VI. He used the occasion to refer to the beatified couple, Louis and Zelle Martin, presenting them as a married couple who deeply interpreted the mystery of Christ's love. The visit of the relics coincided with the beginning of the 6th World Meeting of Families in Mexico City. The french pilgrims gave the Pope a silver and gold-plated reliquary, the work of a goldsmith from Verona. The relics also travelled to the national shrine of St. Therese, Lleida and Burgos (Spain). On January 27 they returned to Lisieux.

The message that was inspired spontaneously by the passage of these relics was that of the family. They were parents who achieved holiness in their home environment. Further information about the passage of the relics and the pastoral activity that was organized during the visit can be found on the following website: <http://www.famigliamartin.org/>

Fr. Dario Cumer
R.I.P. January 10, 2009

On Saturday January 10 the Blessed Virgin carried off her faithful servant. He was a Carmelite from the Venice province. Born in Trentino, Italy, August 6, 1935. Both in his Carmelite province and in the Teresianum, Rome, his life was taken up with teaching and formation. He had studied for a license in theology and philosophy, culminating in a doctorate in philosophy and letters from the catholic university, Milan. He had been Master of students at our International College and later superior of the OCD Interprovincial House. He also spent about two years in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

He returned to the Teresianum, Rome, in 1993. As a secretary to the faculty he was always punctual and obliging. He also became the bursar of the same institute. From 2000-2006 he was the rector. In the last years of his life he struggled physically and spiritually with a malignant cancer. He was a great admirer of the Focolari movement.

Fr. General presided at his solemn requiem in the chapel of the Teresianum. He said that as a formator during the troublesome years after the Council Fr. Dario Cumer showed a creative spirit, always working to develop the authenticity of the human person. In his last years he had become spiritually very mature. In his own gentle way he pointed to what really mattered.

A New Carmel in Burundi

The Church in Burundi had been asking for a Carmelite foundation for a long time. In 1985 there was a plan to make a foundation but due to the then dangerous political situation it could not be carried out. Now, encouraged by the involvement of our Carmelite friars present in the country, the Carmelite nuns from Cyangugu (Rwanda), trusting entirely in God's Providence, accepted the enormous challenge. Of the 11 nuns from this convent four of them and another from Kigali (Congo) were appointed to the foundation. A Carmelite nun who was born in Burundi and is today in Brussel's carmel (Belgium) is to be the sixth member of the group. They are still hopeful that another convent, in a spirit of missionary generosity, will offer one of their sisters.

The foundation was approved in writing by the archbishop of Gitega. Fr. General had also approved the project, as this was not someone's personal initiative, but came from a community's deep reflection, prayer and discernment. It is hoped that the new foundation will be able to attract local vocations.

In spite of the political turmoil that makes the place unstable there is a belief that Burundi is on the way to political stability. Thanks to a fund (for the Rwanda-Burundi Delegation) set up by the Cracow province it was possible to buy four hectares of land. Later, some more hectares were added. The new community has launched an appeal to the Order to support this foundation in the heart of Africa, in the area of the Great Lakes.

The seminars in the Las Palmas Desert House, Spain

The Las Palmas Desert House (Aragon Valencia province) was well known in the past and is still well known today in the Order. It is a house of spirituality (the first in Spain) and at the same time the location of the interprovincial novitiate of the Iberian peninsula. Its geographical location and the surrounding countryside add charm and interest. With its Carmelite museum and other initiatives it is also a fine cultural centre.

It was with culture in mind that the house had the idea to organize 'seminars' for reflection. These have taken place every year since 2004. The first looked at the theme of 'The Spirituality of the Desert'. Other themes followed: 'Silence' (2005), 'Listening' (2006), 'Dialogue' (2007). The title of the seminar in 2008 was 'Searching.' The theme for 2009 (February 27-March 1) will focus on the 'Environment.' Books have been published. These are interdisciplinary studies, given by specialists, on philosophy, theology, mysticism, pedagogy, psychology, art, aesthetics, ecology, science, cinema, ...among other themes.

The 'seminars' in the Desert House are at the same time academic, because they are recognized and convalidated (1 credit) by the faculty of theology in Valencia, by the 'Jaume I' university, Castellon, by the catholic university, Murcia, by the 'International teresian-sanjuanist Centre', Avila, and by the university of mysticism in the same city.