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Superior General

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Most Reverend Jesús García Burillo, Bishop of Avila; Most Honourable Miguel Ángel García Nieto, Mayor of Avila [and the other authorities present]; Rev. Fr Francisco Javier Sancho Fermín, director of CITEs; and all our friends in the Lord:

It pleases me very much to take this opportunity, which Fr Francisco Javier Sancho offered me, to address these words at the inauguration of the 2009-2010 academic year at the St Teresa-St John of the Cross International Centre of the Discalced Carmelites in Avila. I would have liked to be able to do this personally, but unavoidable obligations on my agenda hinder me from being physically here today.

I thank God that, for another year, the activities have officially begun in this Centre, born in 1986 in the desire to serve the Church, the Discalced Carmelites, the city of Avila and all the men and women who wish to imbibe from the wealth of the spirituality of St Teresa and St John of the Cross.

During his visit to Segovia in 1982, the Servant of God, Pope John Paul II, requested of the Discalced Carmelites in that city “the study and deepening knowledge of spiritual theology”– something which we can extend to the whole Order. With legitimate satisfaction, I see this call of the Holy Father being realised, yet another year, in perusing the list of materials and various activities, dealing with spirituality and mysticism, which will be developed during the course to begin in these halls.

We Discalced Carmelites are very aware of the patrimony we have inherited. In the hands of Saint Teresa of Jesus and Saint John of the Cross, Christian mysticism reaches its highest level, experienced and ordered as intimate communion and knowledge of Christ, God and Man, in the heart of the ecclesial community. It is above all, in the practice of prayer that this experience of communion comes in contact with a privileged space, lived out as an exercise of a stable relationship with God who firstly loves us always and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, makes us each day new men and women resembling his Son.

After the experience narrated by the Parents of Carmel, no one can have the right and the duty taken from them to have access to communion with the living God.

However, neither can anyone be permitted to state they have had an authentic spiritual and mystical experience unless it be communion with Christ in the Church, that becomes apostolic service and practice of Gospel charity.

In the lived experience described by Teresa and John of the Cross is based all attempts to live and systematize in a real way the spiritual and mystical life of the Christian. This has been the basis of the experience of their more notable sons and daughters: Therese of Lisieux, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), Elizabeth of the Trinity and so many others, both within and outside the frontiers of the Teresian Carmel.

This heredity cannot be faithfully guarded if it is not transmitted: if we Discalced Carmelites are not capable, in the first place, of following the example of Teresa and John of the Cross, to recreate this experience in our lives with the same spirit of service for the Church and humanity and, secondly, to present it in an ordered manner and with theological criteria.

CITeS wants to be a space in which both these demands can be realized. On the one hand, the courses and teaching activities carried out here permit serious and qualified presentation – an excellent team of professors see to that – of spiritual theology, particularly that of Teresa and John of the Cross, in the framework of theology in general and the study of mysticism in particular, including that of other religions. But, at the same time, it is not a cold, academic sphere, rather one that is warm, in which the teaching of Christian mysticism, as cannot be otherwise, is unfolded with a balanced equilibrium between science and experience, a fact which so many students who have qualified or done courses in these halls can attest.

I finish now, by placing in the hands of Saint Teresa, in this the city of her birth, the course that is now beginning. This is taking place at the time in which the Order is beginning the venture of renewing her charism and preparing for the V Centenary of the birth of the Saint, by systematic reading of her works. I am certain that CITeS will be a place of reference for the Discalced Carmelites and for the Church in this beautiful adventure which, over the coming six years, will lead us to the celebration of the five hundred years of the birth of this universal woman from Avila, the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus.

Affectionately in Christ:

Fr Saverio Cannistrà of the Heart of Jesus
OCD Superior General