

Sunday, August 28, 2011 – Homily
Carmelite Community of the Word
40th Anniversary of Founding & 10th Anniversary as Diocesan Institute

There is a story of a young monk who sat outside of the monastery with his Bible day after day, quietly reading the Sacred Scriptures. People from the local village who passed by were impressed by his thoughtful reading of the Word of God.

One day the superior of the monastery sat next to him. He opened a bag and took out a brick and a stone. He slowly started rubbing the brick against the piece of granite.

Day after day the young monk sat down to thoughtfully read and pray over the word of God, and day after day the superior would appear and begin rubbing the brick against the stone.

This went on for a few weeks until the young monk could no longer contain his curiosity. He finally asked, “Father, what are you doing?”

The superior replied, “I am trying to make a mirror.”
“But that’s impossible,” said the young monk. “You can’t make a mirror from a piece of brick.”

“That’s true,” said the superior. “And it is just as impossible for you to fulfill your vocation by doing nothing except reading and praying over the Word of God all day long. In case they forgot to tell you, we have other work to do!”

The religious women who are members of the Carmelite Community of the Word would understand this story.

According to their constitutions, the Sisters of the Carmelite Community of the Word believe that

- As individuals and as a community they have been called and formed by God’s Word
- The person of Jesus, the Word made flesh, and the Sacred Scriptures are at the heart of their spirituality and ministry
- Having meditated on and believed in the Word of God, they are called to be heralds of the Gospel to others.

Thus, the Sisters of the Carmelite Community of the Word understand themselves to be an active contemplative community;

- Like the young monk in the story, they are drawn to meditate on the Word of God each day as individuals and as a community
- But as the young monk's superior said, they have other work to do.

As a diocesan religious institute, our Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown is the beneficiary of the commitment of the Carmelite Community of the Word to that balance of

- Spirituality in the Carmelite heritage of
 - The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Carmel
 - St. Teresa of Avila
 - St. John of the Cross and
 - St. Therese of Lisieux
- And active ministerial labors that contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ

On an occasion like this, one can only wonder what would have been missing for these past 40 years if the Carmelite Community of the Word had not been established in our diocese by the inspiration and determination of these faithful religious women.

I have already become aware that if people from our diocese need prayers for a special intention, they often seek the spiritual power that comes from the individual and communal life of prayer of the Carmelite Community of the Word.

And just think of the ministerial labors that the Sisters have been engaged in for these 40 years:

- Pastoral ministers in parishes
- Directors of parish religious education programs
- ministry to those in prison
- advocate for those who have been abused
- teaching in Catholic schools
- coordinating evangelization efforts in parishes
- outreach to welcome those who left the Church or stopped practicing the Catholic faith

- outreach to the poor
 - through ministry in a diocesan mission
 - as caseworker for Catholic Charities

All of that has come with the help of God's grace, and it has brought challenges to the Sisters, both individually and as a community.

In the 1st reading today, Jeremiah the prophet

- speaks of his devotion to the Word of God which compels him to cry out
- shares the temptation that he experienced many times not to speak, and not to cry out because of the suffering he endured whenever he announced God's word
- tells us that in the end he did speak because the Word of God within him became like a fire burning in his heart

That is Jeremiah's description of the cross that he had to take up in his life. Jesus reminds us in the Gospel reading today that it is an essential part of the life of each one of us that

- we must deny ourselves
- take up our cross
- follow him, the one whose cross on Calvary became a visible symbol of faith for all his disciples

For many of us it is hard to imagine how serious Jesus was when he said that if we want to save our life, we must lose it for his sake and the sake of those whom God created and loves, especially those who are most poor and lacking in their lives.

For many of us, we might be tempted like Jeremiah just to be quiet.

But thanks be to God; we are inspired by the ones who choose to take the Gospel seriously and put it into action as the primary focus and purpose in their life.

How blessed are we and how blessed are those who have been on the receiving end of the

- prayers
- spirituality

- mission and service of the Sisters of the Carmelite Community of the Word

In case you have never read or heard it, let me read the mission statement of the Carmelite Community of the Word:

As women of prayer, living the tradition of Carmel, we are called to serve those yearning for God in ordinary life, especially the spiritually and materially poor. We recognize the complexity of diverse and changing needs within the Church and society.

Therefore, we strive to model a simple and balanced life in community, witnessing to Gospel values. In this way we continue the mission of Jesus Christ by enfleshing God's Word and inviting others to encounter this Word through mutual evangelization particularly in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown.

Sisters of the Carmelite Community of the Word, I wish to thank you on behalf of everyone here and everyone in our diocese for your presence among us.

You did not need someone to make you realize that you cannot make a mirror by rubbing a brick against a stone.

You did not need someone to remind you that while meditating on the Word of God is very, very important, there is other work to be done.

With initial assistance of Bishop Hogan and the affirmation of Bishop Joseph who saw to your canonical establishment as a diocesan religious institute, you have distinguished yourselves as true disciples of Carmel and of the Word.

Thank you for taking up and living this unique manifestation of the saving power of the Cross of Christian discipleship.

May God continue to bless you in the years ahead and in as much as so many of us have depended on your prayer and service these 40 years, may you always know of our love and support for you.

What better way can we express that than in this Eucharistic celebration in which the sacrifice of Christ is made present to us in these sacred signs and in the Word of God.

The words of St. Paul become an appropriate prayer from us for you, the Sisters of the Carmelite Community of the Word:

God of mercy, may the Sisters of the Carmelite Community of the Word continue to offer themselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to you. May they never allow themselves to be conformed to this age, but may they continued to be transformed by the renewal of their minds as inspired by the tradition of Carmel by your Word. May they always discern what is your will, what is good, and what is pleasing and perfect. God of mercy and hope we ask this through Christ our Lord.