



Carmelite Communications

Special Newsletter No. 4 covering the International Student Course

Blessed Titus Brandsma: Carmelite, Professor, Journalist and Martyr **Contemplation, the dynamic element that unifies them** International Student Course for Carmelite Friars in Simple Profession 22 July - 5 August 2018, The Netherlands - Germany

DAY EIGHT - 30 July 2018: Nijmegen, The Netherlands to Mainz, Germany

Following Morning Prayer we boarded a bus for a five hour trip to Mainz, Germany. On the way we made a lunch stop at Maria Laach (Lake Maria). After eating lunch there was time to explore the nearby lake (see the picture) and the nearby Benedictine Monastery church.



Edith Stein Memorial Stone, Maria Laach

At the Church there is a memorial stone remembering Edith Stein and an artwork in the Monastery Church. I'm uncertain what connection the monastery had with Edith, but there wasn't anyone around to ask. Perhaps she visited like us?



Matthew and Francisco outside the Maria Laach Benedictine Church

After a short time of exploring and some time to stretch the legs, we all hopped back on the bus, making the rest of the journey to Mainz.

More photos on our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/carmelitesAET
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DAY EIGHT - 30 July 2018: Arrival in Mainz, Germany

Once we had arrived in Mainz we unloaded luggage at the youth hostel, before making a two kilometre walk through Mainz to the Carmelite Community via the local Cathedral. Our guide to the Carmelite community was Br Severin, a local Carmelite student.

On arrival at the Carmelite community, we were greeted by Fr Peter, the Prior Provincial of the German Province, and paused for a cool drink in the community garden. Severin then took us on a tour of the Mainz church, pointing out the various architectural features and the Carmelite stained glass windows. The church was built in 1350 with a fresco in the meditation room and the ceiling decoration surviving to this day. The latest church renovation took place in 2008 with the redesign resulting from reflection on the spirit and teaching of the Second Vatican Council and consultation with the community that prays at the church. Key features of the renovation are: the altar, which is the central focus of the church; the presidential chair which is set among the people; and the equality given to the placement of the tabernacle and the place for the Word of God.

We celebrated Eucharist together with the Mainz community, led by a local choir - a deeply prayerful experience. The celebration continued with a German BBQ in the community garden with plenty of German sausages.



(Clockwise from left): Group photo, Mainz Cathedral; 1350 fresco in meditation room; interior photo of Karmeliterkirche.

DAY NINE - 31 July 2018: Mainz, Germany

In the morning we gathered once again in the Mainz Carmelite Church to celebrate Eucharist with the local community that regularly prays there. Following the Eucharist, we were led in meditation by Br Andreas Scholten, reflecting on the lives of Carmelites Titus Brandsma and Dachau Camp survivor Rafaël Tijhuis.



Br Andreas singing while leading meditation on the lives of Titus Brandsma and Rafaël Tijhuis

Br Andreas Scholten

Meditation on the Dachau experiences of Titus Brandsma and Rafaël Tijhuis

Br Andreas used a variety of music, poetry, images and artefacts to encourage us to enter into the memory of Titus and Rafaël. He reminded us that our faith is grounded in the ancient Jewish tradition of *remembering*, just as our Eucharist is grounded in this tradition. Entering into the remembrance of the Dachau camp, the dead, in a way, live in and through us. In another way, we too died in Dachau.

Andreas reflected that, “perhaps remembering this moment of utter inhumanity and desolation reveals in us, if we allow it, our deepest need for a God of merciful love. Titus’ witness might reveal for us some answer to the question ‘Where is God?’, even here in a place of violence and inhumanity.”

Rafaël, who survived Dachau, was reluctant to recall his experiences but after much persuasion, wrote a “diary” about Dachau and titled it “Nothing can stop God from reaching us”. The trauma of Dachau camp changed Rafaël for life and yet he perceived God in a deeper way.

During the meditation we listened to music, watched a photo slideshow, investigated sketches from the Dachau camp and considered the imagery of the Titus Brandsma Shrine in the Church.

The meditation was followed by a farewell lunch with the Mainz community, after which we boarded the bus and continued on our pilgrimage to Pullach, Munich.



The Titus Brandsma Shrine in the Karmeliterkirche, Mainz



Rafaël's sketchbook and photograph

DAY TEN - 1 August 2018: Munich, Germany

Gathering outdoors, under the trees on the grounds of the youth hostel we were staying at, the group celebrated morning prayer. Prayer was followed by a talk on Titus as a martyr by Fr Fernando Millán Romeral, the Prior General.



Fr Fernando speaks about Titus as a martyr under the trees in Pullach, Germany

Fr Fernando Millán Romeral - Titus the Martyr

Fr Fernando presented the strong links between martyrdom and Christ's life, death and resurrection (the Christological links). He proposed some misconceptions of Christian martyrdom and presented an insightful reflection on the Church's understanding of martyrs and particularly the witness of Titus Brandsma's life.

A martyr is a witness to faith, the relationship between the person and God, that persists even in the face of death, and is not destroyed in death. Titus' witness to this relationship was not revealed at the moment of his death, but rather throughout his life. For myself, as a Carmelite and Christian, Titus witnesses to seeking an ever deepening awareness of relationship with God and with others that persists even in the face of death. Titus persisted in commitment to this relationship in weakness, word and action, facing the struggle to stay in relationship, in the most extreme circumstances.

Fr Fernando described Titus as a witness (martyr) in three ways:

- 1. Titus as a witness of humanity.** In the concentration camps, places of great inhumanity, cruelty and suffering, Titus witnessed to humanity, tenderness, respect and gratefulness of genuine humanity.
- 2. Titus as a witness of reconciliation and forgiveness.** During his life Titus was given the nickname 'conciliator'. Titus often sought the reconciliation of parties in a conflict. In efforts to resist National Socialist ideology, he maintained and often expressed in his writings a hope and prayer that Germany and Holland would once again walk together in peace, justice and freedom. At the time this was a great comfort and inspiration for Germans who were caught between their national identity as enemies and oppressors of Holland, and living in a regime that threatened and destroyed peace and justice.
- 3. Titus as a witness of the presence of God in our life.** Titus witnessed most strongly to the presence of God's compassion and presence even in the midst of the horrendous suffering and abuse of Dachau. Titus continued to visit and comfort other prisoners. Accounts tell of his cheerfulness and kindness, even to abusive and violent guards. Titus witnesses to a God who, through his own contemplative experience, he found to be present always and whose mercy is refused to no one.

Following some time to reflect on Fr Fernando's talk we walked about 15 minutes to the Church of the Holy Spirit to share Eucharist and lunch before continuing our program of reflection, preparation and briefing for our visit to Dachau Concentration Camp the following day.