

FIVE MOMENTS OF PRAYER AND REFLECTION

Papal Recognition Formula Vitae



800 years

A Living Text for Today

General Council of the Carmelite Order
ROME - 2026

**800 Years
Since the Recognition
of the Carmelite
Formula Vitae by
Pope Honorius III**

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INTRODUCTION

The occasion is the 8th centenary of the recognition of the Carmelite Formula Vitae by Pope Honorius III in 1226. What we have is a relatively short letter that recognizes the Rule and gives it an initial approval. To mark this significant centenary, we are offering five moments of prayer and reflection on the text of the Formula Vitae, following a *Lectio divina* approach.

On each occasion, the community gathers for prayer and reflection. Once the initial greeting and exchange of news and views has taken place, the leader invites the participants to remain in silence for a moment and introduces the theme for the meeting, offering some brief notes on its nature and meaning.

The group invokes the Holy Spirit using the prayer below (from Pope Leo) or some other suitable prayer.

*Holy Spirit, you, light of our understanding,
gentle breath that guides our decisions,
grant me the grace to listen attentively to your voice
and to discern the hidden paths of my heart,
so that I may grasp what truly matters to you,
and free my heart from its troubles.
I ask you for the grace to learn how to pause,
to become aware of the way I act,
of the feelings that dwell within me,
and of the thoughts that overwhelm me
which, so often, I fail to notice.
I long for my choices*

*to lead me to the joy of the Gospel.
Even if I must go through moments of doubt and fatigue,
even if I must struggle, reflect, search, and begin again...
Because, at the end of the journey,
your consolation is the fruit of the right decision.
Grant me a deeper understanding of what moves me,
so that I may reject what draws me away from Christ,
and love him and serve him more fully.
Amen.*

The reading begins, meeting continues with a **first reading** of the articles paragraphs of the Rule that have been proposed. Silence follows.

For a few brief moments, the participants may react to the text, **highlighting the words or phrases** that have struck them.

A **second reading** of the proposed paragraphs of the Rule follows.

Silence follows, giving way to some **sharing on what the text says** about our way of life, the gift that is given to us in this way of life, and the demands it makes on us.

Silence follows, giving way to the participants' gathering of the fruits of this reflection, out of which they are led to **formulate prayers of petition, repentance, worship, or praise** – all of which are based on the particular paragraphs of the Rule being reflected upon. Silence follows.

The meeting **concludes** with the recitation of the suggested **Gospel**, the Our Father, a Marian antiphon, or some other suitable prayer.

FIRST MEETING

A Blessing for Our Life which then becomes a Blessing

The Rule opens with a blessing, in the style of St Paul's openings in his letters. Albert, called by God to address the brothers united in Christ, wishes them health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

The way of life that Albert proposes is one of many ways of living in allegiance to Christ, but it is to be their way. By living this way of consecrated life, those who follow it become a blessing for one another and for the world because of the witness and service they give.

Their life represents many forms of communication: participation in the life of the Holy Trinity, listening to the Word of God, sharing at community meetings, silence, liturgy, and contemplation, all of which are forms of communication.

From the Rule: 1, 2, 3, 18, 19

- [1] Albert, by the grace of God called to be patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, to the beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits who are living under obedience to him by the spring on Mount Carmel: health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit.
- [2] In many and various ways the holy fathers established how everyone, whatever his order or whatever kind of religious life he has chosen, must live in allegiance to Jesus Christ and serve him faithfully from a pure heart and a good conscience.
- [3] However, because you ask us to give you a formula of

life in accordance with your commitment, which you must observe in the future:

- [18] Because, indeed, a person's life on earth is a trial, and all who wish to live devotedly in Christ suffer persecution, and also since your adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, you are to use every care to put on the armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand the deceits of the enemy.
- [19] Your loins are to be girt with the cincture of chastity. Your breast is to be fortified with holy thoughts, for it is written, holy thought will save you. The breastplate of justice is to be put on, that you may love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and your neighbour as yourselves. In all circumstances the shield of faith must be taken up, in which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one, for without faith it is impossible to please God. The helmet of salvation also is to be placed on your head, that you may expect salvation from the only Saviour who saves his people from their sins. The sword of the Spirit, too, which is the word of God, is to dwell abundantly in your mouth and in your hearts; and whatever things you have to do, let them be done in the word of the Lord.

From the Gospel (Jn 15:26-27)

When the Advocate comes whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father, he will be my witness, and you too will be witnesses because you have been with me from the outset.

For Our Life

We live our life as a blessing. We recognize the source of that blessing. God is in our lives. We respond to his work in our lives by saying Yes in the many different ways we can do this. Our consecrated life is this kind of response to God. It is a life of finding God revealed in the humanity, life, and work of Jesus, the incarnate Word.

Our response is adoration, thanksgiving, a request for pardon and forgiveness, and a request for help for ourselves and for others.

SECOND MEETING

The Armour of God, Strength for Our Lives

The Rule, for those who follow it, produces a certain kind of person. The life of this person is built upon a number of essential values that enable a person to live in allegiance to Christ with a pure heart and a stout conscience.

The Carmelite is called to live in solitude and fraternity and to engage in the struggle of life between good and evil by listening to the Word of God and putting on the armour of God.

From the Rule: 7, 10, 18, 19

- [7] Nevertheless, you are to eat whatever may have been given you in a common refectory, listening in common to some reading of Sacred Scripture, where this can be done conveniently.
- [10] All are to remain in their cells or near them, meditating day and night on the Law of the Lord and keeping vigil in prayer, unless they are occupied with other worthy activities.
- [18] Because, indeed, a person's life on earth is a trial, and all who wish to live devotedly in Christ suffer persecution, and also since your adversary the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, you are to use every care to put on the armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand the deceits of the enemy.
- [19] Your loins are to be girt with the cincture of chastity. Your breast is to be fortified with holy thoughts, for it is written, holy thought will save you. The breastplate of justice is to be put on, that you may love the Lord

your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and your neighbour as yourselves. In all circumstances the shield of faith must be taken up, in which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one, for without faith it is impossible to please God. The helmet of salvation also is to be placed on your head, that you may expect salvation from the only Saviour who saves his people from their sins. The sword of the Spirit, too, which is the word of God, is to dwell abundantly in your mouth and in your hearts; and whatever things you have to do, let them be done in the word of the Lord.

From the Gospel (Jn 16:7-11)

When he comes, he will show the world how wrong it was about sin, and about who was in the right, and about judgement: about sin, proved by their refusal to believe in me; about who was right, proved by my going to the Father and your seeing me no more; about judgement, proved by the prince of this world being already condemned.

For Our Life

Life is a struggle. At the same time, the burden and yoke that Jesus lays upon us is light (Mt 11:25). Just as in the dining room and in the cell, the Word of God accompanies all that the Carmelite does from morning until night.

Putting on the armour of God is another way of saying “putting on God.” The Holy Spirit will be sent to defend and guide us. The Holy Spirit comes with chastity, holy thoughts, justice, salvation, and the expectation of salvation. All of this comes to those who listen to the Word of God and put it into practice.

THIRD MEETING

Silence and Work

The observance of the Rule produces the kind of person who observes silence. This silence is not the absence of words but the cultivation of words so that they may lead to salvation. This is the silence that helps a person to listen and to choose words in such a way that they help to build up the body.

Those who live by this Rule, which is itself an application of the Gospel, must have some kind of work. The Rule does not determine what this work will be. It will be the work discerned by the community and will serve to build up God's reign here on earth.

Albert recommends that we follow the example and teaching of St Paul. Here we find a specific reference to the way we are to work. There are other Pauline characteristics in the Rule as well: the Christocentric nature of our lives, our attention to the Word, our putting on the armour of God, and our practice of silence, using only words that build up and do not sadden the Holy Spirit.

From the Rule: 20, 21

[20] You must have some sort of work to do, so that the devil may always find you occupied, lest because of your idleness he manage to find some way of entering into your souls. In this you have the teaching and the example alike of the blessed apostle Paul, in whose mouth Christ spoke, who has been appointed and given by God as preacher and teacher of the nations in faith

and truth; if you follow him you cannot go astray. In toil and weariness, he says, we lived among you, working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you; not as if we do not have the right, but so as to give ourselves to you as a model, so that you might imitate us. For when we were with you we used to admonish you that if anyone is unwilling to work, let him not eat. For we have heard that there are certain people among you going about restlessly and doing no work. We admonish people of this kind, then, and beseech them in the Lord Jesus Christ that, working in silence, they eat their own bread. This way is holy and good: walk in it.

- [21] The Apostle, in fact, recommends silence, for he commands working in it; and also the Prophet testifies, Silence is the cultivation of justice; and again, In silence and hope will be your strength. And so, therefore, we decree that you keep silence from after compline until after prime of the following day. At other times, however, although so strict an observance of silence is not kept, talkativeness is nevertheless to be carefully avoided, for as it is written – and experience teaches no less – In talkativeness sin will not be lacking; and, the one who is careless in speech will meet with evils; and again, The one who uses many words injures his own soul. And the Lord says in the gospel: For every idle word that people speak they will render account of it on judgement day. Let each one, therefore, make a measure of his words and proper reins for his mouth, lest as it happens he stumble and fall in his tongue, and his fall be irreparable and deadly. Guarding his ways with the Prophet so he does not sin in his tongue, let

him strive diligently and carefully to observe the silence in which is the cultivation of justice.

From the Gospel (Jn 16:12-15)

I still have many things to say to you, but they would be too much for you now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will lead you to the complete truth, since he will not be speaking as from himself but will say only what he has learned, and he will tell you of the things to come. He will glorify me, since all he tells you will be taken from what is mine. Everything the Father has is mine; that is why I said: All he tells you will be taken from what is mine.

For Our Life

We are not to be idle, and we are not to be busy about too many things. We are not to be taken up by our own personal missions. The work we do has to be discerned in accordance with our charism and the needs of the time and place in which we live. Discernment belongs to the community, and the community is responsible for acting in unity upon the fruits of its own discernment.

Where there are many words, sin cannot be far away. Pope Francis warned us many times about the evils of gossip. The Rule invites us to be lovers of the Word and respectful of human words: not too many, not too few, but the kind of words that bring salvation to the one who speaks and the one who listens.

FOURTH MEETING

Life in Community, a Life of Sharing

The Rule addresses B. and the brothers and proposes a way of life that is to be lived in a movement from the cell to the common area, from the common area out into the life of the people, and from the life of the people back to the cell.

Life has to be organized in order to allow the gift of God to be received. This organization, recommended by the Rule and accepted by those who live it, is made up of a number of important elements: each community is to have its own prior, each member is to have a cell, there is to be a common refectory where the community will eat together while listening to the Word, there is to be a chapel where the community will gather for the Eucharist, and there is to be a meeting room where, on Sunday or on some other day during the week, the community will gather to discuss its life and wellbeing.

The type of organization proposed reflects the life of the Jerusalem community described for us in the Acts of the Apostles, a community that gave witness to the Resurrection and attracted new members because they prayed together, listened to the teaching of the Apostles, broke bread, and held everything in common.

From the Rule: 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15

[7] Nevertheless, you are to eat whatever may have been given you in a common refectory, listening in common to some reading of Sacred Scripture, where this can be done conveniently.

- [10] All are to remain in their cells or near them, meditating day and night on the Law of the Lord and keeping vigil in prayer, unless they are occupied with other worthy activities.
- [11] Those who know how to say the canonical hours with the clerics are to say them according to the institution of the holy fathers and the approved custom of the Church. Those who do not know them are to say the Our Father twenty-five times for the night vigil, except on Sundays and solemnities, for the vigils of which we establish that the said number be doubled, so that the Our Father is said fifty times. And the same prayer is to be said seven times for morning lauds. Likewise for the other hours the same prayer is also to be said seven times each, except for the evening office, when you must say it fifteen times.
- [12] None of the brothers is to call anything his own, but everything is to be held in common among you, and distributed to each according to his need by the hand of the prior, that is by the brother appointed by him for this task, taking into account the age and needs of each.
- [13] It is permissible for you, however, to have asses or mules, as your need requires, and some provision of animals or poultry.
- [14] An oratory, as far as it can be done conveniently, is to be built in the midst of the cells, where you must come together every day in the morning to hear Mass, where this can be done conveniently.
- [15] On Sundays, also, or on other days when there is reason, you shall discuss the preservation of order and the

salvation of souls, and at this time the excesses and faults of the brothers, if these are revealed in anyone, should be corrected by means of love.

From the Gospel (Jn 14,15-18)

If you love me you will keep my commandments and I shall ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever.

For Our Life

Our life in community is our ministry. We witness to community and present ourselves as community builders. Such community is built around the Word of God, and it is regulated by the decisions of the members as to how they wish to live in response to their vocation. Every member has been called. Every member possesses the charism. Every member knows the values by which we live and accepts being part of the organization of the community that allows us to receive the gift of God and put it at the service of God's people: prayer, the Word, the Eucharist, and a way of sharing that leaves no one in need.

FIFTH MEETING

More than What is Written in the Rule

In everything there has to be discernment. That is to say that the members of the community, following the example of Mary, ponder “these things” in their hearts and ponder them together in community. There is discernment in the choice of prior, in the distribution of cells, in offering hospitality to people from outside, in discussing the wellbeing of the community and the correction of faults, and in determining the missionary outreach of the community.

There is always something more when we look at reality with the eyes of faith, hope, and charity. Anyone who observes the words of the Rule faithfully will be rewarded. Anyone who goes beyond the words of the Rule and does something more will be rewarded when the Lord returns. That “something more,” however, cannot mean more things, more activities, or more ideas, but rather a deeper awareness of God’s presence and God’s Word.

From the Rule: 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 22, 23, 24

- [4] The first thing we establish is that you have one of yourselves as prior, who is to be chosen for this office by the unanimous assent of all, or of the greater and sounder part, to whom each of the others is to promise obedience, and strive to fulfil his promise in the reality of deeds, along with chastity and the renunciation of ownership.
- [5] You may have places in solitary areas or where they are given to you which are suitable and convenient for the

observance of your religious life, as may seem fit to the prior and the brothers.

- [6] Furthermore, according to the site of the place in which you propose to dwell, all of you are to have separate individual cells, and these cells are to be assigned to each by the disposition of the prior himself and with the assent of the other brothers or the sounder part of them.
- [8] It is not permitted to any of the brothers to change his appointed place or exchange it with another, except with the permission of whoever is prior at the time.
- [9] The prior's cell is to be near the entrance of the place, so that he may be the first to meet those who come to that place; and everything that must be done subsequently shall proceed according to his judgement and direction.
- [16] You are to observe the fast every day except Sundays from the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross until Easter Sunday, unless sickness or bodily weakness or some other worthy reason suggest the fast be broken, for necessity has no law.
- [17] You are to abstain from eating meat, unless it is taken as a remedy for sickness or feebleness. And since you have to beg more frequently while travelling, outside your own houses you may eat food cooked with meat, so as not to be a burden to your hosts; but at sea even meat may be eaten.
- [22] And you, brother B., and whoever will be appointed prior after you, should always have in mind and observe in practice what the Lord says in the gospel: Whoever wishes to be the greater among you will be your servant, and whoever wishes to be the first among you will be your slave.

- [23] You other brothers, too, honour your prior humbly, thinking not of him but rather of Christ who placed him over your heads, and who says to the leaders of the churches, whoever hears you, hears me; whoever rejects you, rejects me, so that you will not come into judgement for contempt, but for obedience will merit the reward of eternal life.
- [24] We have written these things briefly for you, establishing a formula for your way of life according to which you are bound to live. But if anyone will have expended more, the Lord himself, when he returns, will repay him. Use discernment, however, which is the guide of the virtues.

From the Gospel (Jn 14:26)

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have told you.

For Our Life

We opt for a life of communion and fraternity in preference to a life of isolation and individual choice. We accept sharing our life, prayer, work, property, and discernment with others.

Discernment helps us to distinguish and to know what we are to do and how we are to live. Discernment is a gift that we have to ask of God. It comes from the Holy Spirit. If we ask for the gift, we must follow the gift when it comes. When the community discerns together as one, all its members are obliged to be obedient to that discernment.

We live our lives in gratitude for what we have received and in hopeful expectation of what has yet to be given and received until the Lord comes again.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

Lord of heaven and earth, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of God. May Mary, our Mother, given to us on Calvary, watch over us and lead us to your holy mountain, Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.

