

**COMING TO THE FONT
SEPTEMBER 18, 2021
ALBERT OF JERUSALEM, THE RULE GIVER
THE RULE OF CARMEL: THE WAY TO PERFECTION**

THE CARMELITE RULE

Among the Rules establishing the major religious orders, the Carmelite Rule is unique in several ways. One of the most notable being that it is the only Rule for a major order that was not written by its founder. This is why the author of the Rule, St. Albert of Jerusalem is also named the Rule Giver. The Rule itself was also written as a letter, addressed to “B. and the other hermits under obedience to him.” As a letter, it is also extraordinarily short. It is just over 2 regular printed pages, whereas the Rule of St. Benedict is about 100 pages. The purpose of the Rule is to codify the way of life that developed among the hermits on Mt. Carmel so that the community could receive formal recognition as a religious order.

CHAPTER 1:

Albert, called by God’s favor to be Patriarch of the Church of Jerusalem, bids health in the Lord and the blessing of the Holy Spirit to his beloved sons in Christ, B. and the other hermits under obedience to him, who live near the spring on Mount Carmel.

The Rule is written as a Letter. Aside from being an interesting curiosity, it hints that this way of life was developed through conversation.

Obedience plays a central role in the Rule and life in Carmel. Not only does it define the community, “B. and the other hermits in obedience to him,” but the first regulation that Albert puts forth, after this initial section of greeting and introduction, is to require obedience to a prior. The other monastic counsels, chastity and renunciation of ownership, were later additions required to formalize the Order. In considering obedience, it is essential to recall its derivation and meaning, which is “to listen.” The Rule is centered on righteous and holy listening to the divine word and presence, through the Rule giver, the Order, the prior, and our saintly forefathers, and our brothers and sisters.”

Even in the Rule, Albert intentionally avoids naming a leader of the community of hermits, suggesting the significance of not establishing one of them as a founder.

The Rule is particular to Carmel and needs the support of the community life in order to work. In other words, it is intended for avowed religious and does not work for others.

CHAPTER 2:

Many and varied are the ways in which our saintly forefathers laid down how everyone, whatever his station or the kind of religious observance he has chosen, should live a life in allegiance to Jesus Christ – how, pure in heart and stout in conscience, he must be unswerving in the service of the Master.

This is a pilgrim way of life, seeking allegiance, or unity, with Christ. Gleaning wisdom and guidance from those who have gone before us, and gaining support from those who presently walk the way.

Purity of Heart and Perseverance are the two essential qualities in following Christ, something that we can definitely see in Carmelite Spirituality: Teresa of Jesus and John of the Cross.

Addressed to the brothers on Mt. Carmel, it appears to be the Way of Life that is most significant, rather than membership in a community. We have seen this historically as the Carmelites have ordinarily had the largest number of Third Order Members. Most other religious orders, not considering Societies of Apostolic Life, Associations, etc., are centered around the ideal of community life first.

This also recognizes not only the significance that a person's station in life effects the way in which they are able to follow Christ and live out the commandments, but it also affirms, beyond question, that the call to holiness is universal and not reserved to only the few religious or ordained.

The principles in the Rule can be adapted to various stations in life.

CHAPTER 3:

It is to me, however, that you have come for a rule of life in keeping with your avowed purpose, a rule you may hold fast to henceforward; and therefore:

While many and varied are the ways of following Christ, the Rule of Carmel is written as a guide and aid in keeping with a particular purpose, what later becomes expressed more clearly as The Way of Perfection.