

While this song of loving praise ascends on the third floor, the lay brothers unite their prayers to that of the choir monks according to the vision of the Carmelite Rule. Within their hermitages, the lay brothers too have risen from their sleep to keep vigil with the Lord through the praying of the “Our Father.” This divine prayer, given to

us by God Himself, encapsulates the monastic vocation of the lay brother who dares to call God his Father. Kneeling before the image of Our Lady of the New Mount Carmel, one of the only adornments of the austere hermitage together with a bare wooden cross, the lay brothers recite the prescribed number of Our Fathers, their hands moving from bead to bead on what might appear like a Rosary, but is in fact for keeping track of the number of Our Fathers prayed. In this manner, a truly heavenly orchestra of praise arises within the monastery walls—the choir monks (Fathers and seminarians) gathered with their chant in the chapel and the lay brothers solitarily begging God to “give us this day our daily bread.”

After about an hour of singing the Psalms and Readings from Scripture, the hebdomadary intones the antiphon for the Canticle of Zachariah. Truly, God has visited His people to save us. “Jesus, have mercy on poor sinners. Convert them. I beg you,” he prays within his heart as the canticle draws to a close and the closing prayer is said. Not before, however, singing the *Salve Regina* that concludes every time of liturgical prayer in the Carmelite Rite, a reminder that our poor, little monk is a son of Mary, a brother of Mary, a

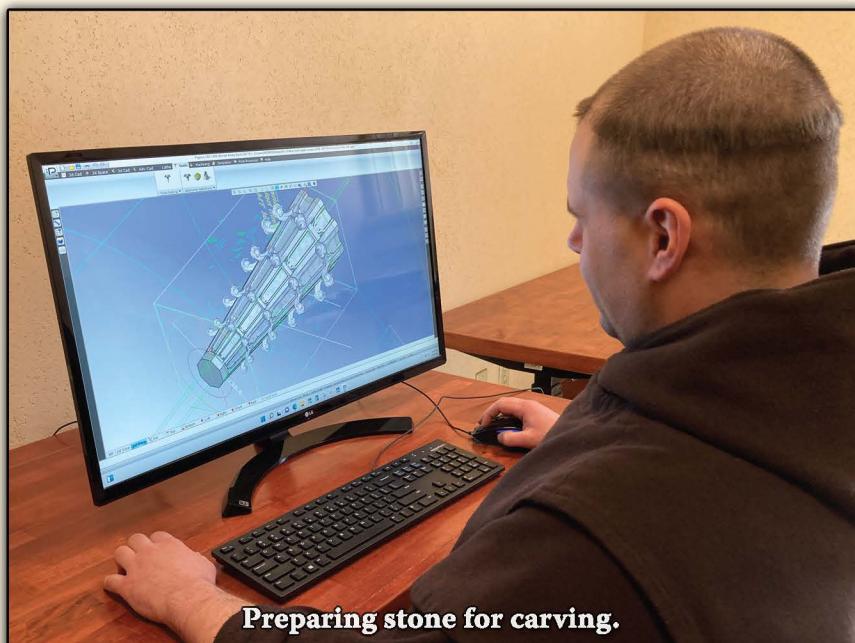
companion of Mary; She is the way that leads to Jesus and the Carmelite life—even this keeping of vigils—is nothing else than an imitation of Mary. The Marian hymn concludes with a final commemoration of the poor souls in purgatory as the monk recalls his deceased loved ones and benefactors asking the holy angels to lead them

them into the unfathomable light of heaven: “*Fidelium animae per misericordiam Dei requiescant in pace. Amen.*”

Having finished the Midnight Office, the monks depart from the chapel to return to their hermitages in the same manner that they came an hour ago. As the vast Wyoming night sky continues to glisten with its constellations, the monk’s heart is full and grateful; the spring cold of this early hour cannot chill the love of his heart for his God, his Church, and all of his spiritual children—wherever they might be. Returning to the warmth of the hermitage and the firmness of his straw mattress, the monk can only hope that the world has

received a new deluge of grace this night—and every night—and that through the monk’s faith, hope, and charity Jesus has looked with mercy upon our world. The monk has heard Jesus’s question and sought to answer tonight and each night, “Could you not watch one hour with me (Mt 26:40 *DRA*)?” For now, however, with heavy, tired eyes, the monk falls swiftly back to sleep.

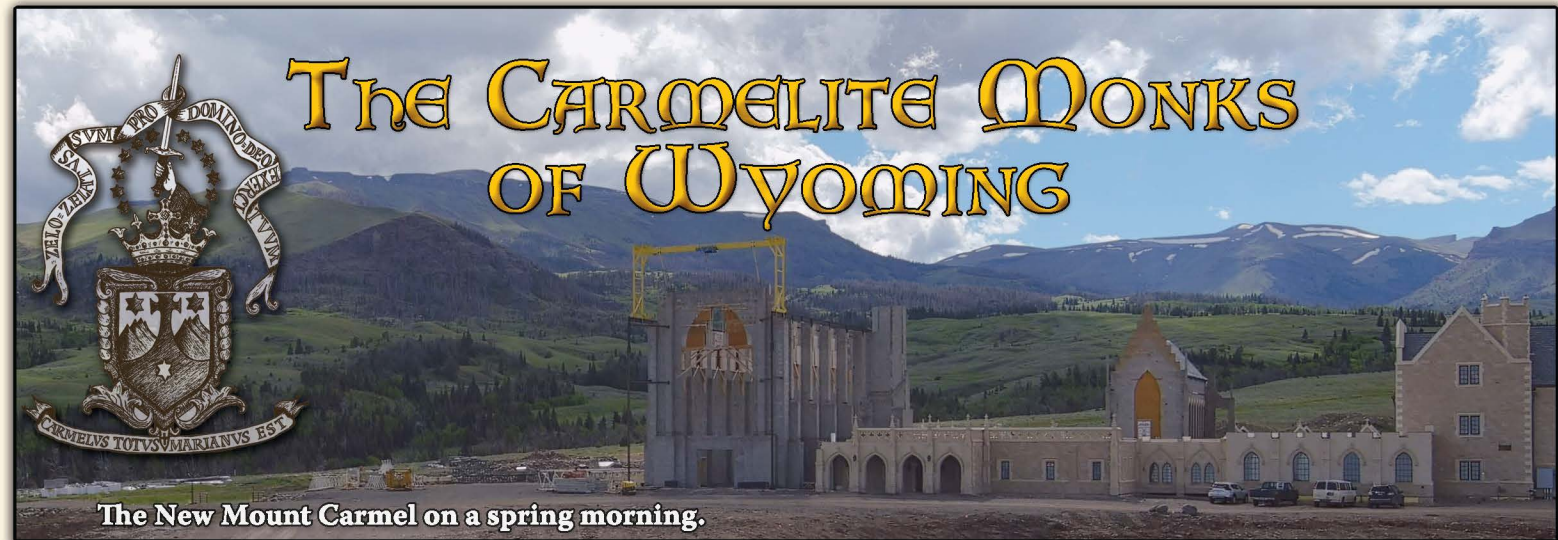
Your devoted Father in Carmel,  
Fr. Daniel Mary of Jesus Crucified, M. Carm.



Preparing stone for carving.



Stone undergoing finishing.



The New Mount Carmel on a spring morning.

Arranged in their rectangular formation that will one day be connected by a walkway, twenty-four hermitages sit dark and still under the twinkling of the brilliant stars. Inside, the Fathers and Brothers peacefully rest on their straw mattresses nestled under warm woolen quilts. This tranquil slumber, however, is interrupted tonight—as it is every night—by the repetitive buzz of the alarm clock. The clock reads, “11:45.” Opening his eyes to the black hermitage, the monk is tempted to roll back over, but he recalls that there is Someone waiting for him and work to be done even at this hour. With the short prayer “Jesus, Mary I love you; save souls,” the monk quickly rises from his bed, dressing in the

brown woolen habit before wiping away the sleep from his tired eyes in his private washroom. After putting on his mud boots and saying a Hail Mary prostrated before a small image of the Virgin Mother in the ante-

chamber, the monk opens the door to the crisp night air as a gentle spring snow falls outside. With purposeful step, and undeterred by the weather, the monk with hood raised begins the short walk across the grand cloister. Slowly more hermitage doors open under this midnight moon as other Fathers and Brothers too join this strange silent procession on their way to the chapel.



Hermitage on a starry night.

Entering the common building and trading his boots for the recognizable sandals of the discalced reform, the monk walks down the dark cloisterwalk where only a few small nightlights cast their reflection upon the tile floor. After ascending three flights of stairs to the monastery’s interim chapel in what will one day be the library, the monk opens the door to behold his God hidden in the tabernacle. The monk thinks to himself, “What a privilege to dwell in the Lord’s house!” A statue of the Madonna of Mount Carmel is flooded with soft white light as the

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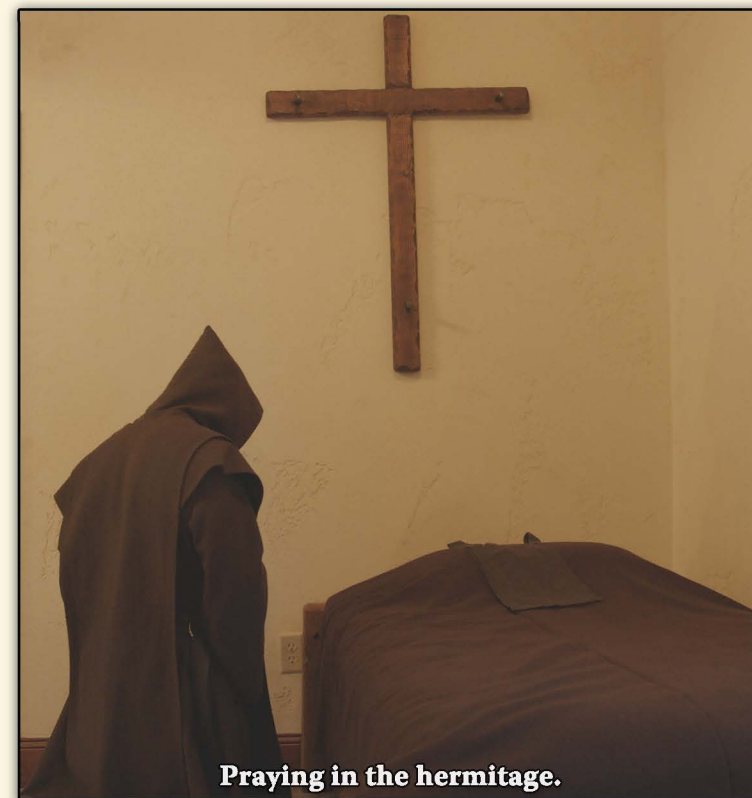
sacristan illumines the chapel. Each monk slowly enters as the soft step of his sandaled feet announce his entrance—one after another, genuflecting and kissing the Brown Scapular before taking his place in the wooden choir stalls. Having fixed the ribbons in his prayer book known as a “breviary,” the monk kneels quietly in prayer telling his Lord how much he loves Him with loving gaze. He is not kneeling at this midnight hour for himself, however; recalling the needs of the Church and the world, he prays, “My Jesus, Mercy!”

At the strike of the midnight clock, Fr. Prior makes a knock and the monks sign their lips in the shape of a cross and begin to recite the preparatory prayers. Slow, steady, uniform the words come forth as they pray together, united as a band of brothers of the Queen of Angels. Having prepared their minds and hearts to pray the Church’s official public prayer—the Liturgy of the Hours—the priest celebrant known as the hebdomadary goes before the center of the altar intoning the words of Psalm 50:17, “*Domine, labia mea aperies*” to which the monks respond, “*Et os meum annuntiabit laudem tuam.*” The Latin flows from the monks’ lips as a spring from its source, a fruit of countless years of study and true immersion in this ancient language.

Indeed, the monks gather in praise of the Most Holy Trinity. As poor sinners, they cannot, however, praise God as He deserves, so the Liturgy continues, “O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me.” And so the Midnight Office commonly known now as the “Office of Vigils” or in our tradition as “Matins and Lauds” begins to the pitch pipe’s pealing of the G note.

Following the invitatory to rouse the monks from their deep slumber and a hymn suited to the feast, three nocturns or parts of this ancient Office begin—each most regularly comprised of three psalms and three readings. The monks take turns leading the intonations as the verses of the psalm bounce from one side of the choir to the other as if in a conversation from one side of the chapel to the other. Back and forth and back and forth the prayer arises on that one solemn note of G as the monks’ voices crack and the young and old attend not only to the words and to the pitch, but first and foremost to the love in their hearts.

In this intimate time of prayer and of vigil, the monk considers all those who are relying upon his prayers in that very moment. “Jesus, make me a channel of grace for your people,” he prays. Of course, he remembers his ailing parents and his siblings trying to



Praying in the hermitage.

raise their families. He prays for the happy repose of his deceased grandparents and for his nieces, and nephews, and cousins, and aunts and uncles. But, he does not pray for his family alone, but for the Church. He makes his own the intentions of the Holy Father and of our good bishop in the Diocese of Cheyenne. Remembering too the admonition of his holy mother in Carmel, St. Teresa of Jesus, he prays for his brother priests—the lonely, the worn out, those receiving new assignments, those suffering persecutions, those rising at this hour to rush off to the hospital to anoint the dying. His prayer turns to deacons and to religious and to the laity, so many of whom have not only encouraged him along the way but made it possible for the chapel radiator to click and the lights to illumine. He thinks too of students studying at this late hour and of workers on second and third shifts to support their families. He remembers too the poor without a warm bed who are hungry and alone. And, of course, he begs for peace—peace in Ukraine and in our world, but first in our hearts. From within this chapel during this midnight hour, perhaps forgotten by the world, the monk does not forget; he remembers God’s Holy People with love, and their needs become his needs from within the immensity of his fatherly heart.

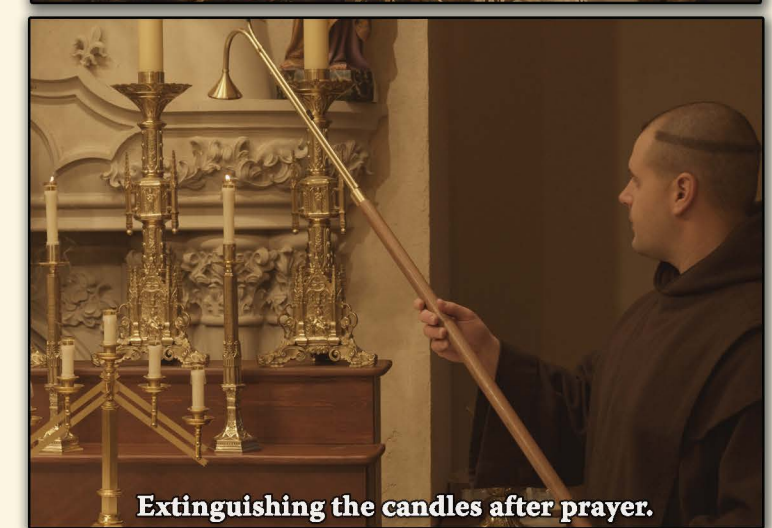
The monk stands to take his turn at intoning the next antiphon as the three nocturns with their regular three psalms and readings give way to the Office of Lauds, or Morning Prayer as it is sometimes called, but not without first singing the Church’s hymn of Thanksgiving—the Te Deum—in between. The monk has so much to be grateful for, so many blessings received: his vocation, his family and friends, God’s mercy, the support of his bishop and the monastery’s leadership, a future bright with hope, and so many other graces too numerous to recall within this short space, including each of you reading these lines.



Our Lady, Queen and Beauty of Carmel.



Chanting the Midnight Office.



Extinguishing the candles after prayer.