

**“Our Lady of Mount Carmel: Model and Intercessor for the
Contemplative *Lectio Divina* of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St.
Elizabeth of the Trinity and Us”**

Homily of Bishop John O. Barres, STD, JCL

Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Order of Carmelites

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I am very grateful for the invitation from Brother Robert Chiulli, O. Carm, Prior Provincial of Saint Elias, to celebrate Mass on the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel at this National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

We celebrate this Feast twelve days after celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the Birth of Our Nation and the Declaration of Independence.

Today, in this moment of history, with our images and statues of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and wearing our St. Simon of Stock scapulars, each one of us makes a ***Declaration of Dependence*** – a ***Declaration of Dependence*** on the glorious intercession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in our lives and in the global mission of the Catholic Church.

We also look forward to the Beatification of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen in St. Louis on September 24th.

It was Bishop Sheen, in his grasp of the history of philosophy, mysticism and the unfolding of world events and crises who said in his classic work, *Peace of Soul*: “In the Divine reckoning, it is Carmelite (friars) and nuns and Trappist monks who are

doing more to save the world than the politicians and the generals. The alien spirit which preempts civilization can be driven out only by prayers and fasting.”¹

We give special thanks to our Carmelite Brothers and Sisters today for this critical vocation for the mission of the Church and the destiny of the world described so powerfully by Bishop Sheen.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel: Model and Patroness of Contemplative Lectio Divina

And so we turn to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, OCD writes: “The scapular, the little habit, that Our Lady of Mount Carmel offers us, is only the external symbol of her unceasing, maternal care: the symbol, but also the sign, the pledge of eternal salvation...Those who wish to live truly devoted to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, must follow Mary into the depths of the interior life. Carmel is the symbol of the contemplative life, of life wholly consecrated to seeking God and tending wholly toward divine intimacy; and she who best realizes this very high ideal is Mary, *Queen, Beauty of Carmel*.”²

Together, we make our existential *Declaration of Dependence* on her intercession for our progress in mental prayer, our progress in liturgical prayer and the progress of our creativity in Catholic global worldwide mission and evangelization.

Specifically, I would like to explore Our Lady of Mount Carmel’s intercession for our daily contemplative biblical *lectio divina*.

In both *Deus Caritas Est* 41 (2005) and *Verbum Domini* 28 (2010), Pope Benedict XVI writes: “The Magnificat – a portrait of her soul – is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her Word, and her Word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate.”

¹ Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, *Peace of Soul*, (New York: Garden City Books, 1951), 245.

² Fr. Gabriel of St. Mary Magdalen, OCD, *Divine Intimacy*, (New York: Desclee Company, 1964), 1146-1147.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel models and guides the contemplative *lectio divina* of the great Carmelite saints and our contemplative *lectio divina* as well.³

Our Lady of Mount Carmel recognizes our unique backgrounds and histories and the unique and personally intimate ways that the Holy Spirit teaches us Psalm 119: “May the Word of God be a Light and Lamp for our steps.”

I would like to examine two case studies – the contemplative *lectio divina* of St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897) and St. Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906).

One of the ways that the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Mount Carmel prepared the foundation of St. Thérèse’s contemplative *lectio divina* was her experience of her mother Saint Zélie’s intricate and decorative lace-making business and the intricate and precise embroidery and stitching involved.

One of the ways that the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Mount Carmel prepared the foundation of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity’s contemplative *lectio divina* was through her rigorous musical training as a pianist at the Dijon Conservatory.

I’d like this to spark your own reflection about how the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Mount Carmel prepared your foundation for daily contemplative *lectio divina*.

For myself personally, I majored in English literature at Princeton University but also studied quite a bit of American and Comparative Literature. The Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Mount Carmel prepared the foundation of my own contemplative *lectio divina* through the teaching of my Professors – Professor T.P. Roche (Shakespeare, G.K. Chesterton, T.S. Eliot), Professor Andre Maman (French Literature and Grammar), Professor Victor Brombert (Balzac, Stendhal, Hugo) and Professor Joseph Frank (Dostoevsky) – who trained me to be sensitive to the nuances of literary texts; thus, preparing me for deep contemplative study and prayer over the inspired texts of the Old Testament and the New Testament.

So let’s start with St. Thérèse.

³ For an extensive treatment of **Contemplative Lectio Divina**, see Bishop Barrès’ January 2026 Pastoral Letter, *God’s Word is Living and Effective: A Reflection on Father Simeon Leiva-Merikakis, O.C.S.O’s Commentary Fire of Mercy, Heart of the Word: Meditations on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew and its Contribution to Contemplative Catholic Biblical Theology, Scholarship, and Lectio Divina* available at drvc.org.

Pope Francis on St. Thérèse's Contemplative Global Missiology and the Divine Mercy Missiology expressed in her Contemplative *Lectio Divina* on the Matthew 9:9-13 Image the Table of Sinners⁴

In 1927, Pope Pius XI declared St. Thérèse the Patroness of Catholic global worldwide mission and in this vocation of mercy she could not neglect the Table of Sinners in history and her empathy for their struggle in darkness and her prayerful and mystical intercession for them.

Thérèse writes in Manuscript C of *The Story of a Soul*: “Lord, your child has comprehended your divine light, she’s asking your forgiveness for her brothers, she agrees to eat for as long as you wish the bread of sorrow and she does not wish to rise, before the day you have indicated, from this table filled with bitterness where poor sinners are eating...But can she not also say in her name, in the name of her brothers: Have pity on us, Lord, indeed, we are poor sinners!...O Lord, send us away justified...May all those who are not enlightened by the luminous torch of Faith see it shine at last...O Jesus, if it is necessary that the table soiled by them be purified by a soul that loves you. I truly wish to eat alone the bread of testing till it please you to introduce me into your luminous realm.”

Thérèse’s particular use of the Table of Sinners is grounded in Matthew 9:9-13 but is also the fruit of her rich Old Testament and New Testament *lectio divina* where she draws on a powerful range of parables, biblical characters and gospel mysteries connecting them to this table of sinners.⁵

In his 2023 Apostolic Exhortation on St. Thérèse, *C’est la Confiance*, Pope Francis gives a particularly insightful analysis of Thérèse’s Dark Night and trial of faith.

He writes: “Thérèse experienced faith most powerfully and surely in the midst of the dark night and especially amid the darkness of Calvary. Her witness culminated in the final months of her life, in the great ‘trial against the faith’ that began at Easter of 1896. In her account, she directly relates this period of testing to the painful

⁴ This section draws on Bishop John Barres’ Address “St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), Doctor of the Church and ‘Sister of Atheists’: The Relationship between St. Thérèse’s ‘Night of Faith and Dawn of Hope’ and Friedrich Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) Night of Atheism and Darkness of Despair” delivered on August 2, 2025 at the St. Thérèse of Lisieux Symposium at Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, NY. The Address is available at drvc.org.

⁵ See Thomas R. Nevin, *The Last Years of Saint Thérèse: Doubt and Darkness, 1895-1897*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). See especially Chapter Two, “Seeking Light in the Bible,” 17-75.

reality of the atheism of her time. The last years of the nineteenth century were the ‘golden age’ of modern atheism as a philosophical and ideological system. When she wrote that Jesus allowed her soul ‘to be invaded by the thickest darkness,’ when she was evoking the darkness of atheism and the rejection of the Christian faith. In union with Jesus, who took upon himself all the darkness of the sin of the world when he willed to drink from the cup of the Passion, Thérèse came to appreciate its underlying sense of despair and sheer emptiness. Yet darkness cannot overcome the light: Thérèse had been conquered by the One who came as light into the world (cf. John 12:46). Her account reveals the heroic nature of her faith, her triumph in spiritual combat with the most powerful temptations. She felt herself a sister to atheists, seated with them at table, like Jesus who sat with sinners (cf. Matthew 9:10-13). She interceded for them ever renewing her own act of faith, in constant loving communion with the Lord.” (25-26)

Thérèse’s mother Zélie mastered the exacting craft of lace making which involved nine different stitches which were joined by nine lace makers.⁶ St. Zélie taught St. Thérèse “how to patiently practice needlework and embroidery.”⁷

St. Thérèse was a contemplative master of biblical embroidery where her contemplative *lectio divina* helped her to bring many biblical stitches together at once to illuminate the Matthew 9 Table of Sinners. What Zélie accomplished with lace, her daughter accomplished with Sacred Scripture – all with the tender guidance of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

The Audacious Musical Interpretation and Discipline of the Dijon Conservatory Pianist and the Audacious Contemplative *Lectio Divina* of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity⁸

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity is an early 20th Century Contemplative Master of *lectio divina* and has much to teach us in the 21st Century. Like St. Thérèse, she was inspired and guided by Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

⁶ See Thomas R. Nevin, *The Last Years of Saint Thérèse: Doubt and Darkness, 1895-1897*, 80-81.

⁷ Mary Harper, “St. Zélie the Lacemaker,” July 12, 2026 National Catholic Register, 11.

⁸ This section draws on Bishop John Barres’ Address, “St. Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Pauline Audacity of her *Lectio Divina* and her Trinitarian Praise of Glory Catholic Mysticism,” delivered on August 9, 2024 at the Contemplative Symposium on “St. Elizabeth of the Trinity: the Mystery of Christian Prayer,” held at St. Joseph’s Seminary (Dunwoodie), Yonkers, New York. This address can be found at drvc.org.

Hans Urs Von Balthasar states: “Few have ever exposed themselves so unreservedly to the *word* in its entire breadth and depth in order to let sanctification take place in them as did Elizabeth of the Trinity.”⁹

In his Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of the Lord* (2010), Pope Benedict XVI gives us an excellent process of praying individual biblical passages, a process of *lectio divina* or sacred reading of the text that includes reading, meditating, praying, contemplating and living the biblical text (86-87).

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity’s *lectio divina* had the contemplative rigor, attention to detail and zeal described by Pope Benedict.

In *Evangelium Gaudium*, Pope Francis states: “God’s word is unpredictable in its power...The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.” (22)

This “unruly freedom of the Word” is an adventure of discovery that St. Elizabeth of the Trinity embraced with Our Lady of Mount Carmel as her inspiration and guide.

Elizabeth was a trained and disciplined pianist and musician at the Dijon conservatory. She has a trained “musical ear”¹⁰ and with grace building on nature, she hears the Word of God with the discipline of the musician and the discipline of the Holy Spirit. If grace builds on nature, Elizabeth’s Trinitarian mysticism builds on her musical training as a pianist.

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity has a Pauline **audacity** in her confidence in the Word of God and in the words of St. Paul that she read, meditated, prayed, contemplated and lived so profoundly. This same word “audacity” is used to describe her bold interpretation of the musical notes on a page as an accomplished pianist within the Dijon conservatory.¹¹

⁹ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux and Elizabeth of the Trinity*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 412.

¹⁰ *Elisabeth de la Trinite : L’Aventure Mystique* (Sous la direction de J. Clapier, OCD), (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2006), Jean-Michel GRIMAUD, OSB, « Ouvrir Les Ecritures avec Elisabeth de la Trinite: Les Sources Pauliniennes et Johanniques de sa Pensee Theologique,», 19.

¹¹ See Pierre Barthez, “Elisabeth Catez: Une Vraie Musicienne!” in *Elisabeth de la Trinite: L’Aventure Mystique* (Sous la direction de J. Clapier, OCD), (Toulouse: Editions du Carmel, 2006), 553-579, especially 564.

Elizabeth's treatise *The Last Retreat* is woven and forged with Pauline texts in a dense and intense way. Elizabeth approaches the Word of God through a deep, compelling and audacious Pauline Catholic Faith.

She discovers her vocation as *Laudem Gloriam*, Praise of Glory in St. Paul. It is her audacious *lectio divina* "confrontation" with the Ephesians biblical text that leads her to her conviction about her Vocation as a Praise of Glory and it is the reason why former Sulpician General and spiritual theologian of the 17th Century French School, Fr. Raymond Deville states: "To understand St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, you need to understand Elizabeth of the Trinity."¹²

With St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, we are called to believe with Pauline audacity and confidence and a spirit of apostolic adventure that the Holy Spirit is dazzlingly present in the biblical texts we pray and that the Holy Spirit's tongues of flame are connecting the text to our souls transforming us in mysterious and profound ways.

We remember too that Elizabeth is a Praise of Glory liturgically in the Liturgy of the Hours and in her cosmic experience of the Catholic Mass and her understanding of the unity of the earthly and heavenly liturgy. We remember that Eucharistic Prayer IV makes direct reference to the Ephesians text and phrase "Praise of Glory."

The Word of God cannot be Chained

In *Verbum Domini* (2010), Pope Benedict XVI states: "The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist." (55)

Deep contemplative *lectio divina* always leads us to the Eucharistic Altar of Sacrifice as the Liturgy of the Word leads us to the Liturgy of the Eucharist in every Cosmic Catholic Mass celebrated on the Altar of the World.¹³

Both St. Thérèse of Lisieux and St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, inspired and aided by Our Lady of Mount Carmel, teach us to be bold in our daily contemplative *lectio divina*. They also teach us to be attentive to how the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Mount Carmel have prepared a unique foundation for us to receive the Word of God.

¹² Fr. Raymond Deville, PSS (Superior General of the Society of Saint Sulpice at time of the interview, now RIP), Interview, Spring 1988.

¹³ Pope Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (8), April 17, 2003.

St. Thérèse's contemplative *lectio divina* was prepared by watching her mother St. Zélie and her co-workers do intricate, precise and detailed lace-making and embroidery – a model for how St. Thérèse laced together biblical passages, images and characters in her prayer.

St. Elizabeth's contemplative *lectio divina* was prepared in her rigorous musical training as a pianist. She was audacious in the way she interpreted music on her piano. She was audacious in how she interpreted the Word of God in her contemplative *lectio divina*.

How has the Holy Spirit and Our Lady of Mount Carmel prepared your own contemplative *lectio divina* and how does it impact your prayer to this day?

St. Thérèse and St. Elizabeth teach us with St. Paul in his second Letter to Timothy 2:9 that “The Word of God cannot be chained!”

The Word of God cannot be chained in our own lives and in our experiences of the Cross of Jesus Christ!

The Word of God bursts through our sin, paralyses and resistances to change and ignites our own Road to Damascus conversions!

The Word of God breaks down the self-imposed prison doors of addiction, ego, pride, selfishness and narcissism and refocuses our lives on Christ and his call to rejoice!

The Word of God cannot be chained by sin, war, terrorism, racism, injustice and disrespect for the sanctity and dignity of human life!

The Word of God cannot be chained in the global worldwide mission of the Catholic Church regardless of the 21st century persecutions and martyrdoms she experiences!¹⁴

The Word of God cannot be chained in regard to our deep and definitive response to our baptismal call to contemplative holiness and contemplative mission!

¹⁴ See Robert Royal, *The Martyrs of the New Millennium: The Global Persecution of Christians in the Twenty-First Century*, (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 2025); and Bishop Robert Barron, *What Do Their Deaths Demand? Christian Persecution Today*, (Elk Grove Village, Illinois: Word on Fire/Aid to the Church in Need, 2026).

The Word of God cannot be chained by efforts of the Prince of Darkness to sunder advances in Artificial Intelligence and technology from spiritual and moral truth.¹⁵

Cardinal Anders Arborelius said that “Artificial Intelligence needs to be guided by Spiritual Intelligence.”¹⁶ He also told Pope Leo XIV when they first met after his election: “St. Thérèse will help you!”¹⁷

In 1887 in Rome, Pope Leo XIII is confronted with the Carmelite vocation of the 15 year old Thérèse, and days into his Pontificate Pope Leo XIV lays a white rose on the Tomb of Pope Francis in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome in honor of St. Thérèse and invokes a shower of her roses on a Church confronting the evolution of Artificial Intelligence with the liberating moral truth of the Catholic Church in the 21st Century Industrial Revolution.¹⁸

May Pope Leo XIV’s encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*, be a light of Christ’s love, truth and guidance for the world.

And may our 21st Century Contemplative Revolution guide the 21st Century Industrial Revolution!

Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Mother of the Word of God, pray for us!

St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church, Patroness of Catholic global worldwide mission and Sister of Atheists, pray for us!

St. Elizabeth of the Trinity, Praise of Glory, pray for us!

¹⁵ See Pope Leo XIV’s May 15 2026 encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* available on the Vatican website. See also Bishop John Barres’ February 10, 2026 Address, “In the Workshops of Saint Joseph and Saint Josemaria Escriva: A 21st Century Catholic Theology and Spirituality of Work in an Era of Epochal Artificial Intelligence Change and Industrial Revolution,” delivered for the Institute of Human Ecology at The Catholic University of America on February 10, 2026. It is available on the CUA Institute of Human Ecology website and at drvc.org.

¹⁶ Cardinal Anders Arborelius, Sunday, August 3, 2025 Homily at the St. Thérèse Symposium at the Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, New York as heard and recorded in writing by Bishop Barres.

¹⁷ Cardinal Arborelius told this story to Bishop Barres at that same St. Thérèse Symposium at the Immaculate Conception Seminary, Huntington, New York, August 1-3, 2025.

¹⁸ Pope Leo XIV’s May 10, 2025 Address to the Cardinals: “Sensing myself called to continue in this same path, I chose to take the name Leo XIV. There are different reasons for this, but mainly because Pope Leo XIII in his historic Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* addressed the social question in the context of the first great industrial revolution. In our own day, the Church offers to everyone the treasury of her social teaching in response to another industrial revolution and to developments in the field of artificial intelligence that pose new challenges for the defense of human dignity, justice and labor.”

