

- As we celebrate today the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Carmelites around the world are celebrating the Feast of St. Elijah, whom we find in our apse mural in a fiery chariot.
- For Carmelites, Elijah is a model of both contemplative prayer and active ministry, as well as a prophetic voice in an ungodly world – all hallmarks of Carmelite spirituality.
- When we think of Elijah, we naturally call to mind his confrontations with King Ahab, proclaiming a drought for several years in Israel as punishment for Ahab's worship of baal, and how he was miraculously fed by ravens and the widow of Zarephath during the drought.
- We think, too, of his contest with the 450 prophets of baal on Mt. Carmel, wherein fire devoured Elijah's sacrifice rather than that of baal, proving that the God of Israel is indeed the Lord – and not baal, whose cult had been firmly planted in Israel by Ahab's wife, Jezebel.
- After slaying the 450 prophets of baal, you'll remember that Elijah had to flee the wrath of Jezebel, and so he walked for 40 days and 40 nights to Mt. Sinai.
- There, on that holy mountain, as he poured out his despair, God's presence was revealed to Elijah in a quiet whisper rather than the mighty fire, earthquake, and wind, reminding us that God so often speaks to us in the quiet of our hearts rather than through mighty signs.
- What we learn from Elijah's example is that apostolic activity is made efficacious by times of solitude and prayer, which is why the Carmelites venerate Elijah as their spiritual father.
- Elijah was a prophet mighty in word and deed, zealously defending Israel from false gods and famously taken up to Heaven in a chariot of fire. He preached and worked miracles, yet Elijah also withdrew for periods of prayer in the desert and atop Mt. Carmel.
- In this Elijah shows us that a life of prayer doesn't have to be at odds with a life of apostolic activity, but that they go hand in hand. This leads us to our Gospel story today.
- On the one hand, we have dear St. Martha, "burdened with much serving," who asks Jesus for justice with her sister, Mary, whom she perceives is unfairly doing nothing. And on the other hand, we have Mary, sitting attentively at Jesus' feet.
- Yet in gently rebuking Martha as He does, our Lord is teaching us the importance of prayer – of striving to be close to Him and listening to Him.
- We need to pray, for more than anything else in this world, prayer has the power to guide us to God's will. When prayer is a daily habit for us, it directs our life – and in it we find strength that we never knew we had, just as Elijah did.
- And this is why Jesus says that Mary has chosen the better part. Of course, the world needs Martha's: those generous souls willing to serve others. There are times when work just has to be done. But our prayer life should not be sacrificed regularly for the sake of work.
- No matter what our vocation, we are all called to a life of prayer. We are all called to sit at our Lord's feet and listen to Him.
- So, regardless of personal responsibilities, we must make time to sit in prayerful silence, separating ourselves – at least for some period of time each day – from the cares and noise of daily life, seeking our Lord's voice. We must choose the better part sometimes!
- For it's in prayer that we are given to know God's will, and that we're given the strength to accomplish His will, even when it involves suffering.
- It's in our prayer that we are strengthened so that we can accept and even rejoice in the sufferings of life, *filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ*, just as St. Paul states in our 2nd reading today.

- Of course there are times when we must work. Even within the Church, both active and contemplative elements are necessary for the Church to accomplish Her mission of preaching the Gospel and saving souls. They are not opposing ways of practicing our faith.
- Yet an active life that does not seek any type of union with God is useless and barren, while an apparent life of prayer that shows no concern for the apostolate and the sanctification of ordinary things also fails to please God (cf. *The Navarre Bible: Gospels and Acts*, 403).
- So, our lives should be a combination of both prayer and external activity, all oriented toward glorifying our Lord so that we come to know Him more deeply, and eventually become more like Him, who both worked and contemplated during His 33 years on earth.
- Ultimately, in seeking to integrate the activity of our lives in the world with an interior life of prayer and meditation, we must strive to conform our lives to God's holy will.
- This requires that we learn to see in all the events of our daily life God's providential hand drawing us closer to Him.
- This is generally easy to do with life's blessings, but it is much harder to recognize that which is holy and divine in our daily sufferings.
- In our 2nd reading, St. Paul talks about rejoicing in his sufferings because of the great spiritual benefits that we can glean from our sufferings – for ourselves and for the sake of the entire Church.
- Indeed, suffering borne with faith not only draws us closer to God, but it also makes us more like Him. And it is a service to the entire Church because it helps to perfect the Church at large.
- When we accept our sufferings patiently and join them to Christ's sufferings on the cross, we participate in the redemptive work of Jesus. We make the power of His redemption present once again.
- And it is this grace that helps transform souls: not only our own, but those of the people around us as well.
- But for any of this to happen: being able to recognize God's providential hand in all the events of our daily life, patiently and gratefully embracing both the joys and sufferings that come our way, we must first find time to unite ourselves to our Lord in prayer – despite the pressures and demands of daily life.
- Mark my words: None of us will ever make it to Heaven without devoting regular time to prayer while we live on earth.
- My brothers and sisters: strive to fulfill well the demands of your vocation, yet make time daily to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him. As baptized Christians our Triune God lives within our souls, and so we are always in His presence (as long as we are in a state of grace).
- May we be transformed by His presence within us and live our lives in perfect union with His will: for our sake and the sake of entire Church.
- St. Elijah, pray for us. Sts. Mary and Martha, pray for us.