

# Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites

## FORMATION II – YEAR A

# The Ascent of Mount Carmel



During this year of Formation II, candidates immerse themselves in the writings of St. John of the Cross. “St. John of the Cross was the original collaborator with Our Holy Mother St. Teresa in both the spiritual and juridical re-founding of Carmel in this new charismatic way. So, he is called Our Holy Father.” (*Ratio* 77)

Those who want to understand John’s writings should read his work directly, frequently, and reflectively. “We do not read John merely to gain clearer understanding of how people understood discipleship in the sixteenth century; but to gain insight into the nature of Christian commitment and spiritual growth in our own time. So, we must read John with an eye on our own situations – personal, ecclesial, and societal.” (*The Contemporary Challenge of John of the Cross*, pg. 26)

This year begins with an in-depth exploration of St. John’s writings. The main syllabus is divided into two parts with each session focusing on a distinct theme or sub-theme. Part One covers the sense desires – the inordinate, unmortified desires which are known to be a hindrance to God’s action in the soul. John begins to discuss the purgative phases of spiritual growth with vivid visual images and metaphors. However, he quickly points out that one cannot achieve anything in one’s effort to practice self-denial without “a habitual desire to imitate Christ.” The desire to imitate Christ leads into a prayer of “urgent longings” – kindled in love with yearnings. In this prayer, God becomes the intense desire. By finding satisfaction and strength in this love, one will possess the courage and constancy to readily deny all other appetites. (See *Ascent*, Ch. 14) This is the heart of John’s teaching, that Christ is the source of all holy love and strength.

Part Two briefly covers the purification process of the intellect by faith, the memory by hope, and the will by charity. John identifies this period of purification as the “Active Night of the Spirit.” He calls souls to practice total detachment not only from their unruly desires and possessions, but also from “spiritual goods” whether in the form of spiritual consolation, locutions, visions, or ecstasies. The heart of John’s teaching is that the purification of the spirit leads one to practice a mature form of prayer, from meditation to the gift of contemplation.

St. John inspires the Secular Carmelite to be vigilant in the practice of faith, hope and charity. “He guides the Secular Carmelite through the dark night to union with God. In this union with God, the Secular Carmelite finds the true freedom of the children of God.” (OCDS Constitutions, Art. 8)

Excerpt from “Introduction To Formation II - Year A”

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