

JULY 16 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

About a month ago, on the feast of Corpus Christi, there was a huge conflict of bombing and animosity between Iran and Israel. One of the cities that was bombed in Israel was Haifa, the third-largest city in Israel. Haifa is just 11 or 12 kilometres to the north of Mount Carmel, which we celebrate today — Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

As I saw and heard about the bombs in Haifa, I thought of the Baha'i Gardens, which are world famous and absolutely beautiful. I have no idea, because I'm not very good with these search devices, to see whether that was destroyed or not. But coming to Mount Carmel, we have a place that is very sacred, Maharrahah as it was called by many people.

It was here on Mount Carmel that a group of people decided they would build a monastery, a heritage, in honour of Our Lady. They would do two things in memory of Our Lady. One was a sense of obedience — to search for God's will and then to do God's will. The second was a sense of not giving up hope when things were difficult and hard to understand. We are told Mary pondered these things in her heart.

Now, Mount Carmel is a place of pilgrimage not because of apparitions of Our Lady like Lourdes in France, Fatima in Portugal, or Guadalupe in Mexico. But because a group of people decided to go there to venerate Mary. She had given to the Crusaders, and especially to an English prior called St. Simon Stock, the brown scapular with the promise that anybody who wore it and died would be saved.

This was in the 12th century, and on this day, the 16th of July, in 1221, this was the apparent apparition to St. Simon Stock. It was during the time of the Crusades that these men decided to go up to the mountain, to make this place a hermitage, and to spend their time in prayer and contemplation.

Today, the Carmelite Order numbers about 50,000 — about 4,000 monks or friars, who go out and preach, run retreats, and serve parishes, and 12,000 nuns, who are enclosed in monasteries and meant for contemplation. In the 16th century, St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross started what is called the Discalced Carmelites — the Carmelites who do not wear shoes — a stricter order.

It was because of this great devotion to Our Lady that this devotion spread, especially through the Spanish-speaking countries — in Argentina, Chile, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and even Guyana. Needless to say, it also took hold in Spain and in Mexico.

But there's something else that is very important here. Carmel comes from the Hebrew word which means — "El" means God, like in Michael, Gabriel, Raphael. The "el" means God, and "carm" means garden. So "Carmel" means the garden of the Lord. A very appropriate name for people who want to spend their time in contemplation and before God in peace and quiet.

The ironic thing is that it is at Mount Carmel that you also have a scene of great violence and killing. This was with the prophet Elijah. The prophet Elijah at Mount Carmel killed 450 false prophets — the prophets who put their devotion and worship to the idol Baal. Baal was the god or idol that Queen Jezebel worshipped. Therefore, when Elijah put these prophets to death, Jezebel sought the life of Elijah, and he fled from Mount Carmel all the way down to the south of Israel, to Mount Horeb.

Mount Horeb is not very far from Midian, where our first reading speaks of Moses when he encountered God. Moses saw God face to face, and yet he did not die. Moses was given a command by God. Moses, in front of the burning bush, was told, "Remove your shoes, for the ground you're standing on is holy ground."

This picture of Moses on holy ground is a very important metaphor and symbol of Ignatian spirituality. St. Ignatius, when he spoke about meditation, contemplation, application of the senses, the examen, the revisiting of a scene, always said there's one thing that is very important: realize who you are and in whose presence you are. If you are in the presence of God, then you should show great love and respect.

John Paul II, whenever he landed in a new country, would kiss the ground in honour to respect the ground, the land he visited, and the culture of the people. How much more when we stand in God's very presence? We too can bend and bow, and if needs be, kneel and kiss the ground, to realize that we are in God's presence — God who is going to speak to us.

Now, God is not going to tell us to go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh, "Let my people go." But God is going to call us to many things. And like Mary, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, we need to ponder these things in our hearts. What was very important was, she knew what the will of God was, and then she obeyed it.

It is our call to search what God's will is, through the intercession of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and then obey.

God bless you all.