

# *The Word gives the Kiss of Peace*

March 25, 2007

An open letter from the Carmelo of Florence  
on occasion of the fourth Centennial  
of St. Mary Magdalen's death  
Florence 1566 – 1607

Dear Sisters and Brothers and all Friends of our Carmelo:  
four hundred years ago, Sister Mary Magdalen of the Word Living died on Ascension day, May 25, 1607, surrounded by her Carmelite sisters.

She was born to the noble Florentine family of the Pazzi on April 2 1566, and was named Catherine. At only 16 years of age, she entered the Carmelite Monastery in Florence during the Advent of 1582. Her intimately desire, like the Vergin Mary, receive the *Verbum*, the Father's Word through the Spirit's Fire and Tenderness.

The Church proclaimed her saint, a true witness of that Son whom she so deeply loved and had chosen as her Brother and Spouse. Her desire was to *«follow in his footsteps»* (LR 7,29).

We feel St. Mary Magdalen spiritually close to us in our obedience to Jesus Christ (*Rule of the Carmelo*, prologue), in our meditation of this Word day and night (*Rule of the Carmelo* 7), in our spiritual growth in Communion.

The General of the Carmelite Order, father Joseph Chalmers, commemorated the Fourth Centennial of the death in a recent letter. Embracing St. Mary Magdalen's desire for a "Communion - Carmelo", with the present letter, wish to celebrate this event together with as many people as possible, starting from today, Annunciation Day, a holiday particularly dear to our Saint.

We would like to share her wisdom with all those who "Know" her and, inspired by her deep love for the Gospel and passionate hope for renewal of the Church, desire her intercession, especially this year. As she might say, we would like to make her voice ring out and tell of her love for the Word and desire for a Church more similar to God's dreams.

That peace was given by Mary

*«If it hadn't been for Mary, for me God wouldn't have existed»* (PRO II, 202): a very courageous assertion indeed, which expresses Mary Magdalen's love for Mary, Son's first disciple and her Mother and guide.

This Mother and guide accompanied our Saint in her first steps of religious life in that Advent of 1582.

On Pentecost 1585, together with Mary she was touched by the *«Kiss of Peace»* of the holy Spirit. On Assumption 1593, with Mary she began questioning the carmelite Contemplative life and its need to adopt a new way of evangelizing.

She nurtured herself on the Church Fathers' writings and on the Word received in the Eucharist, and during liturgical celebrations, she soon realized that: *«While they took Communion, thus uniting themselves to Jesus, I saw the Virgin Mary give each of them the Kiss of holy peace»* (QG, 258).

This *«Kiss of Peace»* meant much more to our Saint. It represented not only Mary's intercession, but God himself who offers himself to his creatures *who are ready* to receive him.

This wedding took place in Mary's presence, thanks to her "yes", because what happened to her, is now made available to everyone: *«Oh, most glorious Mary! "You kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (Ct 1,1). He gave you the kiss with his mouth. "You kiss me". The intimate vision of God and the Word's participation reserved for you were contained in that kiss. You were called to share in God's divinity as fully as any human creature could...That is, through his kisses, he let you taste what God tastes of his creature and what the creature tastes of God....you are adorning the creatures' hearts one by one, to offer them to the holy Trinity along with your own heart, let there be no one who refuses to be adorned by you»* (PRO II, 200).

Our Saint thus conceived of God - Trinity as a «*Kiss of Peace*».  
The Trinity Recommends Peace

Dear friends, we wish to point out the fact that St. Mary Magdalen did not want to love or *ring the bells* for God. Her dilemma was how to announce the Face of God revealed to her by the Word:

A God who looks you in the eyes.

A God who knows how to listen and entrust himself to his  
Creatures.

A God who surpasses our dreams of “perfection” and strength.

For St. Mary Magdalen, the Christian God knows how to look over and over again, until his contemplation of the Son gives way to the Creation: «*And this peace was given..... when the three persons of the Trinity conceived the birth of pre-conceived man. This peace did not consist in “radiating” but rather in “contemplating” and this mutual contemplation led us to fall in love with our own greatness and goodness; this in turn led us to desire – desire immensely – to communicate this goodness of ours. However, since we couldn’t find anyone able to receive this communication, we deliberated to create pre-conceived man according to our own image and likeness. A new Trinity was thus created in which this peace could reside*» (RE, 76).

This is the Gospel’s main message: God’s creatures are the “dwelling-place of the Trinity” and, like Mary, they can receive the gift of Peace, which is God Trinity, able to transform and free every creature.

The following definition of God made by St. Magdalen is unique in the history of spirituality: «*I say that if God is communicative, we, too, must be communicative in communicating the illumination communicated to us by God, especially to all those who can help his creatures to believe in him*» (LR 9, 29).

### If God is Communicative: the renewal of the Church

Dear brothers and sisters, we believe that this is the key to understanding St. Magdalen “passion”. From Christ, she received a *passion of love* for his wounded, beaten and humiliated Body, which is the Church, disfigured by the mediocrity of many of its members.

We cannot penetrate to secret of our Saint’s answer to God – Trinity if we consider the “Ways” in which the Spirit communicated with her (for example, through ecstasies, reading people’s hearts, prophecy) because they were profoundly influenced by the historical times she lived in, what makes her relevant to our times are not the “extraordinary events” she experienced but the creative and dynamic love she nurtured ever since she was a little girl for the Church and its renewal (cf LR 6, 13ss)

She believed that single people and religious orders in the Church could convert and respond to this love by assuming a sober life-style, cultivating the Word and loving and respecting Him in their fellow men.

In the wake of Savonarola’s teachings<sup>1</sup>, our Saint has joined a life of prayer and communion with her sisters, to a prophetic mystique of announcement of the Gospel. After having experienced the presence of God-Communion in her daily life, she felt the need of communicating this to the men and women of her times and thus lay the basis for a renewal of the Church.

The question nowadays is how a contemplative community can open out to all the people in search of God, who are looking for a place where they can listen to him and also communicate with each other. We want to accept this challenge, though conscious of our spiritual poverty. To this end, we offer ourselves to the Father and his Church, determined to let his Spirit “work” in us and guide us day by day in this task.

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<sup>1</sup> The body of the blessed Mary b. Bagnesi (1514 - 1577), who was actively involved in Savonarola’s movement, is still kept in the “Capitolo” of the Monastery.

## Becoming Fire and Water

In St. Magdalen's times, a vast literature existed concerning the various aspects of love involved in the search of God, but her insight on the subject was totally unique and deeply rooted in holy scripture. According to her, the focal point of Christ's mission was not his passion and death but his resurrection.

She believed that the Spirit wants to re-live the whole *History of Salvation*, culminating in Easter, in every person, she affirms: «*Oh, pure God, how great you are! You would like to flood everything but then we'd have to become dauphins to survive the flood!... Oh, pure God; oh, eternal Word! You'd like to create a fountain of fresh, pure water in us*» (RE, 58-59) and «*The hearth that received this Spirit is the thorn-bush that Moses saw: it burns but is not consumed (Es 3,2-3)*» (RE, 64).

Like the holy Virgin, St. Mary Magdalen totally accepted the Word and his will, and also its consequences: a hard experience of radical spiritual change, she expressed it as follows: «*Moses's thorn-bush burned but wasn't consumed, while I am consumed and do not burn. Oh Word: no more greatness, no more goodness*» (CO II, 308).

These words urge us to reflect today and verify how much excessive "caution" and "slowness" there are in us and our Carmelo that need to be burned.

We must also reflect on our role in the Church: how do we relate to the people who come in contact with us? Do we succeed in helping them meet the Word and find solace in it? Do we help them open their eyes and ears unto him in trustful expectation?

The highest point of the «*Kiss of peace*» and «*Kiss of union*» described by our Saint (CO II, 275-280) is a "waterfall" a "river" that springs from the Trinity and embraces the creature in an undeserved gift of love (such a risk!), not shaped on our (little) heart but on the Son's (immense) heart. She called this «*dead love*».

## You must look out of wounded side

St. Mary Magdalen's mystic experiences did not exclusively involve God and her soul, nor did they consist in heroic penance or emotional transports. Her writings help us understand her spiritual life and growth; the following episode is an example of this.

It cites a recurring dream she had (from 1592 on): she "dreamed" that some contemplative carmelite sisters finally took on St. Catherine of Siena's «*Eyes and hands and they all blithely and harmoniously walked around on a beautiful meadow full of flowers*» (PRO I, 259).

The wisdom (the eyes) and action (the hands) acquired by these "new" nuns were such that: «*They don't always remain in his heart, which is their souls secret bridal chamber, nor in his wounded side.... Because when you have been in his heart's secret bridal chamber for awhile, you must look out of it and lovingly call out to all the countless souls on their way to perdition*» (Ivi).

St. Mary Magdalen wanted her "sisters", to become "creatures of the Gospel", women able to listen to the Word and live in Communion. Day by day, we realize how demanding and creative this gift can be.

The God that St. Mary Magdalen experienced was Dialogue, Communion, Kiss and Plan of Peace for all his creatures.

She was ready to die for this Word and this God.

Today, in the name of this Word and this God, we do not want to be a "museum" (however precious) of her words but, on the «*garden Church*», able to read the signs of the times and ready to act accordingly.

This means submitting humbly to God's will and the action of the Spirit. To his demanding, creative love, may we give loving, creative answers in newness of life!

Our saint herself did not agree with many of the traditional habits followed in her community and stated: «*Many justify their behaviour and say: All those who lived here before us are now in God's Glory. So we approve their*

*behaviour and thin they acted very well. But I could answer them that, even in their behaviour seemed good, they didn't do the same things that God now requires of us: they lived in past times and our times are different»* (PRO I, 101-102)

It is important for us to reflect on this evangelic and demanding message.

We yearn for communion with everyone baptized in Christ, with all people of good will, with all our Carmelite Brothers and Sisters.

By intercession of the Holy Virgin and St. Magdalen, may the Spirit descend abundantly on our community, our local Church, on all his creatures and be received as a personal Gift of Fire and Water.

May it burn away our fears and irrigate our desert.

May he enlighten us and guide us in doing the Father's will; may he help us to accept Him always, especially when he surprises or *disturbs us*.

May the «*Kiss of Peace*» experienced by our beloved Sister as Presence of Communion, reach and address to hearts, also today, by means of her word, soft but at the meantime pervasive and far-reaching.

Your Carmelite Sisters

Florence, March 25, 2007: Annunciation Day

From the Carmelo of St. Mary of the Angels and St. Mary Magdalen.

QG SANTA MARIA MADDALENA DE' PAZZI, *Quaranta giorni*, E. Ancilli (ed.), I, Firenze 1960.

CO I-II ID., *Colloqui*, C. Catena (ed.), II-III, Firenze 1961-1963.

RE ID., *Revelatione e Intelligenze*, P. Visentin (ed.), IV, Firenze 1964.

PRO I-II ID., *Probatione*, G. Agresti (ed.), V-VI, Firenze 1965.

LR ID., *Epistolario completo*, C. Vasciaveo (ed.), Firenze 2009<sup>2</sup>.