



Special Newsletter No. 3 covering the International Student Course

Blessed Titus Brandsma: Carmelite, Professor, Journalist and Martyr
Contemplation, the dynamic element that unifies them
International Student Course for Carmelite Friars in Simple Profession
22 July - 5 August 2018, The Netherlands - Germany

DAY FOUR - 26 July 2018: Nijmegen

Session 1: Titus a Scholar- Fr Benny Phang

In this presentation Benny presented an exposition on Titus' academic life. He also made connections with our own engagement in philosophy and theology studies during our initial formation and what might be possibilities for our future ongoing formation.

In our small groups we were encouraged to reflect and share on the meaning of our philosophy and theology studies as well as to make connections between Titus' story and our own.



Fr François Manga

Session 2: Titus a Journalist - Fr François Manga

Fr François, currently completing his PhD in Nijmegen University, explored Titus' prolific work as a journalist. As a member of the International Journalist Association, Titus was deeply engaged in communications and finding ways to share contemplative learning and the prophetic Gospel message with people.

François says, "For Titus, the words alone were not enough to change the situation, he enacted what he wrote... If you are able to do what you say, like Titus, you can be 'very dangerous' to those that would suppress the Gospel message." Brandsma opposed the National Socialist propaganda being printed in the Catholic press, knowing that it would likely mean his arrest.

In concluding François noted Titus' great activity in the field of journalism and asked what this meant for us as Carmelites today. He proposed that perhaps we, too, are called to be active in many different professions, in order that the contemplative charism might be truly in the midst of the people. Vigorous discussion followed, first in the whole group and then in smaller groups.

More photos on our Facebook page: www.facebook/carmelitesAET
Words: Matthew Tonini | Images: Joseph Khoa, José Natalino Freitas

DAY FIVE - 27 July 2018: Feast of Bl Titus Brandsma, Nijmegen

Session 1: Carmelite Mysticism by Titus Brandsma Fr Kees Waaijman

Kees analysed the first of Brandsma's lectures in 'Carmelite Mysticism: Historical Sketches. Both Titus' lecture and Kees analysis provided much for thought and reflection. Kees paused throughout his presentation commenting many times, "we could spend a whole other week on that.."

Kees began by focusing his presentation around the question in the context of Titus' prolific activity and the activity in our own lives for Carmelites: "Where do the many things that we do come together as one?" He also challenged us to listen carefully to our questions that arose, our anger, uncertainty, attractions and dislikes as we moved through his analysis.

The core of Brandsma's lecture entitled 'In the Spirit and Strength of Elias' centres around the foundation and summary of Carmelite life in the story of Elijah. To summarise Kees breaks the lecture down into three parts: The Double Spirit; A Life of prayer; and A School of Prayer, moving from the ideals and principles of the Double Spirit to the grounding and marian character of the Life of Prayer, to the



practices of the Carmelite School of Prayer that draw us through the grounding experience of prayer toward our ideals and principles. As you can tell from the summary there is a lot to break open here! Kees stressed

the importance of revisiting this foundational image of Carmelite life.

Some comments and questions that struck me during Kees' talk:

1. "Jesuits say they are 'Contemplatives in Action,' I would say for Carmelites it is distinctively 'Contemplation AS action.' Contemplation is our mission and our action... One example, Titus shared his contemplation with us in his prayer 'O Jesus when I gaze on you' and no doubt in this lecture of his that we are exploring."



Fr Kees Waaijman

2. "A Carmelite shares his soul in his preaching, you give yourself, not in some form of exhibitionism, but in order that your contemplation is shared."
3. "The challenge always is to become conscious and aware of the experience (not just the thinking) that God loves us."
4. One position is that the experience of God is beyond this life, that is not the Carmelite position.
5. "Are there mystics among you? Are there mystics in your provinces? Are there? Are you being trained in the ay of a mystic?"
6. A life of prayer is how we internalise contemplation.
7. There are many similarities between Carmelite life and Christian life. Living differently does not always mean doing different things, it can also mean living the same things more intensely, more intentionally.
8. "Solitude is to become aware of the uniqueness of your personhood in the presence of your God."
9. "For Titus, and for Carmelites, liturgical prayer is and must foster and express our grounding as *theotokos* (God-bearers) the marian aspect of our lives.... Contemplation impregnates Carmelite liturgy and our liturgy is to be infused with contemplation."

Fortunately in the afternoon we were given a session to reflect and digest Kees' presentation and Titus' lecture further, as well as share in small groups what we learnt, what struck as and what challenged us... Conversation continued over dinner and undoubtedly will continue tomorrow on our bus trip to Amersfoort.

DAY SIX - 28 July 2018: Trip to Amersfoort



Today the week long heatwave broke with a rain storm and cooler weather. We travelled from Nijmegen to the Camp Amersfoort Memorial. It was somewhat appropriate that the rain should fall on a day of mixed emotions.

Titus was transferred to this camp following his initial arrest and imprisonment in Scheveningen.

We were welcomed to the Amersfoort memorial with traditional Dutch hospitality. Our tour guide for the morning was Jana or perhaps she would be better name a story-holder. She led the English-speaking group around the three main sites of the camp that remain as part of the memorial. Much of the camp was demolished in the decades following the end of World War II partly in order to forget what had happened and partly because of the poor quality of the buildings.

Jana told us that the prisoners soon realise that they couldn't forget, but had to remember what had happened, memorialising those who had died and in the hope that such things would never again revisit the land.

As Jana led us around she guided us into something of the experience of the prisoners and guards of the camp and the inhumanity that was bred in the camp, the cruel treatment, imposed malnourishment and simple yet grueling tortures that were inflicted on those in the camp. Prisoners were often worked to death.

The worst job in the camp was digging out and moving earth to construct a shooting range, that grew in length throughout the war. Now there is a statue at the end of the shooting range commonly called 'The Stone Man'. The sculpture was crafted by a surviving prisoner of the camp and depicts a prisoner awaiting execution: one hand clenched in defiance and the other open in helplessness.



'The Stone Man'

It was in the context of these stories that we gathered as a group at the gate of the Amersfoort Camp to share prayer and read testimonies of prisoners who had been companions of Titus Brandsma. The testimony that struck me the most was that of a young student, Mom Wellenstein, who had been transported with Titus to Amersfoort:

“The first time I saw Titus... I thought: ‘what a small and vulnerable man. Should someone so impractical go to a camp? He will certainly not survive. But then I saw his eyes, so crystal clear! ... Soon I discovered





Brandsma had an enormous inner strength. He radiated a deep humanity, a serenity founded in a deep trust in God... I realised: this is a special man. Even in the greatest misery he looked after his fellow prisoners in need in a quiet manner without any sentimentality.”

It is difficult to write well of the mixed feelings that the visit to the camp evoked. I came away both drained and pondering on Titus’ strength to seek God even in the midst of such great suffering and inhumanity, that even there God is.

Session 2: Afternoon Reflection

Quinn Connors led a mid-course assessment and reflection, guiding us in reflecting on what the experiences of the course had meant for us. How they were touching our lives, encouraging us, provoking us and challenging us.

DAY SEVEN - 29th July 2018: Sunday, Nijmegen

Today we joined with the Elijah community for Sunday Eucharist. The Elijah community is the praying community of the Titus Brandsma Memorial. The Eucharist was prayed in Dutch, and included extended periods of silent reflection, and simple Dutch chants throughout the liturgy. It captured something of a Carmelite way of prayer.

We were free for the rest of the day. I took the opportunity to explore Utrecht with a brother from the UK. Walking along the canals and stopping for a dessert on the water’s edge were a highlight!

In the evening we had our final dinner with the Nijmegen community and celebrated our farewell with a cultural night of singing, dance and drama. We had presentations from each region Europe, Americas, Asia and Australia, the Nijmegen community and the Prior General, Fernando, played us a tune on his harmonica!



Fernando, Benny, & Joseph Khoa with students from our Region

