



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 ELEVEN - 2 August 2018: Dachau, Germany

Today we travelled from our youth hostel in Pullach to the Dachau concentration camp. The journey was about one hour by train and bus. The experience was very much a ‘pilgrimage experience’ no description can really capture what it was like to be there. Dachau was the first concentration camp built under Hitler’s regime. It was built only three months after Adolf Hitler was made the Chancellor of Germany. It was a ‘school of violence’ for training military.

We arrived with other groups on the bus and as we walked to the gates of the camp, people seemed to become more subdued. As we walked through the main gate of the camp, the clouds moved across the sun casting a shadow across the white gravel roll call field that stretched out in front of us. After a short briefing by Sr Hetty, we were given three hours to explore the camp. The camp itself was well kept and without the stories, memories or museum, it might be thought to be well manicured gardens. However, as I explored the camp, information plates, photo displays and audio recordings memorialised what had happened in this place. The extent of the violence and inhumanity is something very foreign to my own experience and in many ways incomprehensible. What struck me most as I made my way around the camp were the stories of companionship and humanity, that persisted amongst prisoners, even in the face of this horror.



‘Work will make you free’ the gate to the Dachau concentration camp



‘Never Again’ in five languages. We remember so that it will never happen again.

DAY ELEVEN - Dachau, Germany
(continued...)

On the Dachau camp site there are four religious memorials: a Jewish memorial, a Catholic memorial, a Protestant memorial and a Russian Orthodox memorial. Each memorial seemed to echo and memorialise the presence of God in the most stark, barren and dark human experience.

It was the Jewish memorial, I found to be most moving. It is structured like a smokestack, and you walk down a slope through the entrance into near darkness. There are a few small tealight candles suspended on the walls and an eternal flame. The stone walls are reminiscent of a ashen fireplace or dungeon. A black stone in the wall has the Hebrew word for 'remember'. Toward the back of the room you look up from the depths to a small porthole in the ceiling, that opens out to the sky and a view of the menorah that stands at the top of the building. This memorial, along with the name of the Catholic memorial "The mortal agony of Christ", drew me into meditating on the mystery of how God is present in the reality of the most painful and darkest experiences and memories of human life.

Carmelite Convent, Dachau

Following our personal journey around the Dachau concentration camp, we visited the Carmelite sisters who live at Dachau. The entry to their convent is through the wall behind the religious memorials. Over lunch, we spent some time in small groups talking about our experiences of the camp and how this connected with our understanding of Titus. We then shared afternoon tea and familiar Carmelite hospitality with the sisters of the convent.



José meets the Mother Superior of the Heilig Blut Convent, Dachau



The Jewish Memorial at Dachau



Titus' living quarters: foundations of barracks no. 26



Procession to the memorial museum



Carmelite memorial plaque installed at Dachau

Blessing of Carmelite Memorial Plaque

Following afternoon tea the group participated in a ceremonial installation of a memorial plaque in the Dachau Concentration Camp Museum. The plaque commemorates Carmelites Titus Brandsma and Hilary Januszewski. The ceremony began with a procession to the Museum at the opposite end of the camp. We made our way from the convent in pairs, in a solemn walk down the main road of the camp. At the Museum the memorial plaque was unveiled by Fr Fernando and a prayer was shared. The procession then made its way to the foundations of barracks number 26, the barracks where Titus had lived, while in Dachau. There we listened to witness accounts of Titus' time at Dachau and shared prayer. We concluded the day with Eucharist in the Carmelite convent chapel, before making our way back to Pullach for dinner and some much needed rest.



Group photo at the Carmelite Convent, Dachau

DAY TWELVE - 3 August 2018: Munich, Germany

During our final day together, Fr Quinn Connors, a member of the International Formation Commission, led us through a process of reflecting on our experience of the week and the program. There were opportunities to begin to think about how this experience of walking with Titus had touched our lives, and how it might be integrated into our Carmelite life as we returned to our different places in the world.

Three members of the group had been selected earlier in the week to write and present a statement from the group, that will be later circulated throughout the Order. We spent the afternoon, reflecting and editing this statement together. Then followed, many thank yous and the beginning of the farewells.



Portrait of a young Titus Brandsma



Brs José, Matthew and Francisco

A short final reflection

The opportunity to participate in this experience has been amazing and one I am very grateful for. To share it with brothers from Timor-Leste, as well as Carmelites from twenty-five countries, has expanded my experience of the internationality and global expanse of the Carmelite Order and our shared life. It is always great to become more aware of our shared humanity, to move across barriers of distance and discover ways of communicating beyond language, to listen to and share stories and celebrate faith together.

I have appreciated the opportunity to come to know better Titus Brandsma in the many ways he lived out his Carmelite life and am inspired to return to my own life in Australia and continue to seek out the presence of God amidst my life in the community there. Thank you.

Matthew Tonini