

*I have called you  
into the Land of Carmel  
to eat of its fruits...  
(Jer 2:7, LXX)*



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Dear Carmelite Brothers and Sisters,  
I hope you are well.

In December we looked at the Marian anthem *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, now with the change of the seasons, the Church recommends recitation of *Ave Regina caelorum*. Traditionally it was recited from the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord until the Wednesday of Holy Week. Below is an adapted translation, which will, I hope, help to make clear the many interesting features of the anthem:

*Hail, Queen of the heavens,  
hail, Lady of the angels,  
greetings, Root, greetings Gate –  
from where a light has risen for the world.*

*Rejoice, O glorious Virgin,  
lovely beyond all others,  
farewell, most beautiful one,  
and plead for us to Christ.*

As with all the hymns to Mary, the *Ave Regina caelorum* is filled with symbolic titles, which remind us of her close connection to the Lord. As ‘root’ (*radix*), she connects Jesus to the history of the Jewish people and specifically to the line of David, which Isaiah says will produce a ‘shoot’ (*flos*) upon whom the Spirit of the Lord will rest (see Isaiah 11:1–2). This image is taken up in the seldom used third verse of the *Flos Carmeli*, which ask the ‘Root of Jesse, which bore one bright flower, to be ever near us and guard us each hour’. The image of the ‘gate’ is a familiar one – the Litany of Loreto hails the Virgin as the ‘Gate of Heaven’ (*janua caeli*). Bl. John Henry Newman suggests that the gate metaphor for Mary’s divine motherhood and perpetual virginity is intimated in the prophecy of Ezekiel, who declares that the east gate of the sanctuary will remain closed, since only the Lord has the right to pass through it and has done so once only (see Ezekiel 44:1–2).

Mary, as mother of the redeemer, is accorded the title ‘Queen of the Heavens’ (*regina caelorum*). She is arrayed in the glory of the resurrection won by her Son, and allows the reign of God the Father full expression in her person, through thought, word and deed. She needs no prompting to rejoice, as she was the first to know the unbounded joy of eternal life in the Holy Trinity. However, the hope is that something of her joy will mark our own lives of Christian witness. Mary, is also hailed ‘Lady of the Angels’ (*domina angelorum*), which again emphasizes her exalted position. However, her association with the angels begins in the very ordinary domestic setting of her home in Nazareth, when Gabriel announces to her that she will give birth to the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:26 – 33). Later, in a humble stable, she receives news that a host of angels heralded the birth of her Son to lowly shepherds (Luke 2:9–15).

It is Mary’s intimacy with Jesus that warrants our confidence in her willingness and effectiveness as an intercessor – she will certainly plead for us. From Mary a light has dawned, just as Isaiah foretold; this light brings hope to those who are oppressed and dejected (see Isaiah 9:2–3). The ‘farewell’ (*vale*) is purely poetic – it provides a contrast with the ‘hail’ in the first verse and assonance with ‘most’ (*valde*). However, the person praying knows that we never take our leave of Mary – as Mother of the Church and sister in the Faith, she is ever near to us. Let us therefore have recourse to her each day, for she will not fail to support us.

Wishing your communities, families and friends every blessing.  
Yours in Carmel,  
Fr Michael