

# A DAY OF PRAYER -

The Freedom of Belief

10th of December 2010

World Human Rights Day

Sponsored by

**The Carmelite NGO**

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## INTRODUCTION

We dedicate our Day of Prayer on Human Rights Day this year to the theme of freedom of belief. This Prayer allows us to reflect on the right of freedom of belief as it is enshrined in the United Nations Declaration and as it is enunciated in the teaching of the Catholic Church. It is a right that is related intrinsically to the dignity of the human person. It pertains to the human quest for Truth.

God is Truth. All who seek truth seek God, whether this is clear to them or not. (*Edith Stein, Letter, March 23, 1938*)

### **Elijah, the Prophet**

Elijah then came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." (*1 Kg 18:21*)

The Elijah story may be used as the ultimate statement of freedom of belief: "If the Lord is God, follow him, if Baal is God, follow him, but do not go hopping from one to the other." Then he slaughtered the prophets of Baal! What does that say about freedom of belief? We might understand this as their failure to exercise their freedom of belief by allowing themselves to follow the winds of immediate advantage. They were not firmly committed to anything. Such prophets will die of their own indecision. The story also points to the cultural difficulties that are involved in the pursuit of freedom of belief - forcing us to accept the inadequacies of culture and of the particular historical moment, while striving for the deeper values that will enhance the human condition. This may be gleaned from this second passage from the story of the prophet:

He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. (*1 Kg 19:11-13*)

How will we recognize God's presence if we are not free to be surprised by the way in which God chooses to reveal God's loving presence?

## Articles from the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (1948):

### Article 1

*All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood (sic).*

Those who promote and foster this right: people educated in human rights, people who are committed to the common good, people who have confidence in themselves and in the goodness of humanity.

**Pray that they may be strengthened ...**

Those who deny and abuse this right; totalitarian regimes, fundamentalist believers, people who have little confidence in themselves or in the god they worship.

**Pray that they may be given a change of heart ...**

### From the Book of Psalms: Ps 8:

O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory above the heavens.  
Out of the mouths of babes and infants  
you have founded a bulwark because of your foes,  
to silence the enemy and the avenger.  
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that you have established;  
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,  
mortals that you care for them?  
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;  
you have put all things under their feet,  
all sheep and oxen,  
and also the beasts of the field,  
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,  
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.  
O Lord, our Sovereign,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

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## Article 2:

*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.*

Those who promote and foster this right: educators, ministers of religion, legislators who do not believe that one race is superior to another, one gender is superior to the other, one language is better than all the rest, one religion is so good that it puts all the others in the shade.

**Pray That they may be strengthened ....**

Those who deny this right: bigots and narrow-minded people who have no sense of the wealth, beauty and difference in humanity.

**Pray that they may have a change of heart ....**

## From the Book of Psalms: Ps 1:

Happy are those  
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.  
The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

### **Article 3:**

*Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.*

*The freedom of people to believe, and not be persecuted, imprisoned or put to death is recognised by this article.*

Those who foster and promote this right: the defenders of human life and liberty, those who believe that human life is the primary value.

**Pray that they may be strengthened ....**

Those who abuse this right: those who are careless about the wellbeing of others.

**Pray that they may have a change of heart ....**

### **From the Book of Psalms: Ps. 63:**

O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.  
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
beholding your power and glory.  
Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise you.  
So I will bless you as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.  
My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips  
when I think of you on my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;  
for you have been my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.  
My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me.  
But those who seek to destroy my life  
shall go down into the depths of the earth;  
they shall be given over to the power of the sword,  
they shall be prey for jackals.  
But the king shall rejoice in God;  
all who swear by him shall exult,  
for the mouths of liars will be stopped.

## Article 18:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*

Those who foster and promote this right: people of faith who know and acknowledge that God, whatever God people worship, is much greater than those who worship. Those who have confidence in the integrity of the human person.

**Pray that they may be strengthened ....**

Those who abuse this right: Those who are afraid of freedom, those who need to protect vested interests, those who are afraid of different.

**Pray that they may have a change of heart ....**

## From the Book of Psalms: Ps 139:

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

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## Article 19:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.*

Those who foster and promote this right: those who enjoy the ability of humanity to hold different views on things and yet

who enjoy unity with their neighbor.

**Pray that they may be strengthened ....**

Those who abuse this right: people who believe that the media and places of learning should be controlled, those who do not respect the opinions of others ..

**Pray that they may have a change of heart ....**

### **From the Book of the Psalms: Ps 19:**

The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
making wise the simple;  
the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;  
the fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.  
More to be desired are they than gold,  
even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey,  
and drippings of the honeycomb.

### **Article 20:**

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.*
- (2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.*

Those who foster and promote this right: Those who recognise the community dimension of human life, that human persons need one another in order to grow to maturity.

**May they be strengthened ....**

Those who abuse this right: Those who have a fear of people coming together and prefer to deal with individuals alone.

**May they have a change of heart ....**

## From the Book of the Psalms: Ps 122:

I was glad when they said to me,  
“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”  
Our feet are standing  
within your gates, O Jerusalem.  
Jerusalem - built as a city  
that is bound firmly together.  
To it the tribes go up,  
the tribes of the Lord,  
as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.  
For there the thrones for judgment were set up,  
the thrones of the house of David.  
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
“May they prosper who love you.  
Peace be within your walls,  
and security within your towers.”  
For the sake of my relatives and friends  
I will say, “Peace be within you.”  
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,  
I will seek your good.

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### Suggested further reading:

*Dignitatis humanae*, (D.H.) the Declaration of the Second Vatican Council on Freedom of Belief ([carmelitengo.org/dignitatis\\_humanae](http://carmelitengo.org/dignitatis_humanae))



## The Carmelite NGO

211 East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 708, New York, NY  
10017 USA

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