



CONGREGAZIONE DELLA PASSIONE DI GESÙ CRISTO
P.ZA SS.GIOVANNI E PAOLO, 13
00184 ROMA - ITALIA
Curia Generale

Prot.n. 2007.0214

CENTENARY OF THE PASSIONIST PRESENCE IN HOLLAND

**Very Rev. Fr. Leo A. J. Bos , Provincial Superior
and Brethren of the Province of Our Mother of Holy Hope**

My dear Fr. Leo,

and the Religious and Laity of the Passionist Family in the Province of
“Mother of Holy Hope”:

Speaking for the General Council and in the name of the entire Congregation, I am happy to share in your joy; and with you I offer prayers of thanksgiving to God for all that the Lord has given to the Church and to the world through the Dutch Passionist Religious in these hundred years of continual presence in Holland. We thank God for all that so many of our brethren have been able to for the good of the People of God in Holland, in Bulgaria, in Indonesia, in São Luis de Montes Belos, GO, Brazil; and in Marienmünster, Germany. May Blessed Eugene Bossilkov, who received his secular and religious formation in your Province, and your own countryman, Saint Charles Houben, who lived in Ireland and who was canonized last June 3rd, obtain for you the serenity and courage to live through the difficulties of today in the light of Christian Hope. Your Province’s history reveals a compelling missionary vocation; you did not shrink from such diverse cultures as belong to Indonesia and Brazil. In fact, you entered into those cultures, you let yourselves be inculturated; your interior liberty facilitated above and beyond evangelization, the “implantatio congregationis,” the putting down roots of the Congregation, as witnessed by your presence in Germany and the heroic testimony of your work in Bulgaria. Nevertheless, the beginning of your presence in Holland was not easy; to serve in the service of the Kingdom of God often means to undergo violence, and leads us to purification through our struggles.

The first attempt to establish a Passionist presence in Holland began with the foundation of Herten (Limburg, Diocese of Roermond) in November of 1853.

However, on account of the restrictions imposed by the bishop on your pastoral work, and on the practical elements of your life, it was closed in July of 1866. God's plans, however, were only being renewed, not abolished. In fact, the presence of some Dutch in the Province of St. Michael (MICH) in France, among who was Fr. Leo Kierkels, together with the difficulty experienced between the French and the Flemish Belgians, renewed the efforts to open a religious house in Holland. Another factor was the anticlerical laws which were being issued in France, and which led to the closing of the Passionist Houses there. Thus, efforts were accelerated and finally, in 1906, property was acquired in Mook. On March 9, 1907, the community was granted civil status and the construction began on the religious house. It was officially opened on October 27, 1907, and was dedicated to the Sorrowful Mother with the title "Mater Dolorosa". In 1924, the Province was established under the title of Mother of Holy Hope, and Mook was designated the Provincial House.

On this occasion, we want to give praise and glory to the Lord for all of the graces received, and for the good which he has permitted us to accomplish in one hundred years of life. "*Without me you can do nothing*" (Jn 15:5), says Jesus in the parable of the vine and the branches.

Thanksgiving is also the theme of the Liturgy this 28th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Today's gospel (Lk 17:11-19) tells of the meeting of Jesus with the lepers, of their healing, and the gratitude expressed by only one of them. To him, Jesus says, "Get up, your faith has saved you." Similarly, in the First Reading, Naaman witnesses to an attitude of acknowledgment before God, acknowledging with gratitude and expressing that gratitude in a profession of Faith: "*Now I know that there is no God on the face of the earth other than the God of Israel!*" (2 Kgs 5:14-17) What gives rise to our gratitude is the fidelity of God in spite of our infidelities. The Second Reading is explicit: "*If our faith is lacking, he is nevertheless still faithful, because he cannot deny who he is.*" (2 Tim 2:8-13). The imperative which begins this passage of St. Paul's Letter to Timothy, "Remember", is an invitation made also to us on the occasion of this celebration. This celebration is not simply a reliving of our history, more properly, it is a "memorial" of God's life in the Province through all of the religious who have been a part of its hundred year history, and who make up its history today. It is a "Memorial" of the Passover, which we are called to celebrate in the life of our Provincial Community and to live in the personal history of each one of us.

This "remembering" should give rise to a hope in the future, and to the decision to walk together toward a new life, one marked by a serene faith in the certitude that God continues to be present in our history just as he has been in the history of the past hundred years. To the difficulties of the present moment in the world, in the Church, in the Congregation, and in the Province, we respond with a living faith because we know that authentic faith is "tested", and that difficulties validate and refine our faith. At the same time, our difficulties are a guarantee of a fruitful life because "*if the grain of wheat falling to the ground does not die, it simply*

lies there, but if it die, it will produce much fruit,” it becomes an ear of wheat, it becomes new life (Jn 12:23).

In this context, the Restructuring Process of the Congregation is an act of faith. We are asked to believe in something beyond reasonable doubts or human imagining; just as the lepers in today’s Gospel who *“raised their voices saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us.’”* He replied, *“Get up, and walk, your faith has saved you!”* Jesus intervenes, he heals them, and in the gift of healing, he invites them to accept what it means to *“get up and walk”*; it means to become a witness through one’s own life. *“Get up and walk”* is an invitation which God has spoken to the Congregation, it is the invitation which he directs to the Province, asking it to continue its journey beyond the hundred years which we are celebrating; that it go forth in fidelity to the spirit of its vocation as a missionary Province.

There is another aspect of this Province’s life that I would like to highlight: its solidarity and generosity with the poorer parts of the Congregation; something which I was able to experience during my service as General Econome, and which I have recognized as a member of the General Council. I bring you the thanks of those who have benefited from your concrete economic aid. May God return you a hundredfold and with it the reward of eternal life because you have known how to see the face of Jesus in the face of the poor.

Before I bring these reflections and historical notes to a conclusion, I want to add that together with sentiments of gratitude, there is something else that rises from the heart, the desire and need to ask pardon of God for our infidelities and weaknesses. This is something that we all experience in our daily life when measured against the new life to which we are called by baptism. Infidelities and weaknesses, these reveal our fragile nature, but they are overcome by the love and fidelity of the Lord. Reassured by his mercy, we ask pardon and purification with the same cry as the lepers in today’s Gospel: *“Lord, have mercy on us!”* ...for the offenses we have committed in a hundred years of life.

Let us place this centenary, and the Passionist Family in Holland, under the protection of Mary, Mother of Holy Hope, and the patroness of the Province. May she, Mary, mother of gracious love and of concern, of knowledge and of holy hope, who has lived grace with the same meaning of hope, especially at the foot of the cross, help us to understand that only by re-establishing the connection between hope and love, between hope and faith, will it be possible to restore to this dimension of Christian life its foundation and its credibility. St. Paul the Apostle justly writes: *“Hope does not deceive, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”* This are inseparable twins, hope-and-love. In fact, to live without hope is to be as one dead, and hell is to love no longer.

To our joy and thanksgiving is joined the fellowship of Passionist Saint, Charles Houben, a son of this land, and Blessed Bossilkov, a martyr, whose

formation as man and religious was received here among you. They accompany us in this supreme act of thanksgiving which is the Eucharist, and which is presided over today by his Excellency, Bishop A. H. Van Luyn, S.D.B., to whom I offer fraternal greetings, and the respects of the entire Passionist Congregation.

The highpoint and the source of life for the Church is the Eucharist. In it we unite our existence with the gift which Jesus has made of himself to the Father and to the world. Jesus takes our act of thanksgiving, unites it with his own, and offers it to the Father, also for the celebration of this centenary.

Amen! Amen!

Haastrecht 14 ottobre 2007

P.Ottaviano D'Egidio
Superiore Generale cp.