PASSIO

NEWSLETTER OF THE PASSIONIST FAMILY
ST JOSEPH'S PROVINCE

ISSUE#7 - LENT 2021

‘If encouraged, the voices at the frayed edge can be a profound source for reflection. Hearing the marginalised voice, in Church and society, is not simply a commendable act of charity. It is a necessity for present and future vitality. All too often one will find behind such voices the spiritual depths and quest for the real priorities in life’.

Austin Smith CP – ‘Mersey Vespers’ p.154

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The front cover illustration by Liam Rotheram depicts the restoration of natural growth to a damaged forest. “As Passionists, we know we are crucifying God’s Creation. But Resurrection is always possible.” - Martin Newell, p29. The back cover image is an illustration of Edwina Gately’s poem ‘Silent God’ by Luke Tonge & Matt McKay

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EDITORIAL

by John Kearns CP

Welcome to the first ‘Passio’ of the Passionist Tercentenary Year. The tricentenary celebrations commenced with a solemn eucharist at the Basilica of SS John and Paul in Rome on 22nd November 2020 because it was on that day in 1720 that Paul Danei (St Paul of the Cross) received the Passionist habit and began the retreat during which he wrote the Passionist Rule and received many of the foundational graces of the spiritual family God was calling him to found. It seems appropriate then that the opening message of this issue of Passio is presented by John Kearns CP, Provincial of St. Joseph’s Province:

“In prayer by night I was at peace and also a little distracted. I had special recollection in offering his Most Holy Life, Death and Passion... I had a particular impulse to pray for the conversion of England....”

So wrote a young Paul Daneo, later to be known as St Paul of the Cross, on Sunday 29th December 1720 (the feast of St Thomas a Becket). He was part way through the forty-day retreat which also saw him write the first Rule for “The Poor of Jesus”, later to be known as the Passionists. Thus, was the beginning of our Religious Congregation, and therefore the Tercentenary Jubilee of our foundation which started last year and continues this year, 2021.

The Congregation has chosen the theme of “Gratitude, Prophecy and Hope” to mark the Jubilee. Gratitude, for all that is now, and has gone before; Prophecy, to indicate that the message of the Cross stands as a perennial challenge to the world in which we live; and Hope, as this message is rooted in the self-giving and life-giving Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - God who loves us unto and beyond death, as we will celebrate especially at Easter.

Three hundred years is a long time. And yet, since Paul Daneo wrote the first Rule, the charism of the Passion has been forever finding new and fresh expression in the Holy Spirit, as our world continues to give us cause for celebration and for concern, as we need to hear again and again the message of the Gospel, and as our eyes look to a horizon beyond our own immediate circumstances.

Happy Jubilee therefore!

We continue to keep alive the memory of the Passion whenever we see the world around us through eyes of love and mercy; whenever we reach out in solidarity with the Crucified Ones: whenever we adjust our attitudes and lifestyles in solidarity with the Crucified Earth. May St Paul of the Cross pray for us; and in words of prayer used by him and his early followers and continued by us ~ May the Passion of Jesus Christ, and the Sorrows of Mary our Mother, remain always in our hearts. Amen.

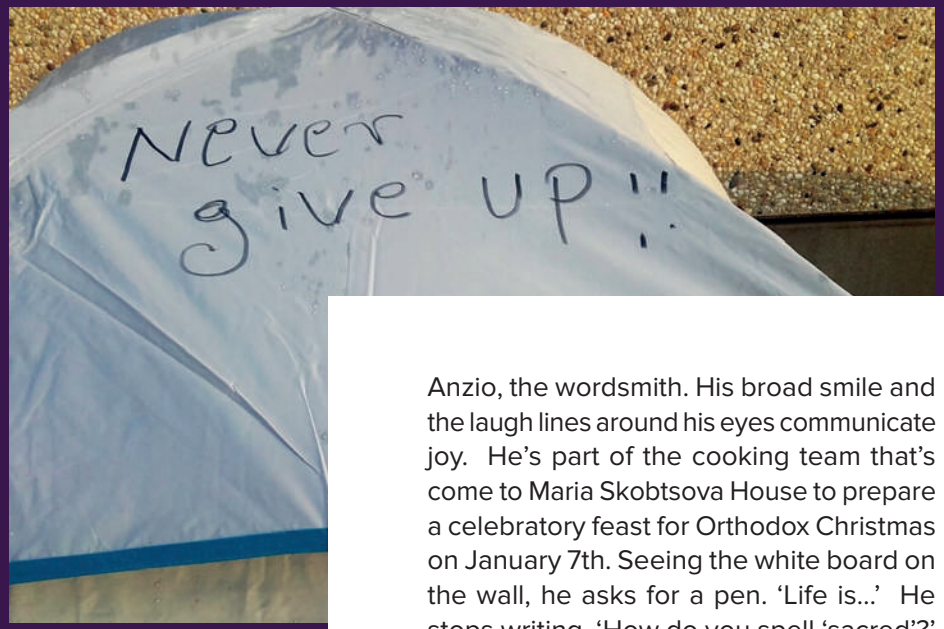
John Kearns CP is the Provincial of St Joseph's Province of Passionists and a member of the Community of the Passion.

Let us live our charism as prophets of hope,
Sincerely believing what we preach
Because God is at the very heart and centre of our lives.
As Passionists in these present times,
Our mission must reflect a hopeful spirituality –
One of surrender and trust into the hands of the One
Who calls us to proclaim the Gospel of the Passion of Jesus,
as a manifestation of the unlimited and boundless love of God

- Joachim Rego CP
General of The Congregation of the Passion

WORDS OF HOPE, WORDS OF LIFE

Snapshots of Calais Refugee Life by Alex Erskine Holmes



Anzio, the wordsmith. His broad smile and the laugh lines around his eyes communicate joy. He's part of the cooking team that's come to Maria Skobtsova House to prepare a celebratory feast for Orthodox Christmas on January 7th. Seeing the white board on the wall, he asks for a pen. 'Life is...' He stops writing. 'How do you spell 'sacred'?' I tell him. 'Life is sacred'; his triune is complete. Merhawi now takes the pen; 'I didn't decide to be born', he writes, 'I won't decide when I'll die; just let me live how I want'. His smile is one of satisfaction, yet hints at something deeper, more painful. Back in the Eritrean camp, Anzio has been at work on the tents that line the base of the UK funded 'security wall'. 'Dear problems please give me some discount, I am your regular customer' is penned across the flysheet of one of the tents. On his own, he has written 'Never Give Up !!'. But this has irked the CRS, the French riot police. 'They came and cut it'. Duct tape covers the slash, near obliterating the 'N' of 'Never'.

A map of the world crisscrossed by planes and flight lines adorns Yoel's small rucksack. An open world, travel friendly. But what irony. Yoel, like most of the Eritrean refugee community in Calais, has crossed the world as a commodity; he's been trafficked, tortured, and, once in Europe, rejected by the asylum system. His only hope now is to stow away in a UK-bound truck. But these are changed days; Brexit has happened. 'Where are the trucks?' the guys ask daily. It's well into January. The flow of trucks arriving into France from the UK continues unabated. But nothing is going the other way. 'Is UK closed?' I offer words that I hope will reassure, that more than half of the UK's imports come from Europe, the trucks will resume.

'I need to go to England. Can you help or Catholic Church England?'
'There is nothing I can do, Negassi, and there's nothing the Church can do. I am sad to tell you this.'
There comes a typically gracious reply;
'Thanks very much, Alex. I am sorry, no sad please.'

The next request is manageable. I'm approached by another Eritrean as I'm leaving the swampland of the largest of the Eritrean camps. 'Can you take a bible to UK?' Several days pass and several people have been involved before I'm handed the bible wrapped in two sleeping bag covers. In London I hand the bible to Teodros. I'd been expecting a young Eritrean; Teodros' hair and moustache are liberally peppered with grey, his hairline receding. He has a gentle, warm face. 'Thank you, thank you,' His gratitude is boundless. 'I am happy to meet you, and my bible. This book', he pauses, looking at me intently, 'this book is my life'.

Fireside. An architecture of timber, shaped like a mini-Stonehenge, surrounds the fire. After endless days of rain, the logs must first be dried before being put on the fire. Johnathon, chef supremo, is whittling an old broom handle. It will be his pot stirrer. The words on his t-shirt include, 'Never be unwilling to do a good deed'. 'You want tea, coffee, milk?' Seeing the 'Max' logo across dozens of half litre cartons of milk, I realise supplies are good. I opt for milk. The Max carton stack offers a clean haven for 'CRS', the camp cat, who appears used to a more salubrious setting. She pads delicately across the muddy terrain. Ultra-biddable, she's scooped up and held close to a chest, yanked into someone's arms by the tail, sleeps the night in the shelter of tent. But she's no ratter. Rats run amok, eating the food, gnawing holes in the tents. They play brazen games of chase on the perimeter of the camp. CRS ignores them. But the real CRS, the Compagnies républicaines de sécurité, ignores nothing. Aklilu the dancer, Aklilu whose scarred adult face lights up with the cheekiness of a little boy, is nursing a broken right wrist. The plaster cast, not yet twenty-four hours old, is already staining brown. 'CRS, they hit me'. His vulnerability is raw. He's a little boy again. Someone puts music on. His face lights up. Soon he's swinging his good arm to the rhythm of the sound.

Alex is a member of Passionist Partner Organisation 'Calais Catholic Worker'. He spends much of the year at Maria Skobtsova House in Calais, offering safe sanctuary to especially vulnerable exiles.

SPOTLIGHT

on Jo Frew

Jo Frew is a residential host of our Passionist Partner, Martha House, which offers temporary accommodation for forced migrants.

What is one word that you would use to describe yourself?

That's tricky. Probably calm.

What one memory do you most treasure?

The feeling of falling in love.

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Try to overcome your shyness earlier!

Which person (living or dead) would you most like to meet and why?

Tricky for a historian to answer this! Nobody would have heard of half the people I'd like to meet... I studied the East India Company and British imperialism and I'd like to meet Warren Hastings who was impeached for his role in the conquest of India. But among his supporters he was considered a friend of India and lover of its culture and people. I'd like to get to the bottom of what he really thought because he played such a huge role in the change of the Company from a company to a government, which had huge consequences for India, Britain and the world. Did he mean to? Is it true that he was supporting his Indian friends against their enemies? Or was he hell bent on making profit?

What is the most important thing you have learnt in the past year?

In 2020? Well, it's been a strange and difficult year for all of us hasn't it? I've learnt a lot more about when to let go and when to push for things to happen.

Brown sauce or red sauce?

Mayonnaise.

When did 'God' become more than a word to you?

When I was about 17. I had grown up in church but was a wayward minister's kid! But after some difficult times, God came to me.

How does your faith shape your work?

I'd like to say completely, but we're not perfect so that would be stretching it! But it should and does as much as we can. Living with people who need support, in a variety of different ways, means always drawing on the depths of God's love for us, letting go of our own expectations and 'solutions', and just letting the Holy Spirit work through us.

If you could go anywhere in the world right now where would it be and why?

If it wasn't the end of 2020 and we hadn't had almost a year of varying shades of lockdown, I'd probably say India. But at the moment, I'd just like to be in Scotland for a while, not socially distant from my family.

If you were about to be castaway on a desert island, what three items would you take with you?

Potatoes, the biggest book I could find critiquing the British empire, and an instrument (any, since I can't play anything but could learn!)

FaithJustice continues to evolve slowly but surely, working out how best to respond to these testing times. It remains a difficult challenge to discern how best to balance the calls of injustice, the need for community and the sense of exhaustion which pervades us all after a year of lockdown.

Perhaps it is always true at moments of crisis that there is an overwhelming need for action coupled with both confusion as to what is best to do, and a lack of energy to make things happen. In the coming months we will all need to navigate the road between renewal and some time for recovery.

In December, FaithJustice partnered with the Jesuits to run a retreat called 'A Winter Pause'. Twenty-one participants took part in a week of prayer at home, each meeting a guide one to one and gathering on zoom for workshops and collective prayer. It proved to be a fruitful experience. It was good to be able to offer an event which was about stopping and listening to God. Many of the participants fed back that the week had been just what they needed at the end of 2020.

Moving forward, with all these challenges in mind, FaithJustice has launched a six-part series of discussions called 'Creating the New Normal'. The intention is to open up a space to talk about where we are now and where we want to be in coming months and years. The discussions will centre on issues such as racism, sexism, sexuality, militarism and the climate emergency. We do not expect to reach any conclusions as such but rather to inspire young adults to start thinking about the world they want to see, and to share the ideas they already have about this future vision.

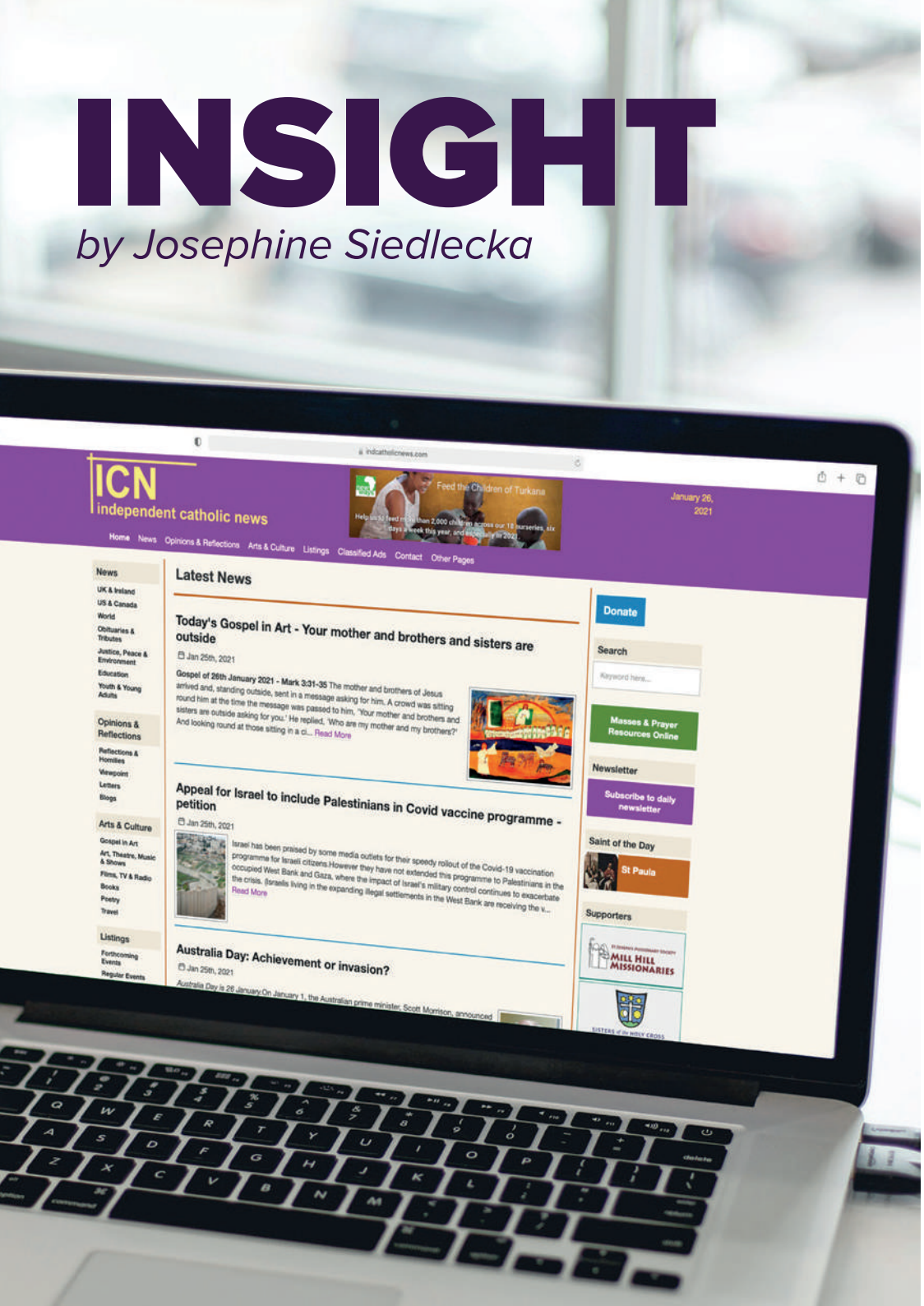
Looking further ahead, we have high hopes that later in the year it will be possible to organise some in-person events. It will be useful to meet some of the young adults who have engaged with FaithJustice in person for the first time since we have resorted to zoom.

For more information, see faithjustice.org.uk

by Matthew Neville, Young Adult Outreach Worker for St Joseph's Province

INSIGHT

by Josephine Siedlecka



I got my first mobile phone in around 1998. My nephew, who is 20, has never known life without one. He called me last night - a big grin on his face as he showed me his new guitar and sang a song. Later we called some cousins in Canada and had a three-way chat on-line. Developments in communications technology are moving so fast, it is hard to imagine where things will be in a few years' time.

Watching the explosion of news, 'fake' and otherwise, around the world really demonstrates the power of this technology and, as Christians with Good News to tell, we need to be in there!

It was with that in mind that I set up Independent Catholic News (ICN) back in 2000. As a print and broadcast journalist working mainly in the secular world, (I was writing for the BBC World Service and doing some consultancy work for the Catholic Bishops Conference Media Office at the time) I felt there was a gap there to be filled. In the run-up to the Millennium, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (an Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II) had called on lay people to play a greater role in the work of the Church. I thought setting up a news service was a way I could make a contribution. I also hoped it might reach a wider readership than just church-going Catholics.

At first the idea seemed very daunting. Web design agencies I approached were very expensive. But there were classes available, and I had friends with IT experience willing to help. I took a short course in web design and in Spring 2000, we built the first ICN site in a weekend.

ICN became the first daily on-line Catholic news service in the UK in May 2000. On the evening of 9th May I posted up our first news reports. Ellen Teague from the Columbans, soon became a regular contributor. For the next year I was just able to update the site twice a week after my day job. I couldn't afford to advertise, but gradually, more and more people began logging on. In between writing news I sent out e-mails asking people whether they would like reciprocal links. The response was encouraging. Within a short space of time, messages started arriving from around the world. The Poor Clares of Narvik in Norway were the very first.

There have been hundreds more reciprocal links and many more people have joined ICN's virtual team of volunteers since then, helping get out the news from the UK and Ireland. Dozens more send in reports from around the world each day. Regular writers include Leela Ramden in Trinidad and Tobago, a Catholic in Wuhan, China, Catholic Worker House, Ben Bano and Phil Kerton assisting refugees in Dover and Calais, Fr Shay Cullen in the Philippines, Rebecca Tinsley a specialist on Cameroon, Leila Sansour from Bethlehem, Ann Farr in Hebron, the St Paul's Missionary Community in Turkana, Kenya, Vinnies in Australia,

Fr Bob Mosher working with migrants on the US-Mexico border and Eco-theologian Sean McDonagh in Ireland. Ellen Teague, Bess Twiston-Davies and Mary Carson have taken over editing when I have been on holiday.

We receive press releases from many dioceses, religious orders, schools, chaplaincies, aid agencies and other faith organisations.

And we try to keep spiritually grounded - with the Daily Gospel in Art by Westminster seminarian Patrick van der Vorst, Spiritual Reflections including the regular, Sunday Reflection with Fr Robin Gibbons - and Saint of the Day.

We chose the patron saints of journalists as our patrons: Ss Francis de Sales and Maximilian Kolbe. They were both prolific writers. St Maximilian was a Polish Franciscan priest who set up a Catholic publishing house and newspapers in Poland and Japan. He died in Auschwitz when he swapped places with a young married man with children. St Francis de Sales was a prolific writer. He once said: “You can catch more flies with a spoonful of honey that you can with a bucket of vinegar” - which I try to remember. For the most part I like to leave comment to others, and my job is just to edit other people’s writing and report the facts.

I recently discovered a third patron for ICN: Blessed Sara Salkahazi a Hungarian religious sister and journalist. She set up a publication for Catholic women, established the first college for working women in Hungary, ran training courses, wrote plays and was executed during WWII after she saved the lives of over 100 Jewish people.

The site is a constant work in progress. The system has been upgraded twice now - in 2009 and in 2018 and we are always looking at ways to develop it. We have pages on other social media sites: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Youtube, as well as putting out a daily email newsletter. ICN is RNIB (Royal National Institute of the Blind) compliant. (So, a blind person can ‘hear’ our news.)

Both Ellen Teague and I received scholarships to take a summer course at the University Santa Croce in Rome on reporting on the Vatican in 2018. The course was marvellous, and it was also great to meet Catholic journalists from around the world - several of whom have written for ICN since. I hope we can get more places for people on this course in future.

Our readership has always been growing, but since the Covid-19 lockdown began in March 2020 - it has increased considerably. As churches were forced to close and more and more parishes started streaming Masses and prayers online - one simple new page on ICN: ’Masses and prayer resources online’ attracted over half a million visitors in a few weeks.

We are hoping that many of the new readers who have joined us will stay after the pandemic has ended.
We have a few plans for 2021. Currently we are looking at the possibility of setting up an ICN App. We have had a few enquiries about starting an intern programme – I have already given some courses in journalism to schools and youth groups and the idea of running an intern program would be a logical next step. I would also like to offer a service through ICN advising people how to write their own press and publicity materials. Possibly we could run online courses also. It would be good to see every parish and organisation with its own press officer.

Currently ICN is run simply as a small business with me as ’sole trader’. The funding comes from the grant we receive as a Passionist Partner, (for which I am very grateful) advertising and donations. We are looking into making ICN a more official entity in 2021, which would enable us to apply for more funding and to expand.

Thank you very much to the Passionists for your support and encouragement. Thanks also to the many people who write for us, to the supporters and advertisers - and thanks especially for your prayers. ICN could not manage without you.

Jo is Editor of Independent Catholic News, a Passionist Partner Organisation and a member of the Community of the Passion.

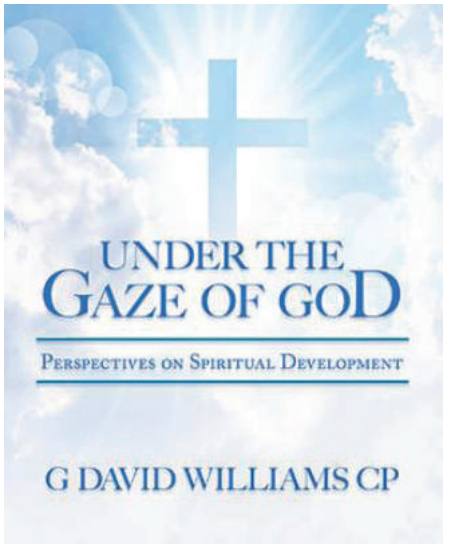
WATCHING THE EXPLOSION OF NEWS, AROUND THE WORLD, ‘FAKE’ & OTHERWISE, REALLY SHOWS THE POWER OF NEW MEDIA, AND, AS CHRISTIANS WITH GOOD NEWS TO TELL, WE NEED TO BE IN THERE!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF

by David Williams CP

With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

T.S. Elliott



The way I understand the gaze of God to have a defining influence on spiritual growth and development has, as its overarching image, the way a mother gazes on her infant at the breast. It is a gaze which is tender, all-absorbing, exclusive, filled with wonder and love, tranquil and protective. Just as the mother's gaze engages the infant in a dialogue without words and provokes a response, so too the gaze of God evokes a response from the human heart. Just as the mutual gaze of the mother and infant set up a relationship which becomes the basis of communication, so too the mutual gaze of God and the soul becomes the basis for prayer.

The main insight of the book is that the movement into union with God is circular rather than linear; that it is not exclusively a movement into something new, something which has not previously occurred, but is also, and more importantly, a movement towards recapturing something which has already existed, namely, that relationship we enjoyed, albeit pre-consciously, at our mother's breast when God looked upon us and saw that we were very good.

This excerpt was taken from the back cover of the book.

David is a member of St Joseph's Province of Passionists & is also a member of the Community of the Passion

WALKING WITH THE CRUCIFIED

by Stephen Morris

Passionist thinking and Passionist living, time and time again take us into the uncomfortable territory of paradox. The point in the human condition where opposites come together and demand of us that we think outside of our comfort zones and with new perspectives. No matter how many times we are called into this process it never seems to become any easier. For more than three decades now, my daily work has provided me with this challenge. I work as a forensic psychotherapist within the criminal justice system across the London prisons and probation service. At the heart of forensic psychotherapy is the belief that all offences are a symbolic communication of something that cannot be said and that no one is ever just their offence. It is these tenets that I embrace when advising courts, parole boards and police investigations on risk, dangerousness and suitability for treatment.

In the context of my work, I have met many hundreds of men and women each presenting me with their own unique version of the paradox and in particular the paradox that sits at the heart of that which we would consider 'good', 'bad', 'evil' or 'mad'. I am forever grateful to the men and women who consume my daily thinking and in so doing constantly challenge me to go beyond myself. Repeatedly, it is they who take me into the heart of the experience of the passion and at the end of the day the only certainty I come away with is that it is never clear cut. It is always paradox.

Paradox in the criminal justice setting is always hidden from public view. My work takes place in a separated, secret world. That fact alone acts as a constant reminder that I am connected to much that many do not want to think about. It is the stuff of life considered only on partial terms by a polarised media or distorted beyond recognition by the latest Netflix crime drama. It is also a world where there is much history of the crucifixions of life. Where contemporary versions of the passion are repeated and often with little evidence of any resurrection. I could cite many examples that would enable me to share my work but none quite like that which occurred in the winter of 2019. A major incident on London Bridge propelled not only the paradoxes of criminal justice into the wider public's thinking but also, and with little recognition of course, the very Passionist themes of forgiveness, wholeness and redemption.

The incident I refer to unfolded at a conference on rehabilitation. A radicalised young man launched a knife attack on two of those attending and killed them. As the violence continued it spilled out onto the bridge and others from the conference became involved.

In the media coverage that followed, two men were brought to our attention, both are deserving of our continued reflection. One is a man previously convicted of murder who, caught up in a new drama acts to save and preserve life. The other, a man who has committed his young life to helping change and rehabilitate similar offenders and who then loses his life at the hands of one he may well have sought to serve. In the days that followed, the media found many words to express a response in relation to the later. But their struggle to find the language that could comprehend that someone serving a life sentence for murder could also be equally involved in the preservation and saving of lives was only too apparent.

In this example, it seems that extreme events are never really as extreme as we need them to be. We prefer 'extreme' to mystery. We know what to do with 'extreme'. We make it 'good' or 'bad' and our small, limited mind can then cope. What our thinking struggles most with is the reality and fact of wholeness. The fact that someone, that we, are forever a sacred mix of all that we easily label 'good' or 'bad' and that the resultant manifest wholeness is for the most not extreme at all. My understanding as a clinician of faith tells me that wholeness is not one or the other, it is always both. It is always a paradox.

The events on London Bridge made public the reality of the paradox within the human condition. For once, the very private world that I inhabit was revealed. Something more occurred, something more got played out for all to see and that something seriously is demanding more than our conditioned view of our world and each other. It is demanding we think beyond the initial superficial reaction and not be so afraid of ourselves and the mystery of what wholeness really looks like. Because wholeness is much more than we care to think about.

Wholeness also requires us to think about the third man who featured on the bridge that day. For it is he that brings into sharp focus the reality that none of us are ever a reduced to one dimension. We are all that incredible mystery of immense light, immense dark and many dimensions. At that moment in time, it is the third man who manifests the part of him capable of ultimate destructive behaviour. But, like it or not, that destructive moment is exactly just that, a moment. It is not the full picture and is certainly not the full reality or extent of who he is. The third man was once a babe in arms, just the same as the other two men. He will have also travelled through life being attached to and loved by others.

Being seen and known for many things worthy of praise and respect and nothing like the part of him now witnessed by the world. He too, just like the rest of us, was a manifest paradox in much need of a manifest passion.

Stephen Morris is a member of the Community of the Passion. He is Chemsex Crime Lead for the London Division of HM Prison & Probation Service and is the organisation's Lead for Faith and Belief

God's choice continues to challenge us to be with those that the world counts as nothing. So, here we are proclaiming a Crucified Christ, we witness to his passion as it continues in our day in women and men at sites of suffering, our modern-day Calvary. We witness to a Crucified Christ, in a crucified humanity, on a crucified planet.

- John Sherrington CP

PASSIONISTS AT 'LIVED CATHOLICISM' CONFERENCE

by Dr Vincent Manning

The Centre for Catholic Studies at Durham University and The London School of Economics hosted a virtual conference 'Lived Catholicism(s)' to ask 'New Questions' and explore 'Untold Stories' on Nov. 23rd & 24th 2020.

Community of the Passion member, Dr Vincent Manning, Director of Catholics for AIDS Prevention and Support (CAPS), a Passionist ministry, presented *A Catholic voice for people living with HIV: 'Positive Faith' as pastoral outreach & practical theological pedagogy*.

In his presentation Vincent played clips from the CAPS 'Positive Faith' online resource and explained how it might be used to "kick-start a process of theological reflection within Christian communities, upon usually taboo subjects at the intersection of HIV and Christian faith."

He informed participants that research indicates that 70% of people living with HIV in the UK (PLWH) are religious or spiritual, of whom 49% said religion was fairly or very important to them. This contrasts with the 2018 British Social Attitudes survey findings that a majority (52%) of UK citizens identify as having no-religion. Dr Manning argued that PLWH deserve more understanding and more effective pastoral ministry from the church.

The late Fr. John Sherrington CP, was featured in one of the film clips speaking about how his faith has been enhanced through his encounters with PLWH. Fr. John went on to say that the message for the church is that "HIV & AIDS is a sign to us that the Passion of Christ continues in our world. It is a site of the crucifixion. It is a site of struggle, abandonment, alienation & rejection. But Christ is present at sites of suffering and challenges us to make a positive response".

HIV is often thought of as a manageable condition today, but Dr Manning argued that it is not manageable for many PLWH especially those who are poor or marginalised in other ways. For example, the refugee or asylum seeker living with HIV, or the gay man who has been rejected by his family. "Stigma remains the affliction and scandal of the cross of HIV. Anyone diagnosed needs the healing and strengthening, that can only be found in community. Once strengthened, these sisters and brothers have much to teach us about what it means to follow Christ" said Dr Manning.

To view the Positive Faith video resources, please visit positivefaith.net

A copy of CAPS News 2020 can be found at caps-uk.org/about-us

Catholics for AIDS Prevention & Support

TALKING

with Kevin Gallagher

Failure Redeemed - Come and See

Take a walk amongst nature, look up at the stars, listen to some heart stirring music, see a sunrise and it is not difficult to believe or experience that God does truly exist and is somehow immanent among this. This is all good, but what about the other side of life, the human sites of suffering, the injustices and inequalities, the blatant poverty that surround us? As this is also part of human life, should we not also be seeing and experiencing God in these places too? So, a question arises: if God is there among the beauty of nature, is God also not participating in these sites of suffering or is God just passively observing it all from a distance? If the answer to this is yes, then everything is changed.

Paddy Fields of Taiwan

It was not answers, but questions like these that first encouraged me to leave my engineering design job with a high tech company in 1990 to take up a two year volunteering stint in a Jesuit run residential centre for those with learning disabilities in Taiwan. Swapping the rolling hills of Hampshire for the paddy fields of Taiwan saw an original two-year volunteer assignment extend to a total of 26 years, which confirmed to me that we do in fact find our own life among the suffering and crucified of today. It was also this which attracted me to join the Community of the Passion upon my return to the UK several years ago, after an invitation from fellow community member Vincent Manning. I have been delighted to find a community of faith which takes seriously the difficult but liberating message of the Passion of Jesus Christ, something which resonated strongly with the depth of my own personal experiences. It was clear that in stepping into these sites of suffering, choosing to locate oneself with the crucified of today, that we truly step onto holy ground where personal transformation will be experienced and after which life will never be the same again. I believe that humanity only really moves forward when we are willing to step into those places of suffering.

In the Engine Room

Returning to the UK, I took up employment in the diocesan curia setting up social action projects in the diocesan area. This involved establishing projects for refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless, those in recovery and so on, and again that experience of God on the margins of society was very much present. But although this frontline experience was life giving, what was it like working in a diocesan curia, embedded within the church structure? I once heard that "a sailor should never go near the engine room" and sadly this was to be confirmed during my time there. While words of "charitable action" or "helping the poor" would flow freely, and glowing articles were demanded for the glossy newsletters, there was never a sense of passion or depth behind this. There was a sense that the institution was believing and worshipping Jesus but not truly following him.

To me the establishment always seemed to be bearing witness from inside its comfort zone and unwilling to operate from the minority position where you can obtain greater access to the truth, and witness to the Gospel and to Jesus. There was little desire to identify with powerlessness instead of power, see dependence instead of independence, to have communion instead of individualism. But unless this point is understood, the Sermon on the Mount and "Blessed are the poor in spirit" is unlikely to make any real sense. Are we not called to operate from the weakness of the immoral minority much more than the power of the moral majority? If the establishment is only concerned with its preservation and protecting its self-image as moral, superior, or "saved" people, then the truth will be lost. The risky search for God, which is common

WHILE WORDS OF 'CHARITABLE ACTION' OR 'HELPING THE POOR' WOULD FLOW FREELY, THERE WAS NEVER A SENSE OF PASSION OR DEPTH BEHIND THIS

to all world religions, is replaced with an egotistical search for personal certitude and control. When you begin to enjoy the fruits of the system, facing truths which take you out of your comfort zone proves difficult and will be

discouraged. Few are those who will remove the plank they are standing on. If we want to get close to God, we need to get close to our fellow human beings and especially the crucified ones of today who will quickly expose any hidden idolatries. This resonates with Pope Francis's prophetic vision to be a poor church for the poor and for the peripheries to drive the centre.

At its worst, success was measured in the crude statistic of counting the followers, measured as mass attendance. Creative spaces and life-giving free speech to challenge, debate, publish or discuss social issues was not encouraged and rather it was a place where sadly institutional preservation and the legalisms of Canon Law would take precedence over the liberating but risky Gospel of Jesus Christ. Should we not be a church that is less concerned with morality, pious practices, and the elimination of personal defects and one which is about shining a light in the darkness of today's pressing issues and receiving God's liberating free gift of compassion and mercy? Church doors are open for us to get involved in the big issues of today - they are not just open for others to come in.

When the Cracks Appear

But the cracks in the institution seem to be widening. Take the diocesan publications full of images of happy, beautiful people doing great things in the big community. If we are honest, we know that it is not quite like the glossy diocesan magazine says it is. And is it really in these image-building areas that our Church is at its best? I think not, because if we are serious about the meaning of Christ's Passion, which we certainly are as Passionists, then it must be at its best amongst failure. This is when we give up on all the ecclesiastical glitter, titles, fancy hardware, costumes, and other trappings. It is in choosing to place ourselves in these sites of suffering, to be in the night shelter, to help the asylum seeker or to simply talk to the lonely, when we place ourselves amidst weakness and failure that we experience that these are locations of triumph, places of engagement, encounter and hope. The paradox of "when I am weak, I am strong" starts to release its mystery. Certitude, something prevalent among the establishment, has no place among the spiritually mature, where living with paradox and the "wisdom of uncertainty" become the norms.

But these encounters, where we get close to God by getting close to our marginalised fellow human beings, can liberate us from the institutional and dogmatic straightjackets that we have inherited, and from which it is so difficult to break free. Being close to powerlessness can allow us to see our own vulnerability and if we are willing to allow it, this becomes our gold and will reveal a deep wisdom. I certainly experienced this during my time working with severely disabled people in Taiwan and amongst the rough sleepers in the UK.

And Finally

We are all part of a weak and broken humanity and by placing ourselves in these places of brokenness, we will experience that deep connection with all humanity. It is my sincere conviction that it is only by locating ourselves in such places and being willing to share in the suffering of others that our humanity truly takes steps forward. I am delighted to be part of a community that in taking the Passion of Jesus Christ seriously offers a channel for these transformative experiences. Oscar Romero said the light of God shines in those places we would rather not see: these are sites of suffering, places of crucifixion. If we choose to go to these sites of suffering, we will experience something special, we will not only remember but enter into the Passion of Jesus Christ, and we will realise that God does not divide Godself equally in a world which is unequal.

The words of Leonard Cohen in "Anthem" sum it up well:

Ring the bells that still can ring,
Forget your perfect offering.
There is a crack in everything,
That's how the light gets in.

Until recently, Kevin worked for Caritas and is also a member of the Community of the Passion.

RING THE BELLS THAT STILL CAN RING, FORGET YOUR PERFECT OFFERING, THERE IS A CRACK IN EVERYTHING, THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN.

LEONARD COHEN

CRUCIFIED EARTH

by Martin Newell

WE HAVE CAUSED A CLIMATE EMERGENCY THAT GRAVELY THREATENS NATURE AND LIFE ITSELF, INCLUDING OUR OWN.

2019 WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE CARE OF CREATION

I think we all know now that we are in a climate and ecological emergency, and that we are called to an 'ecological conversion'. We are living in a moment of crisis, a kairos moment for God's human family. As UN Secretary General António Guterres has said, it is a moment of truth, of not just threat but opportunity. As Passionists, we know we are crucifying God's Creation. But Resurrection is always possible. For there is a bigger picture.

"The rich say the problem is poverty. The poor say the problem is riches"

We now live in a new geological era, the 'anthropocene', 'the age of the humans'. We are now so many and so powerful that for better or worse the future life of God's Earth is in our hands. We are also in a new era of human history in the sense that the human struggle has always been for survival and against poverty, the struggle to obtain from the earth enough just to survive. This was always the truth for the vast majority of the human race.

Now however, the human family is capable of producing plenty for our basic needs and more. Now it is a question of sharing the fruits of the Earth fairly and of producing for our needs without destroying our life-support system. This is especially so since the richest 10% globally, which includes half of the UK population, cause over half of all global carbon emissions.

DOOMSDAY PREDICTIONS CAN NO LONGER BE MET WITH IRONY OR DISDAIN.

– Laudato Si, n161

MINDSETS ARE SHIFTING. CLIMATE ACTION IS THE BAROMETER OF LEADERSHIP IN TODAY'S WORLD

– António Guterres

Even within the UK, the top 10% (those with income after tax of over £41,000) have an average carbon footprint more than 4 times that of those in the bottom half.

But the economic system continues apparently without hesitation, based on continuing 'growth' that is crucifying the life of God's Creation (and not just because it increases the risks of new pandemics) and also even ourselves, especially those with low and insecure income and housing. Economic growth is an idol that demands sacrifices while no longer providing the rewards. Here in the UK, for the vast majority, we are way past the point where 'more is better'.

At the same time technology can and is doing so much work for us. Despite this combination of plenty and technology, the majority still seem forced into frenetic insecurity, when we are capable of producing plenty without it. The opportunity is that work and livelihood could be secure and fulfilling, and fulfil real human, spiritual and material needs. Since our main practical struggles now are not survival and poverty, we need to learn new ways to love our neighbour. The challenge is that riches are a more serious problem than poverty. In asking ourselves how we are to be in solidarity with the crucified of today, this is a truth that can set us free.

Martin is a member of the St Joseph's Province of Passionists and is also a member of the Community of the Passion.

Passionist 'Faith Justice' worker Matthew Neville and participant Orla Cunningham highlighting Christian Climate Action's Advent national subvertising campaign in Birmingham

I CALL ON ALL LEADERS WORLD-WIDE TO DECLARE A STATE OF CLIMATE EMERGENCY IN THEIR COUNTRIES UNTIL CARBON NEUTRALITY IS REACHED.

– António Guterres, UN Secretary General, Climate Ambition Summit, Dec 12th 2020

ST JOHN HENRY NEWMAN & BLESSED DOMINIC BARBERI

THE MEANING BEHIND MICHAEL LONG'S CONTEMPORARY ARTWORK INSTALLED IN 2020 IN ST MARGARET MARY CHURCH, BIRMINGHAM, IN THE NEWMAN GALLERY.

This painting depicts the reception of St John Henry Newman into the Catholic Church on 9th October 1845. On the left is Passionist Blessed Dominic Barberi, an Italian missionary priest and on the right is Saint John Henry Newman.

The location is Littlemore, near Oxford. Dominic Barberi had travelled to Littlemore by open coach in bad weather, which is why he was warming himself by the fire (centre). The desk to the right is the desk on which Newman wrote the book, 'An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine'. In 1846 Newman moved to Birmingham, where he first lived at Maryvale (the original Oscott College) and then later he moved to Hagley Road to found the Oratory, which still stands today. With the encouragement of Bishop Wiseman, Newman was ordained a Catholic priest in 1847. Newman was made a Cardinal in 1879. When he died in 1890, 15,000 people lined the streets of Birmingham. Dominic Barberi was beatified by Pope Paul VI in 1963. Newman was beatified by Pope Benedict on his visit to Birmingham in 2010 and canonised by Pope Francis on 13 October 2019 in Rome.

To watch the full video, please visit: www.tiny.cc/stnewmanpainting

TERCENTENARY SPECIAL

by Ben Lodge CP

THE PASSIONISTS AND ENGLAND *(Part one)*

Three hundred years ago an extraordinary link was begun between an Italian religious order and England and its surrounding countries. The link was to have a considerable influence on the Catholic Church in England. The Religious Order is the Passionists, and from their very founding they have had strong links to England and its people.

Saint Paul of the Cross, originally named Paolo Francesco Daneii, was born on 3 January 1694, in the town of Ovada, near Genoa in northern Italy. His parents were Luca and Anna Maria Daneii. His father ran a small dry-goods store, and moved his family and store from town to town near Genoa trying to make ends meet. Paul was the second of sixteen children, six of whom survived infancy, and he learned at an early age the reality of death and the uncertainty of life. Paul received his early education from a priest who kept a school for boys, in Cremolino, Lombardy. He made great progress and at the age of fifteen he left school and returned to his home at Castellazzo. In his early years he taught catechism in churches near his home.

Paul experienced a conversion to a life of prayer at the age of 19. Influenced by his reading of the "*Treatise on the Love of God*" by Saint Francis de Sales and the direction he received from priests of the Capuchin Order, it became his lifelong conviction that God is most easily found in the Passion of Christ. He described the Passion as the greatest of all love stories.

In 1715, Paul left his work helping his father in order to join a crusade against the Turks who were threatening the Venetian Republic, but he soon realized that the life of a soldier was not his calling. He returned to help in the family business. On his way home he stopped at Novello, where he helped an aging, childless couple until the end of 1716. They offered to make him their heir, but he declined. His uncle, a priest, tried to arrange a marriage, but Paul had no plans to marry. When his uncle died, he kept for himself only the priest's breviary.

Paul Danei had never seen England; he didn't expect to, and he never did. He knew very little about England, this small island, far to the North of his native Italy. He knew only that it was no longer Catholic, and that was sufficient for him. God was singling him out to lead the way, by his prayers, to that country's conversion; God was calling him to be an Apostle to the English. The history of Paul of the Cross' devotion to the cause of England's reconversion is not long, although, it lasted for over a half century of his life. In old age, he was to relate to his fellow Passionists: "It is now fifty years since I began to pray unceasingly for the conversion of England to the faith of its fathers." So how was it that Paul developed such a passion for the English people?

It is possible that Paul's knowledge of England stemmed from his awareness of the life and death of St. Thomas of Canterbury. It is also reasonable to assume that as Castellazzo was on the pilgrim route from England to Rome, he heard not only about persecution and martyrdoms brought about by the Reformation, but also the state of the Church in 18th. century England from travelling pilgrims.

From this time to the end of his life, Paul was to pray "unceasingly" — his own term — for England. Blessed

Vincent Strambi's "Life of St. Paul of the Cross:" says: "England was always the country of his preference. It might almost seem to some who knew him well, as if he had no heart, no feeling but for England. England was always in his thoughts; England was constantly the subject of his discourses; England was always before him in his prayers."

When he was 26 years old, Paul had a series of prayer-experiences which made it clear to him that God was inviting him to form a community who would live an evangelical life and promote the love of God revealed in the Passion of Jesus. Paul reports that in a vision, he saw himself clothed in the habit he and his companions would wear. The first name Paul gave to his planned community was "*the Poor of Jesus*"; later they came to be known as the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ, or the Passionists.

With the encouragement of his bishop, who clothed him in the black habit of a hermit on 22nd. November 1720, Paul began a retreat which lasted for forty days. During the retreat he kept a daily diary describing both the highs and lows of his prayer life. Thus on 26th. December, the Feast of St. Stephen the first martyr, he wrote:

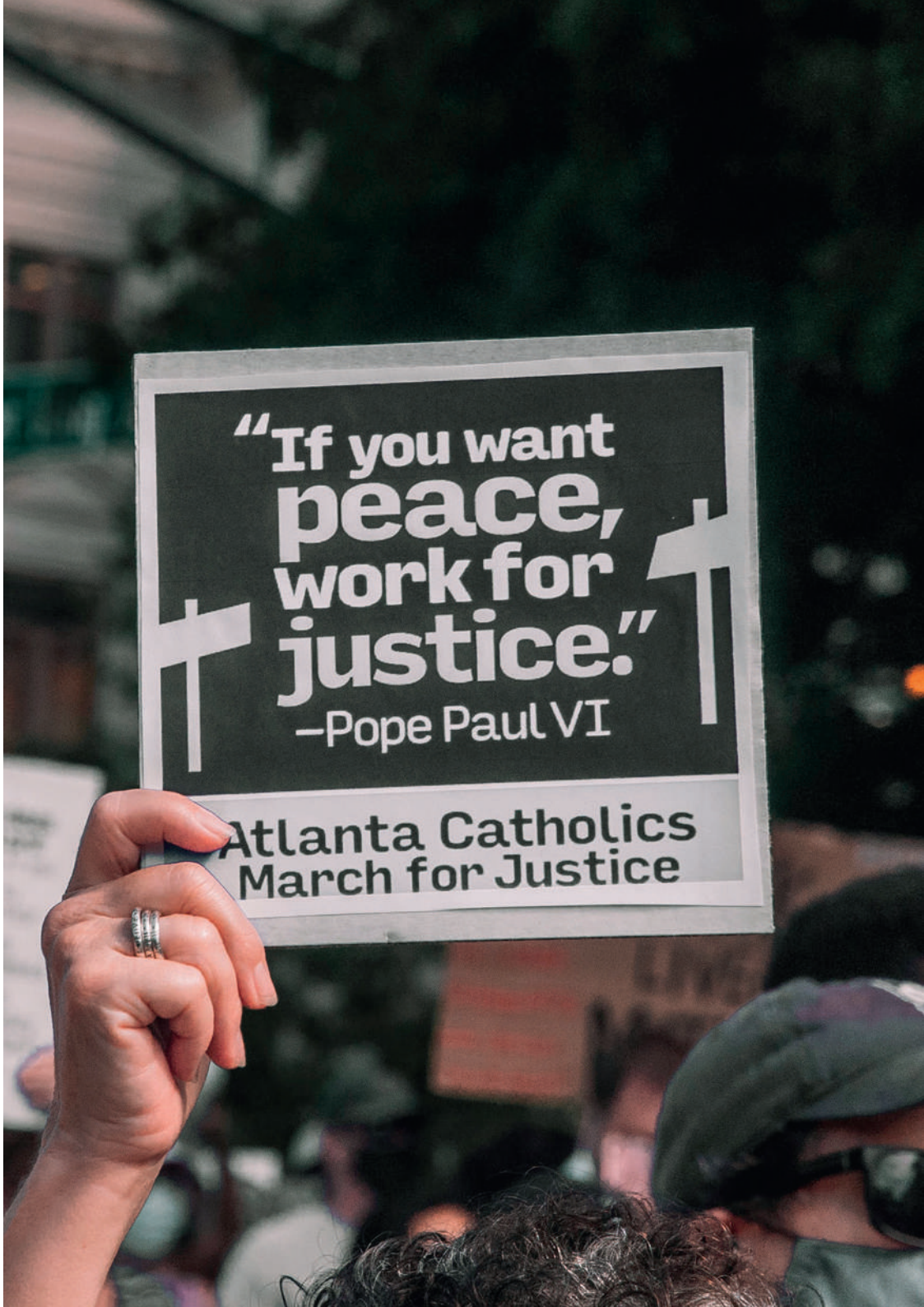
"I experienced a special uplifting of soul especially at Holy Communion. I wanted to go to die a martyr's death in a place where the adorable mystery of the Blessed Sacrament is denied. The Infinite Goodness has given me this wish for some time past but today I had it in a special manner, for I desired the conversion of heretics, especially of England with the neighbouring kingdoms, and I offered a special prayer for this at Holy Communion."

Still in the retreat, but three days later he wrote: "I had a particular impulse to pray for the conversion of England, especially because I want the standard of the Holy Faith to be erected, so that there will be an increase of devotion and reverence, of homage and love, with frequent acts of adoration for the Blessed Sacrament. The desire to die a martyr, especially for the Blessed Sacrament, in some place where people do not believe, does not leave me."

Throughout his life Paul continued his prayer for England. This constant prayer for the conversion of England will be answered when his follower, Blessed Dominic Barberi arrives in England in 1840, and relatively quickly the Passionists established Retreats in England, Ireland, Scotland, and later in Sweden.

(Part two of this article will be included in the next issue of 'Passio')

Ben is a member of St Joseph's Province of Passionists.



On the occasion of the Third Centenary of the Foundation of the Passionist Congregation, together with Mary, our Sorrowful Mother, and with Saint Paul of the Cross, we gaze on the Crucified, toward the cross, at the Passion, at death, to the life that is surrendered, to abandonment, to fear, to trust, as we pray together...

THE LAST WORD

by Paschal Somers

Fear is a robber and anxiety a thief.

The consuming nature of anxiety and its ability to steal everything from us in a way that no other mental tribulation is quite capable of doing is no stranger to any of us. During the Eucharist, certain words of the Embolism (the priest's short petition after the Lord's Prayer), touch a particular chord with me during these times - "protect us from all anxiety."

And yet who could be blameworthy for having an anxious disposition throughout the time which we are currently enduring, when uncertainty has gnawed away at us with sharper teeth than ever and we seem to have the slipped the moorings of our familiar harbours?

Perhaps anxiety happens most easily when we are absent from the present moment. One of the most powerful moments of meditation I have ever experienced centred around the word 'behold'. In that instance, I was invited by a prayer guide to be in the present moment and to behold the delights of a well-cultivated garden. On another occasion -this time totally unprepared for – I walked into my own back garden to 'behold' one of my children playing at the time as toddlers do in a totally unself-conscious way. I found genuine delight in being present in that simple moment, enjoying my daughter's childlike game. To behold is to engage in more than just a cursory glance or a quick look. It is to take time to drink the moment in with your senses or to let it be as it is, totally present to you, and in that way to honour and to cherish it.

Anxiety is only too happy to move into the house of your heart with all its baggage or to fill in the voids in your day. It happens when we have forgotten to delight in what is right in front of us, at this very moment.

As Lent begins, I notice my own fears in prayer: a subtle difficulty in believing God could desire my friendship, a fleeting thought that doubts this core identity and purpose, a hesitation to surrender to what may arise. I notice a fearfulness even more persistent, too—that if I allow myself to trust God fully, God might ask something of me or of those I love which I am not willing to give. This fear stands directly in opposition to the spiritual freedom to which I am called, because this clutching does not allow much space for God. It clutters my heart-space. Fear tells us that if we lessen our grip, chaos will result when it is precisely the gripping that can lead to restless discontent, desolation, and poor discernment.

This Lent, let us seek the grace of spiritual freedom from anxiety. Let us adopt a posture of openness, receptivity, and surrender to serve as God desires. Let us trust ourselves to a God who draws us into friendship, encourages us towards deeper trust, and invites us to receive our inherent belovedness with open hands and to delight in it.

SILENT GOD

This is my prayer —
That, though I may not see,
I be aware
Of the

Who stands by me.

That, though I may not feel,
I be aware
Of the Mighty Love
Which doggedly follows me.

That, though I may not respond,
I be aware
That God — my Silent, Mighty God,
Waits each day.

Quietly, hopefully, persistently.
Waits each day and through each night
for me.
For me — alone.

Edwina Gately