

REKINDLE THE FIRE WITHIN US

Course for Formators



A course for formators will take place in Rome in October 2016. This will be the first time formators from the six configurations of the Congregation will come together for such a course. On this occasion the course is for formators in the novitiate and post-novitiate stages of initial formation. It is our intention to organize courses in the future for formators in the other stages of initial formation and for others.

A New Pentecost

The theme of the course is "Rekindle the Fire Within Us". The theme resonates with the hope of St. John XXIII when he prayed for a New Pentecost for the whole Church. The saintly Pope dreamed of a revitalized apostolic, missionary, and servant Church. We too pray for

a fresh outpouring of God's Spirit and of His charismatic gifts on our little community so that we too may be revitalized in our apostolic and missionary life and be true servants of God and His people. We fervently pray that our mission in the Church and the world will be ever more fruitful.

Religious Life Today

Everybody is aware that religious life today is going through a difficult period of reorientation. Many religious have said that they no longer experience the "fire in the heart" that once inspired and motivated them, and many generations of religious, to give their lives in generous love and service in the past. Some religious, especially in the Western world, are feeling tired and dispirited. The younger religious in the "Global South" have energy and enthusiasm but they too are aware that their Congregations are affected by the overall decline in numbers and uncertainty about their future and their relevance.



It is in this context that the image of “fire” comes to mind with such force. Fire is the symbol of the energizing Spirit who fills the hearts of all believers for the transformation of the world. Our prayer and hope for the formators course is that it will help formators to experience the fire of God’s Spirit within their hearts, filling them with new energy and enthusiasm for their vocation and their ministry



Fire in the Scriptures

The image of fire is familiar to all Christians. For most of us, it is a frightening image that brings to mind the fires of hell that await all sinners if they do not repent. In fact, the bible uses the image of the fires of hell or Sheol only once in Deut. 32, 22.

In the Old Testament, God’s wrath is often compared to a blazing fire burning up his

enemies and the enemies of his people (Ps 11,6;21,9). But this is the reverse side of God’s great concern for the welfare of his people and his desire to protect them from their enemies and from every evil.

By far the most powerful use of the image of fire in the bible is to indicate the hidden and mysterious nature of God. God is imagined as a blazing fire and this is seen most vividly in the experience of Moses at Mt. Horeb where God speaks from the burning bush (Ex 3, 1-2).



This is the first great epiphany of God where he reveals his name and nature as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After that Moses will go to encounter God on the mountain where He appears to him in the form of a flame of fire (Ex 19, 18; 24,17; Deut 4:15,33;5,26 etc.)

The majesty and glory of God are a blazing fire.

In the New Testament, John the Baptist contrasts his baptism with the one that Jesus will give. "I baptize you with water but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3, 16).



At Pentecost the Spirit descended on the disciples and appeared in the form of flames of fire. This fire transforms them and sends them out to set the world on fire with the knowledge and love of Christ. The words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel come to mind here, "I came to cast fire on the earth and would that it were already blazing" (12,49).

In the Mystics

The theme of fire was a favorite of the Desert Fathers and in the entire mystical tradition, East and West. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers includes the inspiring story of Abba Lot.



"Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him,

'Abba, as far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace, and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?'

Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards the heavens. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him

'If you will, you can become all fire.'

To be all fire is to be consumed with the love of God and to be transformed completely into God's living image. To have fire in the heart means to experience the warmth of God's love. This is the teaching of St. John of the Cross in *The Living Flame of Love*. He begins his work by comparing the intensifying of love within the soul to the activity of fire and its effects on wood.

“Although the fire has penetrated the wood, transformed it, and united it with itself, yet as this fire grows hotter and continues to burn the wood becomes much more incandescent and inflamed, even to the point of flaring up and shooting out flames from itself” (Prologue).

Inwardly transformed in the fire of love, the soul is filled with a living flame.

“O living flame of love
That tenderly wounds my soul
In its deepest center.”

Without this fire in our hearts, our life and ministry will lack the attraction and conviction to touch and change hearts. We will easily grow tired and weary and those we are sent to will not be “set on fire”.



Formators are evangelizers who are sent with the Joy of the Gospel to those in their charge. Their mission is to “fan the flame” of enthusiasm for the

Passionist vocation. The primary way in which they do this is by being “on fire” themselves with the love of Christ and the desire to share that love. The Passionist charism is not something that is taught but rather it is caught from those who live it with joy and enthusiasm.

It is our hope that the formators will be filled with the blazing fire of God’s love that has been poured into them by the Holy Spirit and will communicate that love and enthusiasm to those in their charge. The Congregation needs formators who are on fire with enthusiasm for St. Paul of the Cross and his mission to make known to all people the love of God revealed in the Passion of Jesus.



Together with the whole Church, the Congregation today is experiencing the challenges of a world that is becoming less religious and more indifferent to the things of the spirit. We have to find new ways of strengthening believers, reaching out to the disaffected and in general presenting a

more attractive vision of the Christian life.

A NEW FUTURE



We are no longer forming people simply to continue the Passionist life as it always has been or to maintain existing structures. We need men of vision and creativity who can take the charism of the Passion and make it a source of new life for themselves and God's people in the new and challenging circumstances of today.

Despite all the changes in society and the Church, people are still suffering, people are still longing for love and reconciliation, and people still need to feel valued and accepted. The Gospel of the Passion can touch and heal human lives. The Wisdom of the Cross can throw light on the challenges of our existence and show us a way forward. In this Holy Year of Mercy, the Cross of Christ is the fountain of God's mercy for all.

