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Il Superiore Generale



HOMILY: FORMATORS' COURSE
SS Giovanni e Paolo, Rome – 10 October 2016

Dear Brothers,

You are gathered here in this very special place of our Congregation to attend and participate in a Course for Formators over these next weeks. It is exciting, I hope, to be in the company of brothers from other parts of the Congregation engaged in the same ministry, visiting the places and sites founded and lived in by our holy founder, receiving all that will be presented to you, sharing of experiences and listening to hopes for guiding future Passionists.

It would be interesting to hear your expectations and hopes about this Course. No doubt, one of the hopes will be concerned with HOW to do formation...i.e., looking for a method. We all like methods and formulas for success: do this, do that, and all will be fine. But those of you who are experienced formators know that 'methods', while helpful, are not the answer. It's like the people in today's Gospel seeking a 'sign' from Jesus, to which Jesus responds: *"No sign will be given...except the sign of Jonah"* – which is about **listening** and **responding** to the Word of God (Jesus) and allowing that Word to effect **conversion**...a turning to Jesus and to the kingdom of God.

This Course is not about HOW to do formation; rather it is about offering you aids and tools which will assist you to be more **in tune** with your true self, and **attuned** to the mind of the Holy Spirit who is the true formator. For this, you need an openness and a willingness to discern, to live and to walk in the life of the Spirit.

This Course is primarily about YOU! It is about the **formation of the formator**. It is not about a set method/formula which you will pack in your bags and take home for your work of doing formation. No doubt, in your sharing of experiences with each other, you will learn about things that work and things that don't work. But you will also learn that there is no one common method that will work for everyone, or that will be suitable for everyone.

Teaching is one thing. There are many things we can teach. It is about imparting information and learning. This is not so difficult if you can read and understand and then transmit it to others. Teaching focuses primarily on the intellect; it's about training someone to become a specialist in a particular field.

Formation, however, is concerned with the total person: physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, sexual. It is not about becoming a specialist, but about **becoming whole – becoming more human**. This is what I hope the Formators' Course will challenge you to. I hope that it will be a time to **"rekindle the fire"** of your own vocation as a Passionist religious; to claim once again the joy and enthusiasm you had when you first professed your vows. I hope that this will be a time for you to see JESUS again as the centre of your life – as *"someone greater than Solomon and Jonah"*...and everything else.

It happens that as we go through life from day to day, the living of our Passionist vocation and doing our mission can become mundane and monotonous. We come under the influence of so much with which we are seduced by our world and society that we lose sight of the core values of our life: prayer, silence, solitude, sacrifice, concern for the poor, seeking justice, promoting peace and reconciliation, finding and proclaiming the God of love and mercy seen in the Passion of Jesus.

The once blazing fire within can be reduced to some smouldering pieces of wood and coals covered with ashes. But the hot ashes still has life...the fire has not died. With a few more bits of wood, a few puffs of air, and the fire can be once again fanned into flame.

My hope is that what is offered during this programme, and the experience of your participation in this Course will assist you in preserving your spiritual energy, refusing to allow yourselves to get cold, but renewing you to carry religious life into the future for those who will come after us.

Your responsibility as formators is to refuse to let the coals die out. Someone said: *"What I am NOW, religious life will be now. What I am NOW, religious life WILL BE in the future."* It is a sobering thought!

Passionist Religious Life will not die in the future unless it is already dead in Passionist religious now. Each of us is a carrier of the flame to those who will follow us. It is up to each religious to maintain the hot ashes and to fan them into fire. When those young men in formation, and new members, seek for spiritual fire among you (us), they must not find out that the ashes have gone cold.

May this course be a time of renewal in your religious vocation and your relationship with Jesus. May you be open to the Spirit who will lead you into the desert within, and may you learn to discern the movement of the Spirit who will speak to your heart.

**Based on: Hosea 2:16, 21-22
Luke 11:29-32*