



2018 LENTEN-EASTER MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERIOR GENERAL TO THE PASSIONIST FAMILY

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My dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

greetings of peace to you as we commit to responding to the call of Jesus in this Lenten time to: ***“Repent and believe the Gospel!”*** We know well that this is a daily, ongoing call from the Lord in our life and mission of discipleship with him. We also know that we are truly dependent on **grace (God’s power and life)** to respond to the challenge and call of repentance and renewal.

The Church, through its established liturgical seasons, assists us in our journey together, aided by the sacraments, Scripture reflection and prayer as we focus on a particular period of Jesus’ life and mission in the service of the kingdom of God. During this time of Lent, in preparation for the feast of Easter, we are led to “walk with” Jesus in his saving and life-giving Passion, Death and Resurrection.

I am writing this reflection on the feast of the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion (one could almost say is the beginning of Lent for Passionists) which is unique and celebrated as a Titular feast of our Congregation always on the Friday before Ash Wednesday (since Vatican Council II). As such I want to reflect on our Lenten journey in the light of this feast which was desired by St Paul of the Cross to be instituted and commemorated as ***a joyful celebration***.

We know that the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion is celebrated by the whole Church on Good Friday - focused very much on the final hours of the suffering and death of Jesus. It is not generally presented as a day of **joyful celebration**, but of **mourning** as we recall the dreadful treatment, indignity, pain and eventual death as a criminal on the cross which Jesus suffered. The Church emphasizes this day of mourning by quiet, silence, subdued liturgy, listening to the Gospel accounts of the Passion, the Way of the Cross and fasting.

So, why does the Passionist Family celebrate the Commemoration of the Passion as a special feast and with joyful solemnity? A possible explanation of this lies in the vision and understanding of St Paul of the Cross and some brothers of his time. While it is true that no one can imagine the Passion of Jesus without the pain and suffering which he endured, it would seem, instead, that Paul of the Cross (who himself dwelt upon and imitated the sufferings of Jesus) desired to get to **the heart of the message of the Passion**.

In his contemplation of the Passion and of Jesus Crucified, he came to understand and experience the Passion of Jesus as “*the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love*”. This insight was enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for Paul; it was a joyful message (Good News=Gospel) to be celebrated and he was convinced that everyone needed to be reminded of this saving act of God. In his own life and mission, Paul saw and experienced the healing, repentance and miracles arising from the power and proclamation of the Gospel of the Passion. It was life-changing and brought renewed joy!

As we enter into the liturgical season of Lent, we recall that Lent is **a time** and **an opportunity for renewal** – both personal and communal. It is **a joyful season** lived with great **hope**. Lent is an occasion to focus not so much on our personal and communal sinfulness (of which we are very much aware), but on the free outpouring of mercy and love from the heart of God. This attention is what inspires genuine contrition and repentance...and **gratitude**.

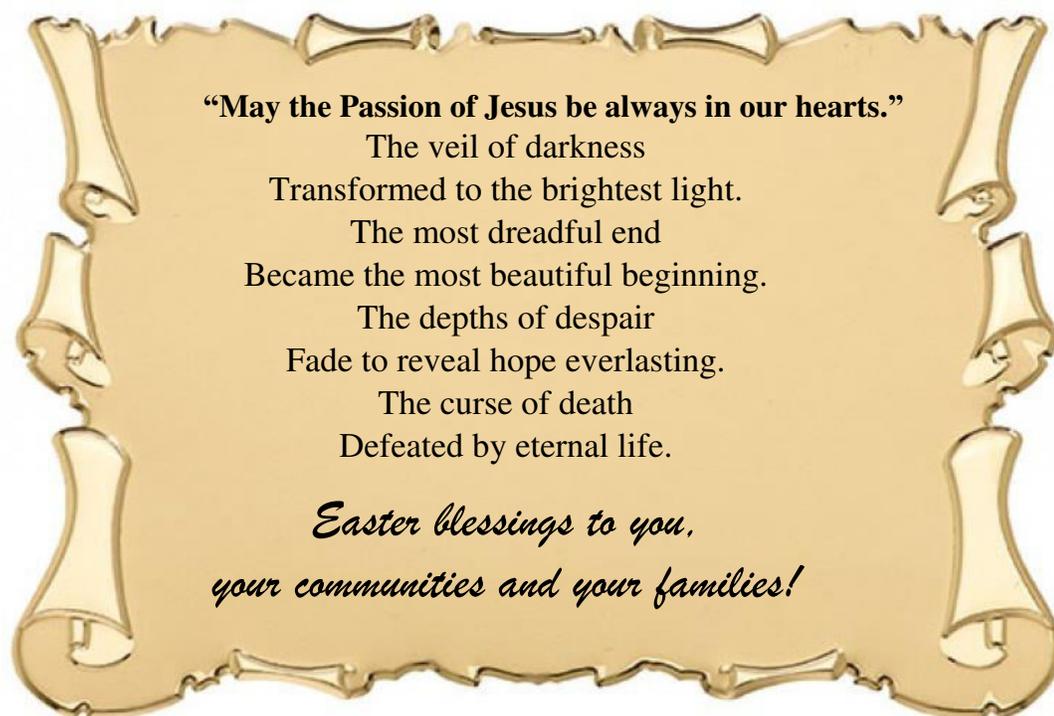
Renewal/repentance is a grace from God; it is not something I can make happen. However, it requires discernment and my active cooperation with God’s grace to bring about the renewal that God intends.

For us, Passionists, this presupposes that we journey with Jesus in his Passion – which is not limited only to those final days leading to his crucifixion and death. Rather, the Passion of Jesus began with his divine conception and birth into human history (the mystery of the Incarnation), continued throughout his ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God, leading to his saving death and life-giving Resurrection, and through the inspiring action of the Holy Spirit the Passion of Jesus continues even now until the end of time. As St Paul of the Cross said:

*The whole life of Jesus was a cross.
The whole life of one who serves God, then,
should be to remain on the cross with Jesus.*

Like St Paul of the Cross, our contemplation and “walking with” Jesus in his Passion will take us deeper and deeper into the heart of God where we experience God’s welcome embrace in acceptance and love for *who we are* and what inspires true joy and newness of life in *what we do*...our **prophetic witness**.

During this Lent, in this year when the Passionist Congregation is celebrating its 47th General Chapter (6 – 27 October 2018) with the chosen theme, **Renewing Our Mission: Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope**, I invite us all in the Passionist Family to seize the opportunity made available through special graces during this holy time of Lent and Easter, to renew our vow to “*keep alive and promote the memory of the Passion of Jesus*” as a sign of God’s love by our prayer, reflection, witness and apostolic action (cf. Const.#5,6).



Fraternally,

Fr Joachim Rego CP (Superior General)