



The Holy See

DISCOURSE OF POPE FRANCIS
TO THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST (PASSIONISTS)

Consistory Hall

Monday, 22 October 2018

Dear brothers,

I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of your General Chapter and I thank the Superior for his words. These days, your reflections have been guided by the theme «Renewing our Mission: gratitude, prophecy and hope». These three words: gratitude, prophecy and hope express the spirit with which you wish to stimulate your Congregation to a renewal of mission. In fact, besides electing the government of the Institute, you propose to implement a new path of continuous formation for your communities, rooted in the experience of daily life; and you also intend to discern pastoral methodology in your approach to younger generations.

Your Founder, Saint Paul of the Cross, gave to himself and to his companions this motto: "May the Passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts." His first biographer, St. Vincent Mary Strambi, said of him: "It seemed that God Almighty had chosen Father Paul, in a special way, to teach people how to seek him in the interiority of their own heart." St. Paul of the Cross wanted your communities to be schools of prayer, where they could experience God. His holiness itself was lived between darkness and desolation, but also with a joy and peace that touched the hearts of those who met him.

At the heart of your life and your mission is the Passion of Jesus, which the Founder described as "the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love" (Letters II, 499). The vow that distinguishes you, with which you undertake to keep alive the memory of the Passion, places you

at the foot of the cross, from which springs the healing and reconciling love of God. I encourage you to be ministers of spiritual healing and reconciliation, which are greatly needed in today's world, marked by ancient and new afflictions. Your Constitutions call you to dedicate yourselves to the "evangelizing and... re-evangelizing the faithful, especially the poor in more neglected areas" (Const. 70). Your closeness to people, traditionally expressed through popular missions, spiritual direction and the sacrament of Penance, is a precious testimony. The Church needs ministers who speak with tenderness, listen without condemnation and accept with mercy.

The Church today strongly perceives the call to come out of itself and go to the peripheries, both geographic and existential. Your commitment to embrace new frontiers of mission implies not only going to new territories to bring the Gospel, but also addressing the new challenges of our time, such as migrations, secularism and the digital world. This means being present in those situations where people perceive the absence of God, and try to be close to those who, in any way or form, are suffering.

In this age of change, which is rather a change of era, you are called to be attentive to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, reading the signs of the times. New situations require new answers. St. Paul of the Cross was very creative in responding to the needs of his time, recognizing-as he says in the Rule-that "the love of God is ingenious and is proved not so much by the words, as by the deeds and examples of those who love." (Rule 1775, XVI). Creative fidelity to your charism will allow you to respond to the needs of today's people, staying close to the suffering Christ in order to bring his presence to a world that suffers.

Your Congregation has given many examples of holiness to the people of God. We recall St. Gabriel of the Mother of Sorrows, a young man whose joyful following of Christ still speaks to the youth of today. The testimony of the Saints and Blesseds of your religious family manifests the fruitfulness of your charism and offers models to inspire you in your apostolic choices. The strength and simplicity of your message, which is the love of God revealed on the cross, can still speak to today's society that has learned not to trust words alone and to be convinced only by facts. For many young people who are looking for God, the Passion of Jesus can be a source of hope and courage, showing them that everyone is loved personally and totally. May your testimony and your apostolate continue to enrich the Church, and may you always remain close to Christ crucified and his suffering people.

May the Apostolic Blessing, which I now impart to you capitulars and to the whole Passionist family, accompany you on your journey. Please don't forget to pray for me. Thank you.