

SUPERIOR GENERAL'S LENTEN-EASTER MESSAGE 2019

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

I greet you sincerely and, as I do each year (even if a little late this year), I want to offer us in the Passionist Family a common point of reflection to engage in as we begin this Lenten season. We know very well that the goal of Lent is CONVERSION and RENEWAL which is attained by our response to God's grace: *the call to return to the Lord who is gracious and merciful (Joel 2:12-13), and to do so NOW - a very acceptable time and the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).*

No doubt, each one of us, when we were signed with ash at the beginning of Lent, have already identified some personal area(s) of our human lives and Christian vocation which need particular attention in overcoming the sinfulness and aligning our lives more in-line with the Gospel: *"Turn away from sin and believe in the Gospel"*. This personal call must proceed.

However, I would like to invite us all during this Lent to give time to reflect and share together on the area concerning **RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS**. I believe that this is one of the "signs of the times" which the Spirit is challenging us to examine in these times.

The scandal resulting from the abuse (sexual, physical, psychological and spiritual) of minors and vulnerable adults perpetrated by church leaders, clergy and religious, which has been revealed and brought to light in recent times, has troubled, disturbed, angered and hurt us deeply. Moreover, we are aware that our Passionist Family has not been exempt from this scandal. Furthermore, while the attention of this scourge has focused very much on the church and other institutions, we are aware also that this reality is present in all parts of our society, including family life. The birth and rise of the "MeToo" movement, and others, highlights the cries of many to recognize and call out abusive and violent relationships for what it is and to foster right relationships.

The right relationship is the one that is authentic and sincere, not going beyond one's own limits/boundaries, not trying to express one's self as others do or as others would expect us to, but always relating out of one's own truth and self-intimacy, i.e. one's ability to see and know the depths of one's own being. When we relate in this way, we are relating in sincerity and truth; thus, our expressions of warmth and affection are acceptable because they are genuine - they come from a heart that is in touch with itself and with the other. Furthermore, they are acceptable because they are respectful of the readiness, culture and personality of the individual.

Right Relationships is a human right. The Scriptures (the inspired Word of God) reveal to us God's commandments by which we are formed to relate in a healthy and loving way with God, with others, with ourselves, and with God's creation – not by using and abusing in order to satisfy and serve one's gratification, but by recognizing the dignity of each sphere and engaging with respect and wholeness: *"Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy"* (Leviticus 19:2). Jesus himself teaches us that at the heart of discipleship is **loving relationships**: *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...You shall love your neighbor as yourself."* (Mark 12: 28-32).

As awful and painful as it might be for us to open our eyes and see, open our ears and hear, open our hearts to feel the terrible things perpetrated by people, especially significant others, in unhealthy ways of relating and treating others, we must accept this revelation as a call from the Spirit – a sign of the times – to confront in ourselves the core issues which block true freedom and impede healthy, loving and right relationships with God, with others, with myself, and with creation.

***"...our hearts are restless until they come to rest in God."* (St Augustine)**

The truly intimate heart is the one that rests in God and from that place of resting is free to relate authentically to others.

For personal and communal reflection:

- **What have you learnt about yourself in the struggles you have experienced in your relationships? What patterns can you identify? What insights can you see about how you relate? What healing and forgiveness do you need?**

May your Lenten journey bring you the riches and blessings of wholeness and healing, and through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, may you know God's life and love anew in the Easter celebration.

~ Fr Joachim Rego, CP
Superior General