



*Il Superiore Generale
dei Passionisti*

**MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
TO THE PASSIONIST FAMILY
ON THE FEAST OF ST PAUL OF THE CROSS
2019**



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

As we celebrate the feast of St Paul of the Cross this year, we are conscious that we are on the eve of the 300th anniversary of the foundation of our beloved Congregation of the Passion which we will commemorate next year with the theme: ***Renewing Our Mission – Gratitude, Prophecy, Hope***. However, once again I want us to be reminded that no renewal will be effective if it does not begin with ME and if we do not invoke the assistance of God's grace. As the new Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich of Luxembourg said in a recent interview: *"The first thing I have to change is myself... We have to undergo a conversion to Christ in order that our proclamation of the Gospel can be really heard by people."*

As Passionists, whose mission is *"to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate"* (Const. 2), we are called to this continual renewal and conversion to Christ by adopting a contemplative stance at the foot of the Crucified from whom we draw wisdom and power *"to discern and remove the causes of human suffering"* (Const. 3). St Paul of the Cross gave specific emphasis to meditation on the Passion of Jesus which he found to be the most effective remedy for the evils which afflicted the people of his time. Specifically, it was the love and compassion of Jesus in his Passion that was efficacious. Nevertheless, it was the formation of Paul's heart and words to be compassionate that enabled him to communicate and witness credibly God's compassion and love as an experience of truth and authenticity in his ministries.

COMPASSION is a significant trait of our Passionist charism and one that we would do well to cultivate in our relationships and ministries for our times.

I feel drawn to propose some reflection for us on this attribute of compassion, particularly because I was struck by the emphasis given to this aspect by Pope Francis in

his recent homily during the Consistory Mass to induct the newly created cardinals. He said: *“Compassion is a keyword in the Gospel. It is forever written in the heart of God...God’s love for His people is drenched with compassion.”*

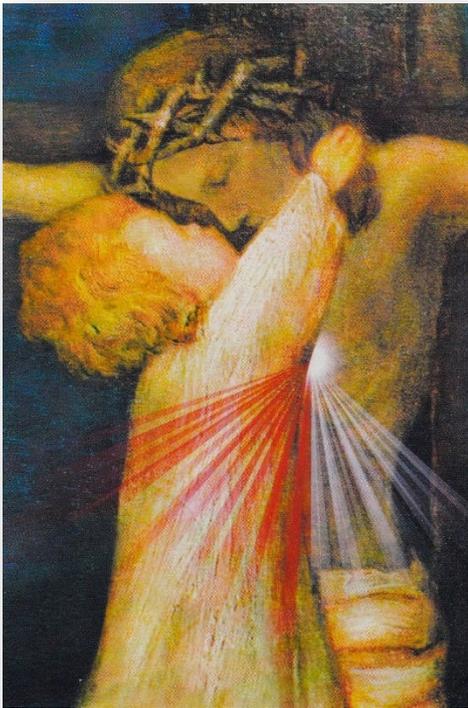
Francis spoke of the steadfast compassion of Jesus for those who suffer. He said: *“The more we read, the more we contemplate, the more we*

come to realize that the Lord’s compassion is not an occasional, sporadic emotion, but is steadfast and indeed seems to be the attitude of His heart”.

Compassion is a steadfast attitude of God’s heart which God showed so eminently and concretely in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus to fallen and suffering humanity and creation.

As Passionists, our mission calls us *“to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected...to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow”* (Const. 3). This is only possible as a genuine response of compassion. However, there is a pre-condition. Firstly, we must experience personally God’s compassion and mercy. As Pope Francis spoke to the cardinals so directly during his recent homily:





“We can ask ourselves: are we conscious—we, in the first place—of having been the object of God’s compassion? In particular, I ask this of you, brother cardinals and those about to become cardinals: Do you have a lively awareness of always having been preceded and accompanied by his mercy? Do we have a lively awareness of this compassion that God feels for us?... If I don’t feel it, how can I share it, bear witness to it, bestow it on others?”

By our contemplation of the Crucified, we dispose our hearts and words to be shaped and formed by the compassionate response of Jesus, especially in his passion. **‘A Passionist Heart’** – the vision of the Holy Spirit Province expresses it thus:

“...it is by entering into the pain and suffering of Jesus that we are strengthened to enter into our pain and suffering, and so are able to stand with others in theirs.”

LOVE must be the essence of compassion, which, in turn, must bear fruits of justice. Our compassion cannot be simply a sentimental response which has no real depth or long-term effective action. Our challenge is not only to hear the cry of those who are suffering in our day, but we are also to act for their liberation whenever this is possible. It goes without saying, of course, that trust and confidence in God to give us all we need to act is paramount.

Our commitment to compassion is basically about making friends. The oppressed, the hurt, the wounded, the sick become our friends. We begin to see life through their eyes. This is the meaning of ‘*com-passion*’ = ‘*to suffer with*’. We try to get into their skin; to stand in their shoes. We enter into their world and join them in the ordinary activities of their lives. We spend quality time with them. This is how we can have a deeper compassion and understanding for those who suffer. In the book



“Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life”, Donald McNeill, Douglas Morrison & Henri Nouwen write:

“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless.”



As always, for us followers of Christ, we look to the example of Jesus and attune our understanding of compassion according to the message of the Gospel. As the Good Samaritan Sr Clare Condon says:

“The compassion of the Christian Gospels is grounded in human rights and human dignity; there is nothing condescending, sentimental or selective about it. It recognises the equality and dignity of every human person regardless of ethnicity, colour, religion or nationality. But the compassion of the Christian Gospels comes with a cost; it requires us ‘to suffer with’ another. Perhaps that’s why we often opt for a more superficial expression?”

Jean Vanier reminds us that nurturing a compassionate heart requires renewal and conversion:

“Compassion is not a passing emotion. It is more than a gesture of tenderness without commitment. To be compassionate is to turn with an open heart towards those who are afflicted. It requires a heart which is understanding and full of goodness, which seeks ways of giving assistance and support.”

I leave the last words for us from St Paul of the Cross himself on his feast day...

“Let your heart be full of compassion for the poor, and lovingly assist them, because the name of Jesus is engraven on their countenance.

When you have not the means of helping your neighbor, recommend him fervently to God, Whose sovereign dominion holds all creatures in His hand.

Counsels gently given heal every wound, but given with sharpness only serve to aggravate it tenfold.

Be gentle in your actions; speak with a peaceful mind and in a calm tone, and you will succeed better.

Poverty is good, but charity is better.”

Wishing you all a happy feast day and invoking God’s blessing on each one of you through the intercession of St Paul of the Cross.



“May the Passion of Jesus be always in our hearts.”

Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General
Saturday, 19 October 2019