

Circular Letter #1:

March 1, 2019
The Solemn Commemoration of the Passion

Dear Mothers and Sisters,

On this blessed Solemn Commemoration of the Passion, I send prayerful greetings to each Passionist Nun in every monastery belonging to our new Monastic Congregation! Although many miles separate us physically, we remain one in our hearts, particularly in the Holy Eucharist, the great Mystery of our Communion in the eternal sacrifice of the Paschal Christ in which time and space disappear and we are all one with the Beloved Son in His crucified love for the Father and for humanity.

It has been a month since we gathered at Ss. John and Paul's in Rome to celebrate together the First General Chapter of our new Monastic Congregation. I would like to recall with you something Fr. Sebastiano Paciolla said on January 29, shortly before the elections began. Father said that the capitulars were called during the election "to generate a 'mother' who is called to service, not to 'power'". Father added that "after the vote, the Nun who is elected becomes our 'mother'." It is truly in the spirit of a mother that I, with faith and trust in the One who called me, and despite my age and health limitations, have taken up the service of authority to which you have called me. I thank you for allowing me to serve you, and I hope always to do so with the spirit of the Mother of our Congregation, Mary Most Holy.

After the chapter, as I greatly desired to visit the two monasteries in the north of Italy who wanted to attend the General Chapter but were impeded from sending the superior or a delegate (I am speaking of Costigliole D'Asti and Gornate), I was able through the kind help of Sr. Fernanda Barbiero to travel up there – to areas that are very hard to get to! How great was my joy to find that these dear Sisters are moving forward with us in a spirit of faith and trust.

On the way, I had the opportunity to visit the Nuns in Genoa and in Ovada, who also manifested a beautiful spirit of communion. During a visit, one of the Nuns, when speaking of our time together at the General Chapter, said something very beautiful that I wish to share with you: ***"For two weeks, we all lived together as one family."*** And that is exactly what our Monastic Congregation is -- one family! In families when one member suffers, all suffer; when one is honored, all are honored. Ideally, in a family, all are concerned for the good and the well-being of all. I have noticed a sincere attitude of "mutual concern" and deepened prayer for one another now emerging more and more among us.

Immediately after my election, many of you began to share with me, either verbally or in writing, some very serious issues in your communities. My overall impression is that the Passionist Nuns throughout the world have truly been suffering the Passion with Jesus. Some of these situations we must accept with Jesus as a chalice we must "drink" from the hand of the Father. On the other hand, some of these situations we can and must work together to change, so that the essentials of our ***contemplative Passionist vocation*** are treasured and preserved for future

generations of Passionist Nuns. This is a “family” matter that concerns us all. And this is so necessary if we are to promote and support a truly contemplative lifestyle instead of a constantly struggling lifestyle of mere survival which drains the spiritual and physical strength of the Nuns. The Church needs us to walk in the truth, and to deal realistically with certain situations that are detrimental to the well-being and the contemplative spirit of many Nuns. In this we are to be wise yet simple, as we seek to discern what the Father is asking of us through events and situations.

In order that we all might support one another in this journey along the path of the Father’s unfolding will, I invite each one to gather close to Mary as the apostles did after the ascension of Jesus. Let us devote ourselves to continual, heartfelt invocation that the Holy Spirit might come upon us all. Pray that each Nun and each monastery may receive a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the new times in which we are walking forward together. You may find it helpful to make your own the profound spirituality contained in the Church’s Sequence for Pentecost: “Come, thou Holy Spirit, come, and from Thy celestial home, shed a ray of light divine...” And so forth. We truly need to pray for a new Pentecost among us!

This Holy Spirit of Communion came upon us during the General Chapter. This Holy Spirit is our bond of communion. And this Holy Spirit of Jesus is the One who will lead us forward through the many difficult situations facing the monasteries. This Holy Spirit is the precious fruit of the Passion and bitter sufferings of Jesus! It is the same Holy Spirit that our beloved founder, St. Paul of the Cross, drank from as we see depicted so movingly in the great painting above his tomb in Ss. John and Paul’s. Truly, with our holy founder and with so many Passionists who have lived our way of life and who intercede for us now in heaven, we can all say with joy: “We have all been given to drink of the one Spirit!”

May this Holy Spirit come upon us now, more and more, to help all of us in our weakness as our infant monastic congregation begins to learn to “walk.” In the weakness of our aging and our lack of vocations, the Holy Spirit can do for us what we could never do for ourselves. So let us unite our hearts and prayers to the “groaning” of the Holy Spirit within us, that the Father’s will may be fulfilled in regard to the Passionist Nuns!

And now, some organizational notes:

1) I wish to tell you that the council and I have chosen Fr. Antonio Munduate, C.P. as the worldwide Passionist Assistant, and this choice has been approved by Most Rev. Fr. Joachim Rego, C.P. and his council. I have invited our beloved Fr. Floriano de Fabiis C.P. to continue to walk with us in an advisory capacity, continuing to pray for all the Passionist Nuns and to be available to share with us his profound knowledge of our founder, our history, and our Passionist spirituality. I know that at least one monastery has already invited Father Floriano to be their personal Assistant, according to #4 of our General Statutes.

2) I wish also to announce that I have chosen, with the consent of my council, Sr. Monica Graffonara, C.P. of the monastery of Loreto to be my delegate in charge of the monastery here in Lucca. Sister will take up residence in Lucca after Easter. I thank Sr. Mariangela and her community for making the sacrifice of allowing Sister to offer this service to the Lucca community.

In closing, dear Sisters, as we celebrate the feast of the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion, I encourage us all to continue to contemplate with Mary the Face of Jesus in His life, death and resurrection, that as we gaze lovingly on His Face and enter into His Heart, we may gradually find our poor hearts, minds and attitudes changed and taking on more and more of His own attitudes, His way of reflecting the Father's painful, yearning love for us and for all humanity, and His filial obedience even unto death. Be assured of my continued prayers for all of you, and I beg yours as well, that I and my council members and those assisting us, may have all the light and grace necessary to know and to carry out the Father's will.

With esteem and prayerful best wishes for a spiritually fruitful Lent,

Mother Catherine Marie, C.P.

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Mother President