

The pillars of our Congregation:

*Gregor Lenzen, C.P.*

**Prayer, poverty, solitude, and penance.**



# Jubilaeum

The Tricentennial Jubilee year of the founding of our Congregation is an opportunity for us to reflect on the foundations of our spirituality and our commitment to the mission. For this reason, we give thanks for the charism of our Founder, Paul of the Cross, to whom God entrusted a special task in his Church.

None of us could be a second Paul of the Cross. Every person is a unique being, to whom God has given, in a personal way, virtues and talents. However, in the charism that Paul Francis Danei received in 18<sup>th</sup> century Italy, there are some fundamental elements which are completely essential to the life of the Community he founded. Without these “Pillars” the entire building of our Congregation would collapse. Here I would like to offer a reflection on “prayer, poverty, solitude



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and penance”, key elements that we consider as the original founding pillars of the Congregation.

First, I will explain the roots of the pillars in the charism of the Founder, in order to ask the question, later, about the meaning that these concepts still possess in the life of Passionists around the world at the beginning of the 21st century.

In the introduction to the original version of his Rule, Paul Francis, in the year 1720, describes some of the fundamental sources of inspiration which God had given him: **“two years or so after my beloved God inspired me to do penance”**, and he continues, **“I was given the inspiration to wear a poor black tunic (...)”**

In addition, he repeatedly referred to the strong desire to live in solitude. He defines it literally **“as long as I had retreated into solitude in that place, or anywhere else, in order to follow the amorous invitation of my God, who by his infinite goodness called me to leave the world”**.

The call to a life of poverty and penance in solitude with God! This was for our Founder the first strong impulse to begin his spiritual life. Subsequently, an inner inspiration was added: **“to**

**gather companions, to be united, to promote in one’s soul the holy fear of God; this is the main desire.”**

The young Danei found these basic sources of inspiration described above, in the biblical image of the “Life of the Apostles”. In the “Notices” of the year 1747, in which Paul of the Cross explains the purposes and structure of his young foundation, he writes: **“Their life is not unlike that of the Apostles, indeed completely in harmony with the same. Their way of life, which was the norm for the Constitutions, is to attempt to form a man all of God, all apostolic, a man of prayer, detached from the world, from things, from themselves; who can truthfully be called a disciple of Jesus Christ, make himself able to generate many children for heaven, and who redound to his glory and honour.”**

For Paul, this ideal of apostolic life harmoniously reconciles both elements of contemplation and action. In close association with the reference in the Gospel according to Mark that describes the return of the disciples from their mission, he writes in the “Notices” of the year 1768: **“When we return to the Retreat after the Apostolic Ministries, the worker retreats into greater solitude in order**





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to assume a renewed spirit in the holy spiritual exercises according to the admonition given by Jesus Christ to the Apostles: **requiescite pusillum**” (Mk. 6:31).

The life of the Passionists, as well that of every life consecrated to God, is a life that seeks to imitate the life of Christ. Among the founding elements of the lives of Christ’s first disciples were being close to the Lord in retreat, prayer, apostolic poverty, penance, as well as on mission.

Today when we reflect on the four “pillars” of our Congregation: solitude, prayer, poverty, and penance, we refer, ultimately, to the true essence of being disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Jubilee motto **“Renewing our mission”** is intended to be the starting point for a process of renewal within our Congregation, a process that helps to provide a revitalization of our charism and makes us a community of missionary disciples in all parts of the world.



**Solitude**, not in the sense of isolation, but as a place to establish, in **prayer**, intimacy with God.

**Poverty**, not in the sense of misery, but as an experience of freedom and as the foundation for the authentic ministry of proclamation.

**Penance**, not as self-flagellation, but as an expression of a continuous and genuine attitude of conversion.

Each of these pillars of our life as Passionists will help us in this process of renewal and for this reason they will maintain their timeless validity. It is no coincidence that our Founder, at the end of his life, in his spiritual Testament, recalled once again these pillars that shaped his path and will continue to shape that of his community: **“Furthermore, I recommend to all [...] that there always flourish in the Congregation the spirit of prayer, the spirit of solitude, and the spirit of poverty. Let them be assured that, if they maintain these three things, the Congregation “will shine like the sun in the sight of God and the nations.”**

