

PASSIO

NEWSLETTER OF THE PASSIONIST FAMILY
ST JOSEPH'S PROVINCE



If you are weak and fragile on the way, if you fall: do not be afraid! God holds out his hand and says to you: "Courage!" You cannot give it to yourself, but you can receive it as a gift. Just open your heart in prayer, just lift that stone placed at the mouth of the heart a little, to let the light of Jesus enter. Just invite Him, "Come, Jesus, into my fears and say to me too, Courage!"

Pope Francis, Easter Vigil – April 11, 2020



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Cover image: The photo by Martin Newell CP is of John Sherrington CP's stole & Brother Robert Lentz's icon "Christ the Liberator". For more, see p25.

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EDITORIAL

by Paschal Somers

Who among us could fail to recall that iconic moment on 27th March this year when Pope Francis, facing an almost empty St. Peter's Square, delivered an extraordinary 'Urbi et Orbi' (to the city and the world) blessing, which a pope typically gives at Christmas and Easter and at his first public appearance after being elected pontiff?

To pray for an end to the pandemic Francis had enlisted two resources from close by: the sorrowful Christ of the 'miraculous crucifix' from the Church of St. Marcello in Via del Corso and the icon of Our Lady 'Protector of the Roman People', normally housed in the Basilica of St. Mary Major. In centuries past, they had both played a key role in ending the plague in Rome.

As we watched the solitary figure of the pope, practically alone on that rainy evening, we encountered the imagery of what many have faced and felt during the pandemic – that universal experience of being in the same boat as it is buffeted by the storm of external events and our need to find a renewed trust in the Lord.

'We find ourselves frightened and lost', the pope said. 'Like the disciples in the gospel, we have been caught off guard by an unexpected, furious storm.' And like those disciples we cry out: 'Wake up, Lord!'

In his address, Francis urged us not to be afraid of this moment but, at the same time, not to waste this opportunity of conversion. He said, 'We are paralysed at present but around us, inaction in itself has potential to change us.' Inaction provides the opportunity to be still, take account of our bearings and surroundings and to allow nature the time and space to begin to heal itself, untrammelled by our anxious activity and industry.



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Some commentators have referred to this time of pandemic as a 'teaching moment'. What, then, might it teach us? The word 'interconnectivity' might be helpful here. This is a time to reconnect with nature. The problem has been that we have used and abused nature rather than contemplated and respected it. This is a time to reconnect with what matters most: love of God and our neighbour and accompaniment of others in our particular place. We must learn to see the human person before us, in their frail and vulnerable relationships. 'Those are the things that need nurturing at this time and

if we can do that, then better times will come'.

The pandemic has had the effect of a lightning flash on our social landscape bringing to our awareness what has long been there but what we have chosen to ignore, particularly the plight of the environment, the vulnerability of the poorest and the scourge of racism.

Francis reminded us of those 'saints next door', speaking of those who are serving as heroes at this time, from teachers to nurses and doctors (we might add from cleaners to bus drivers to care workers) but most of

all drawing attention to the process of bringing the poor front and centre, and holding that church of the poor, which is a constant theme of his pontificate (making the periphery the centre), ensuring that they stay with us in our prayer, in our service, and in our response to this pandemic.

Above all, Francis calls upon us to trust God throughout what may come, especially in a world of economic hardship that awaits after the pandemic is over. Paradoxically, we pray for an end to the pandemic but must trust that it has a purpose and we need to engage with that purpose for it to bear fruit.

now we have discovered that we are vulnerable. We all risk sickness and death but these separations that we created are no longer valid, Francis said. 'Now we (the church) are plunged into the sea with everybody else.'

The Pope is rooting this process of conversion for all of us in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, inviting us to reimagine what our engagement with the poor is, as communities and parishes, and all of this on the fifth anniversary of 'Laudato Si', his ground-breaking encyclical on caring for the earth, our common home.

There is one line from the Pope's address that stays with me: 'we carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick.' Instead of being a field hospital, incarnated at the sites of suffering in our world and amongst its crucified ones, we separated ourselves ... and



Paschal Somers is the Passionist Development Worker for St Joseph's Province



The passion of Jesus is a sea of sorrows, but it is also an ocean of love. Ask the Lord to teach you to fish in this ocean. Dive into its depths. No matter how deep you go, you will never reach the bottom

– St. Paul of the Cross



Summer Festival



*by Matthew
Neville, Young
Adult Outreach
Worker for
St Joseph's
Province*

COVID19 turned all our plans upside down. During 2020 there were plans for a series of FaithJustice events but like so many other plans these fell foul of the virus and warranted either cancellation or serious adaptation.

Thus, the planned FaithJustice summer festival moved online courtesy of zoom. We lost the atmosphere and some of the community feel of a real festival, but in its place we gained greater accessibility and were able to reach some people who wouldn't have been able to take part in a whole weekend of sessions. The weekend was entitled "Searching for Hope in the Storm". The overarching

theme invited participants to reflect on our experiences of lockdown and to explore the challenges that lie ahead. On the Friday evening of the festival we began with a time of prayer, before dividing up into small groups to check in with one another and begin our discussions. On the Saturday we shared a workshop on Solidarity and had a chance to hear the stories of refugees. On the Sunday we explored the theme of sacrifice and whether it is an appropriate model for understanding the role of key workers over recent months. Throughout the weekend we spent a lot of time in small groups discussing these themes.

The weekend was not all about serious discussion. We also had a quiz on the

Saturday evening, and late into the evening of each day we shared camp fire time, chatting about all sorts of things from Northampton Town Football Club to why female religious orders tend to have longer names than male ones!

Across the weekend a real sense of community was built despite the limitations of being physically distanced in different towns and cities. In many ways the weekend experience opened our eyes to what might continue to be possible online beyond this time of lockdown.

Future events and weekends are being planned... watch this space at faithjustice.org.uk



SPOTLIGHT

*on Thomas Aquinas Nwia-Kaamozi
Anlima Kwaw Kwasi Esborn*

Thomas, is a member of The Community of the Passion.

What is one word that you would use to describe yourself?

'Dissatisfaction' – in the sense of feeling an urgency to act on something I am not happy with.

What one memory do you most treasure?

My mother's love and care for me, especially for her dedication in the role she played in the healing process after I was knocked down by a wooden truck in our village in Ghana when I was about 5. As Camara Laye puts it in 'The African Child', "to my mother, black woman, African woman...Thank you;

thank you for all you have done for me."

What advice would you give to your younger self?

Do not put off till tomorrow what you can do today (and learn to SHARE!)

Which person (living or dead) would you most like to meet and why?

Rev. Martin Luther King Jnr for his non-violent protest against racial discrimination. In 1965, he took a knee -a powerful pose - with a group in prayer, prior to going to jail in Selma, Alabama. Then, of course, later there followed his "I have a dream" speech.

What is the most important thing you have learnt in the past year?

How to remain safe and healthy in the face of Covid-19, given that I fall within the vulnerable group category.

Brown sauce or red sauce?

None of the above.

When did 'God' become more than a word to you?

This connects to the response above. It was at a pre-school age when I was knocked down by a wooden truck on the main street of our little village. Although there was no hospitalisation involved in my treatment, I did have a course of injections which were administered by those who were not as well trained as they might have been and could have resulted in doing me permanent damage. I still bear the scars on my left thigh of the local anti-clotting methods of heated sand in doubled over pillowcases. 'Nyamenle liele me ngoane' (in my mother tongue – 'God saved my life'). Why am I still here today to tell the story? In order to give something back.

How does your faith shape your work?

'The Nile is Egypt and Egypt is the Nile'. In a similar way, my Faith shapes my work for my work to enhance my faith. The experience of working with boys in care as well as adults with mild learning disabilities and, in general, the overall experience working in Social Care, has combined to broaden my horizon.

If you could go anywhere in the world right now where would it be and why?

I would go to Uruguay to discover what is left of what the journalist Eduardo Galeano referred to as 'Open Veins of Latin America: five Centuries of the Pillage of A Continent' (LAS VENAS ABIERTAS DE AMERICA LATINA) and learn what oral history can still tell us about the gold and silver, cacao and cotton, rubber and coffee, hides and wool, petroleum, iron and so forth.

If you were about to be castaway on a desert island, what three items would you take with you?

Firstly, I would take a framed photo of my Parents - a reminder of who brought me up. Secondly, I would take The Community of the Passion prayer to remind me to keep alive the memory of the Passion. Finally, I would take 'The Greening of The Church' by Fr. Sean McDonagh, an Irish Columban Missionary's experiences in the Philippines where he reflects on problems of the people there as a 'kind of microcosm of the problems facing other Third World people, the rest of humanity and the earth itself'. This would inform my meditation on the resulting controversies in terms of the stranglehold of international debt on the Third World, the crisis of over-population and the destruction of the Rainforest. McDonagh looks at these problems in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and in the tradition of the churches.

CAPS volunteers and Community of the Passion members L-R: Lazarus, Tyrone, Abigail & Vincent. Masks provided by CAPS Prayer Supporter Sr. Gill Horsfield MMS



INSIGHT

Vincent Manning's Report on CAPS

A tiny virus has certainly upset society, again. Covid-19 is the latest symptom of a deeper crisis. In addition to the climate change emergency, the evils of racism have re-emerged in public consciousness. The turmoil of Brexit continues, and another little virus, HIV, which has never gone away, remains a crisis of global proportions.

Covid-19 is not so new. Structural

injustices, the foundations and consequences of the present world-order, have been brought to attention before. What is new, is that the negative effects of this crisis are being felt more commonly. This virus arrived smack-bang in the midst of our society, disrupted everyone's lives, leaving no person untouched by it, in some way.

I am reminded of Enda McDonagh's

insight from 1994 that HIV & Aids marks "the time of God's special presence and summons". McDonagh drew upon the Greek concept of 'Kairos time' as used in scripture, when the truth of 'God-with-us' is revealed in new, surprising, and often upsetting ways. *Kairos* is also a moment of opportunity, from which greater good may come. Paradoxically God's special presence and summons to respond is often revealed in crisis.

However, discerning God's special presence, let alone our responses, is not easy. Especially in the midst of crisis, our fears and insecurities, the impulse to fly from sites of danger, tiredness and the magnitude of converging problems can leave us

**Some names have been changed to respect confidentiality. Some mentioned are also members of the Community of the Passion.*

feeling not just vulnerable, but powerless and hopeless. To adapt an old saying, he who has not been tempted to hopelessness, has not understood the challenges or undergone the suffering. Whatever else can be said of Covid-19, that it is a sign of greater disruption to come is surely undisputable except by the most naïve.

During another pandemic, Julian of Norwich wrote, we only know that evil exists because of the suffering it causes. Never in my lifetime have so many distinct yet related signs of suffering appeared all at once to such effect. How to respond? Where to begin?

In imitation of Simon of Cyrene?

This crisis heightens awareness of those who live continually at sites of suffering. As always, the worst effects are manifested within marginalised communities. Covid-19 is not so new for them but adds weight to pre-existing burdens. As we wait upon a fuller revelation of the Divine Word, where else can we begin but here, in solidarity with them? In imitation of Simon of Cyrene, how can we share in the cross that others bear continuously?

Many people with HIV (PLWH) live with additional health conditions or are elderly and have stayed isolated. For many, isolation triggers that deep wound of exile experienced by migrants who have been separated from their families. For others, the threat of covid-19 is a reminder of previous encounters with mortality and the trauma of so many deaths from Aids. Too many have yet to recover from the violence of racism, homophobia and patriarchy that made them vulnerable to HIV in the first place. So many endure the long grinding down of poverty and the structural erosion of dignity. Too many remain under the power of exclusion, judgment, rejection and blame, that has afflicted them ever since the day of their HIV diagnosis.

Works of mercy

During this most recent crisis, CAPS' 'Positive Catholics' community have continued to share the burden of the cross of HIV in various ways.

Mr Shah has lived in his car since his family ostracised him after his release

from prison. Since Covid-19 his delivery work has ceased. He is not entitled to any state support and is suspicious of receiving help from most agencies for fear that the Home Office will use his destitution to deny his application to remain in the UK. CAPS' volunteers check in with him regularly by phone, Lazarus and Abigail visit him at the car park, and bring him halal food.

Ahmed, a recently arrived 16 year-old Somali, spent three years in a refugee camp. Bullet wounds testify to his trauma. He exists in 'supported accommodation', which means he lives alone. He received a late-HIV diagnosis in January. Ahmed displays 'challenging' behaviours and his mental health deteriorated severely. The social worker had not found an HIV agency able to cope with Ahmed's complex needs and turned to CAPS for advice. Ahmed is convinced that HIV is a judgment from God. Attempts to find an Imam were fruitless. We advised the social worker on how to engage Ahmed on the issue of HIV as divine retribution. We signposted our 'Positive Faith' Films as useful tools to facilitate conversation. We replaced Ahmed's broken phone, sent with love from PLWH. Perhaps this gesture and listening to PLWH via 'Positive Faith' will give him hope that he is not alone. We remain available to support Ahmed in the future.

The community nurse called. She explained she was restricted from making house-calls but concerned for 'Mary' who had been uncontactable for weeks. Worry intensified since Mary failed to collect medications for HIV, diabetes and mental health, without

which her health would deteriorate dangerously. Mary had spoken of attending our retreats. Was there anything we could do? Abigail and Lazarus rang but got no reply. They arranged to pick up Mary's medication and went to her home. They banged at the door persistently. We agreed that if Mary did not respond, the police must be called. Eventually, tentatively, she replied "who's there?" We received an appreciative letter from the nurse who has since spoken with Mary. Deeply moved, Mary's isolation was relieved, perhaps her life was saved.

Thomas volunteered to shop for Bob who is fearful of venturing out. Tyrone supports a man with cancer undergoing palliative care.

We encourage phone contact between members, thinking especially of the most vulnerable. ZOOM provides some alternative to group meetings. In Manchester, Joyce and Adela listen to PLWH, some known, others new, and distribute small cash grants to relieve hardship. Similar conversations of care and solidarity happen via John and Tilly in Birmingham, Michael at Minsteracres, in London and Bristol. In these ways too, a Christian presence at the site of suffering of HIV is actualised. Of 79 small grants distributed since June, 50% recipients have no recourse to public funds; 80% is for food; 28% to those with children; 64% to Black African people.

'The Name of Jesus is written on their forehead' (St. Paul of the Cross)

Paradoxically, God's special presence and summons may not be so difficult

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CAPS volunteer Abigail

to understand? As John Sherrington CP put it prophetically:

“Christ is present among us, suffering, rejected and often mocked; comes to us weakened. He comes to us as one, sick and in need, a stranger: as one who suffers! As a Passionist, I have been in ministry, to, with, and for, people who have the Human Immune Virus since the early 1990s, when times were very grim regarding the pandemic. I have had time to journey with them and reflect with them, on the issues. I find myself now understanding that, “the Name of Jesus is written on the forehead of people who are HIV+”. They bear the wounds of suffering, of stigma and often rejection. In Positive Catholics, I have seen them to be

Simon of Cyrene to one another, and to others. I have seen, by their sickness (their Cross) they, like Christ have broken down in their bodies the walls of divisions; the division between male and female, black and white, well-off and poor, citizen and stranger, Gay and Heterosexual.” (World AIDS Day, 2011)

Vincent Manning,
Chairperson for
Catholics for AIDS
Prevention &
Support (CAPS)
– A Passionist
Partner Charity.
caps-uk.org



REFLECTIONS

FROM OUR PROVINCIAL

by John Kearns CP

This edition of Passio is timed to coincide with the annual anniversary of Blessed Dominic Barberi CP (born 1792, died 1849, feast day 26 Aug). 1849 seems like a long time ago, and we might wonder what an Italian Passionist from those days might have to do with our concerns and worries today. In fact, I think Dominic is very well placed to help us.

He grew up in war and occupation. Napoleon’s army invaded Italy when Dominic was four, and as a young man Dominic’s entry into Religious Life was delayed because of the Suppression. He grew up “in care” - both his parents had died by the time he was eleven and an uncle took him in. He grew up without much education - yet went on to be a professor of philosophy and theology.

Once in Religious Life, Dominic had to live with unfulfilled hopes and ambitions for decades ~ whilst still a novice (1814) he had a vision of Mary, who told him that he would live and work in England. Dominic wrote “I was so convinced of this being a divine communication that I would have sooner doubted my own existence than its truth.” Yet it was not until 1841, some 27 years later, he came to live on these shores.

The England he expected was not the England he found. It was, to borrow a phrase from Pope Francis,

a change of era - the industrial revolution was in full swing, with wholesale change to society.

The Irish potato famine saw mass migration into England, with large scale outbreaks of cholera and typhus. Dominic and his companions rolled up their sleeves and helped out in the local workhouse and amongst the sick and destitute. A number of Passionists fell ill, none dying thankfully, but over fifty priests in England were dead in the first half of 1847. Ignatius Spencer, then a novice, took his vows as a Passionist on what was thought to be his death bed.

The dominant story of 2020 has been Covid 19. The world has witnessed mass death and illness, economic disruption and social upheaval. Blessed Dominic lived through times perhaps even harder than our own. As a Passionist he would remind us that the Cross is never far away. As a Passionist he would also remind us: ~ stronger than suffering is the love of God, a love which unites itself in solidarity with those who are themselves being crucified, and with a crucified earth. God is the God of life and love, even ~ especially ~ in these troubled times.



BLACK LIVES MATTER

by Martin Newell CP

BLACK
LIVES
MATTER
UK-USA-CALAIS
-EVERYWHERE-
#BLM #NOGOINGBACK
#ABETTERWORLDISPOSSIBLE

Front bay window of
Austin Smith House,
Passionist House of
Hospitality,
Birmingham

I hesitated before putting this sign up in our window at Austin Smith House. I felt it was important it be an authentic statement. It could not be cheap words or a casual mouthing of a popular feeling. As I reflected on who we are and have been as Passionists here in England, I was reassured that for us this statement is deeply real. I also wanted to make sure that it reflected how I really felt, and was not parochial or limited.

Among the cards I sent to friends and family in the last year or two have been some that came from Pax Christi. They show a stained-glass window from an Alabama church that was bombed in a racist attack during the USA civil rights movement. The image is that of a Black Jesus with the words “You do it to me”, a reference to Jesus’ words in the Last Judgment scene in Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 25:31-46). Prominent among those who are crucified today, among those Jesus expressed his strongest identification with, among those of whom he said, “whatever you do to them

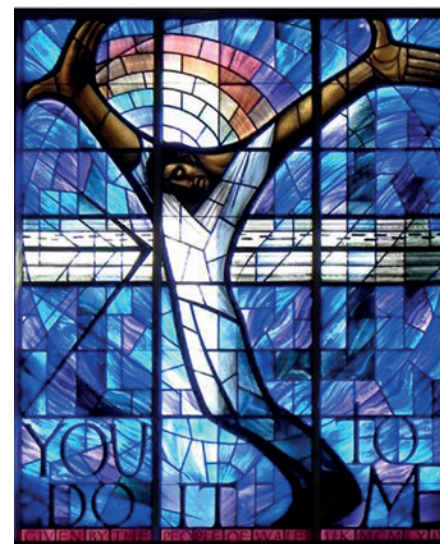
– you do to me”, are those of our Black sisters and brothers in the one family of God.

In recent years, through some of our Passionist Partners, we have received reports of horrendous suffering among the refugees seeking a way to enter the UK from Calais. We have heard how

the police there, funded by the UK government, have attacked many of them, hit them and beat them, just for being there. The police have taken away their sleeping bags and destroyed their tents. This was perhaps at its worst when the so-called ‘Jungle’ refugee camp there was

destroyed, but many refugees remain despite being targeted in increasingly harsh ways.

Johannes Maertens, the founder of one of our Passionist Partners, St Maria Skobtsova Catholic Worker House in Calais, witnessed this and has done his best to support them. The house then focussed especially on welcoming some of the many Eritrean young men, and some women, who are trying to join family or friends in England, af-





ter fleeing the universal open-ended conscription and forced labour that most men in Eritrea are forced to endure. Eritrea has been called 'the North Korea of Africa'.

That is why the sign in our window says, "Black Lives Matter – UK, USA, Calais and Everywhere". You could perhaps be forgiven for thinking, if you follow the news, that the only place black people are targeted for violent attack by members of the police is the USA. You could also be forgiven for thinking that the only country that has been building a wall to keep immigrants out is the USA, on its border with Mexico. But then, you probably have not seen the walls and fences the British government has paid the authorities in Calais to build to keep refugees out of Britain.

The sign in our window says something too about how we Passionists and friends have been saying "Black Lives Matter". Immigration and border policies and attitudes in the UK are certainly racist. They want to keep poor and black people out, and favour immigration from white countries, including Commonwealth countries, which betrays the roots of racism here in the history of the British Empire.

I had some reading to do before a "Climate and Colour" event organised through Christian Climate Action. I found there a statement that "Being anti-racist... means that you actively participate in dismantling racist systems." This statement reassured and reminded me of the long history of anti-racism among Passionists in Britain. Not just in our efforts to 'actively participate

in dismantling" the racist system of British immigration policies. Not even only in our efforts to put into practice our Province Priority to 'welcome the stranger' - the foreigner, the migrant, the refugee – either. I must admit I needed reminding. Perhaps I had got so used to living and working among people of multi-various ethnicities and countries of origin (some of them even being white British, like myself) that I had forgotten that a concern to rebalance the injustices of racism was one reason I was here in the first place.

Even the name of our house of hospitality here in Birmingham reflects our Passionist history in this respect.

Father Austin Smith CP was a well-known Passionist who first moved with Father Nicholas Postlethwaite CP to live in "Liverpool 8" in 1971, an area with an historic and deprived Black community, generally known as Toxteth. At a local community meeting soon after they arrived, a local man stood up and pointed at Austin and said, "And him – he is the most dangerous man here – he is a white liberal". Ten years later, in 1981, Austin and Nicholas were still there, living on what became the front line, when the so-called "Toxteth Riots" (or 'disturbances') happened. Later, Austin was the only white person allowed to join the representatives of the local Black community when Michael Heseltine came to meet

them. This was a journey into true solidarity and, I believe, an experience for Austin of the truth of those words of Jesus, "Whatever you do to them, you do to me".

Austin was a particularly inspirational character. Among those he inspired were John Sherrington and Michael Bold, who followed Austin and Nicholas into what they called the "Passionist Inner City Mission". John was the first Passionist I got to know. They moved to live first in Islington, then Hackney. John and Michael chose the 'worker priest' orientation for their mission. John worked first as a street sweeper, then as a care worker and finally as a home carer for people living with AIDS. During this time, he and Michael became involved with their Trade Unions, and John had a key but secret role in the anti-apartheid movement. I remember him telling me in the mid-1990s, that there was only one Black British born Catholic priest in the whole country. But that through his work, numerous Black men had said to him, "I could be a priest, if I could be a priest like you". Sadly, this could not be guaranteed, so nothing came of it.

With these thoughts in mind, I felt confident I could put the sign, with those words, in our window, and know that they were an authentic reflection of the Passionist presence and witness in this country. For which I thank God.

WALKING

WITH THE CRUCIFIED

by Margaret S. Archer

One sunny morning, not long after the election of Pope Francis, I was sitting in the courtyard of my hotel in San Cristobal de las Cases (Southern Mexico) with my double espresso and iPad, going through the day's e-mails. You will have no difficulty believing that neither Popes old nor new, were among my regular correspondents! The contents were equally amazing: 'You have just been appointed as President of the Pontifical Academy for Social Science' (PASS). Certainly. I was a founder member in 1994 and had the joy of working for Pope Saint John Paul whilst he was still well, writing articles and organizing meetings, which is one of the things academics routinely do. There was nothing routine about the next five years.

The first 'social cause' that the new Pope embraced was abolition of Human Trafficking, which was a steep learning curve for most of us social scientists. To me this signalled a welcome shift towards the Church as a social movement, but you don't get 'the smell of the sheep' by taking one moorland walk. We went on routinely producing Big Books, including presentations from leaders of the ILO,

EU, and UN. The main change was that we were moving beyond our specialist comfort zones and becoming more concerned about Trafficked people. Indeed, its title *Human Trafficking: Issues Beyond Criminalization* (2016) revealed both our critique – including of Teresa May's 2015 Act – for neglecting the concerns of the victims and explicitly for failing to address their resettlement - and this intensified my own discomfort.

That was what fuelled the founding of 'Housing, Help and Hospitality' (3H) in 2016. Buy a small house, draw upon our generous parishioners to furnish it and supply Volunteers to work with the residents (2 mothers and three children), living rent-free and encouraged to draw upon any services we could provide. Everything was *ad experimentum*. But, we were buoyed up by Pope Francis' words that became our logo: '*Every parish, every religious Community, every Monastery, every sanctuary of Europe, take in one family*' (Angelus Address, September 6th 2017).

3H encountered many road-blocks: the lack of a roadmap for obtaining residents from the National Referral

Mechanism; the dilatoriness of the Home Office in hearing their cases for the Right to Remain and to Work (it took over 3 years for both our residents); the constant threat of repatriation and the official gullibility about Nigeria's safety and medical facilities (including Electric Shock Therapy!); as well as our own inexperience in how best to encourage our residents to lead autonomous lives, become part of the Kenilworth community and to dream dreams about their futures in G.B. despite the obstacles.

However, we had blessings in compensation. The biggest was the resilience of the two mothers (one had been in Domestic Servitude since the age of 9), and when asked what she had suffered from most said, 'never being able to go to school'. (She is self-taught from the Internet and remarkably intelligent). We have a very

generous Church congregation, especially the SVP and the CWL; we only need mention 'outgrown school shoes'... Everyone applauded loudly after the five of them had been Baptised or received into the Catholic communion.

Nevertheless, there are many situations in which these young women are reduced to humiliating pleading (e.g. for bus fares) and undergo some street exhibitions of racism. Doubtless, there are some who are even worse off, living homeless in Coventry, but it is unlikely that their experiences have included a life of servitude or being sold as their preludes to destitution.



Margaret S. Archer

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POETRY AND RACISM

by Nicholas Postlethwaite CP

The poetry of Racism! Juxtaposing racism with poetry will surely set teeth on edge in right-minded people. Viewing the poetic within a too limited romantic perspective – *‘wandering lonely as a cloud that floats on high o’er vales and hills’* – and then linking it to the violence of racism will at best seem strange – at worst be judged obscene.

If, however, poetry is understood as an important tool to help us confront extremes of human evil and suffering (as with the famous hymn, *‘Stabat Mater Gloriosa...’*) then perhaps poetry and racism are not such strange bed-fellows. And when poetry can fly beyond the confines of mere words written on paper and become a living expression of courage unflinchingly facing massed ranks of evil racist forces – eg, “... *taking the knee.*” – then as never before it may be legitimate poetically to connect human souls standing strong and tall in stark contrast with the evil that is racism.

Kemi Ryan and her sister Natasha are two remarkable women. I am privileged to claim them as dear friends. While serving a long prison sentence together, they determined to turn their lives around in a new direction – Bonhoeffer was not the first, nor the last to discover that prison can sometimes uncover and set free the Spirit!

Seventeen years later, Kemi and Natasha remain true today to their decision. Unsurprisingly, their selfless commitment to what I think of as ‘action poetry’ spills over and effects the lives of many others too. Today they are the trusted mentors of

countless young people in the city of Liverpool’s Black community. Young people who are frequently suspicious of adults – wary of betrayal – recognise someone who is genuine and who feels and shares their own struggles. They respond to understanding and respect from friends walking in solidarity alongside them to help guide through systems that all too often seem ready to penalise rather than support them. Kemi and Natasha have set up a project and drop-in centre – which they appropriately call “Reformed”. This offers a focus and security for young friends who are warmly welcomed with understanding and conversation over a cup of coffee – and occasional cake. Reformed creates oases for young people within otherwise hostile environments – creating a ‘poetry in action’ with echoes from deriving directly from a line from another Poet – *‘give us this day our daily bread...’*

While preparing these notes I was interrupted by my telephone. It was Kemi, who shared through tears news of two young friends: one, only fourteen, had stabbed and killed the other. Both come from neighbouring families, both have been part of Kemi and Natasha’s Reformed community.

'We are aware that the Passion of Christ continues in this world until he comes in glory; therefore, we share in the joys and sorrows of our contemporaries as we journey through life to our Father.'

'We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and relieve the burden of their sorrow.'
(Congregation of the Passion, Constitutions No 3)



Her tears sprang from sadness about the death of one friend and the consequent bleak consequences for the other. Listening, I had a sense of a deep lake of sorrows that feed these tears – tears for the many similar such tragic events experienced by this community – and so many other similar families and communities for whom today's tragedy is but a reminder of the many others preceding it.

As well as grief, Kemi's tears express her rage at the systems that fail to protect and support vulnerable young friends – as well as their families – and who find themselves increasingly trapped in spirals of seemingly endless violence. One life lost – another's future now blighted – each symbolic of racism abroad in our world yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

"I am glad about current world-wide protests condemning Derek Chauvin, the white police officer who publicly executed George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for eight minutes till the last breath from his lungs," Kemi continued. "But Minneapolis USA

seems a long way from us here in Liverpool. I pray for George and for his children and family, as I do for two friends here today – the circumstances may differ, but underlying causes come back to one poisonous root cause – that of racism. Why isn't the entire world standing in unceasing protest to condemn blatant racism everywhere and refusing to allow it to remain in our midst?"

Kemi's rhetorical question cries to the heavens for responses. Black Lives Matter today is rightly generating anger and energy. But a background fear continues to lurk. Given short attention spans, will current calls for change bring only very limited and cosmetic outcomes? Once the "storm" passes and waves of frustration subside will the issue sink once more beneath apparently calm surface waters of what complacently is described as "normality"? Those experiencing racism at first hand fear they will be left coping as best they can with the continuing "status quo". A small number will hopefully have become aware and go on to work for change. Some small changes may

occur in social systems – penal, health, housing and education. A few racially contaminated statues will have been unceremoniously removed. All to the good! But the fear remains as a lurking presence so long as there is no significant *systemic* shift in regard to racism.

Is this overly pessimistic? Kemi's tears indicate sadly it is not. As an organisation, Reformed remains as a positive sign both for those who experience racism first-hand and for those of us ready to stand alongside so we work together for *systemic* changes. But is this enough?

To presume there is a single silver bullet capable of instant eradication of racism would be naïve in the

extreme. What is needed is the support for many and multiple actions like Reformed, that collectively combine to challenge the deep virus that is racism. As a small contribution towards this dynamic, I borrow a philosophical insight – recommend a recent TV documentary – and record my own deep personal gratitude for the Black friends who continue to educate me and help me examine all that I need to change in my own attitudes.

To read this article in full, please visit:

[passionists-uk.org/
poetry-and-racism](https://passionists-uk.org/poetry-and-racism)

The cover photo by Martin Newell CP is of John Sherrington CP's stole. The icon "Christ the Liberator" is by Brother Robert Lentz. John's stole shows the Black Power fist, representing defiance and solidarity with the liberation struggles of the oppressed, especially of black people.

In this image it grasps the Cross of Jesus, showing both that the struggle for liberation always involves a willingness to suffer for justice and that for Christians this is the Way of the Cross. It also indicates that the Way of the Cross implies solidarity with the oppressed in their struggle for justice. It inspires us in this moment when we are being reminded that, as always, Black Lives Matter. The icon of "Christ the Liberator" reminds us that liberation from oppression, injustice and racism is integral to Jesus' mission of salvation. And that in the words of Matthew 25, written on the Book of the Gospels held by Jesus the Black man, "whatever we do to the least of these - in this case Black people - we do to Him". These images inspire us at this time when we are being reminded that, as always, Black Lives Matter.



GreenChristian

CRUCIFIED EARTH

by Paul Bodenham

**THE ABILITY OF THE
PLANET'S ECOSYSTEMS
TO SUSTAIN FUTURE
GENERATIONS CAN NO
LONGER BE TAKEN FOR
GRANTED.**

MILLENNIUM ECOSYSTEM ASSESSMENT



Paul Bodenham is the Chair of Green Christian, a Passionist Partner, and here reflects on the charity's work and mission

Over the last year we have seen a succession of dire scientific reports on the environment. Surely now no-one can doubt the crisis we're in. With climate change approaching tipping-point, dwindling wildlife, and rising tides of plastic waste, this is a hard time to hope.

On the face of it there are two alternatives: succumb to despair, or whistle a happy tune and kid yourself that easy solutions are in our

reach. If we talk about the environmental crisis at all, we incline to one or other of these alternatives. In our heart of hearts many of us know that they are both dangerous fallacies.

But there is a third way. We can understand the current age as an ecological Passiontide. There will be hope and joy – as there always is in God – but much has to be stripped away if we are to get there. Here in the consumer economies of the

global North, we must first confess our complicity in the self-interest and conventional violence that are crucifying the Earth.

Our true well-being rests in learning to live at the scale of our creation: then we will be reconciled with our own nature. That hope underpins much of what we do in Green Christian, particularly on Joy in Enough, our campaign to build a just economy within the ecological limits of the Earth. Economics has withered to a 'dismal science' in the hands of a technocratic elite; we want to rescue it and see it revitalised as a joyful art in which all have a part to play.

We're creating an interactive, accessible set of 'café conversation' modules, enabling groups of people to reimagine economics, and make practical choices together which prefigure a new economy. We're collecting case studies, such as repair cafés, co-operatives and alternative finance, which show a new order already breaking through. We're forming partnerships with other campaigns, so that together we can build a movement. And we're preparing a public declaration calling for transition to a sustainable economic model, to be signed by church leaders and opinion formers.

We are in no doubt of the scale of these ambitions – nothing less than a transformation of the economy. The support of the Passionists, financial and moral, is vital to help us unlock both the funding and the energy we need. Green Christian is known for

being at the leading edge of Christian ecological witness, but we are a small national charity of about 850 members. We were formed in 1982 to build a bridge between Christianity and the Green movement, and, although the 'integrity of creation' is now a mainstream Christian concern, there is still much further to go before the churches fulfil their prophetic vocation.

Meanwhile we are here to help Christians in the UK, with or without their churches, to grow in radical Christian ecological discipleship, through practical and spiritual formation, publications and events. We offer a creative community, where people can grow in prayer, gentle lifestyle, public witness, and mutual encouragement – and help others do the same. A co-operative ethos has always been important to us, and many of our members take an active part in sustaining and developing our work.

For times like this, we have to be in the business of courage. It is the Passion that gives me the courage I need: courage to notice the unfolding trauma of the Earth; courage to grieve what we witness; courage to find the power-to-act that lies beyond illusion; courage, finally, to set out for the joy that costs everything, because in it we are reconciled with all of life.

To find out more, please visit:

www.greenchristian.org.uk
www.joyinenough.org

PASSIONIST GRANTS PANEL NEWS

The Passionist Grants panel was able to meet courtesy of Zoom at the end of May 2020. The panel recently welcomed a new member, Emma Atherton (Steve's youngest daughter), whose experience in immigration law and involvement in a variety of groups working for social justice will be a considerable advantage to the deliberations of the panel. Not only that, but Emma's arrival significantly reduces the average age of the panel too! In May, seven grant applications were successful and were recommended to the Provincial Curia for awards. Amongst these were appeals from an environmental group which campaigns to raise awareness of damage done by extractive industries to indigenous peoples and land in the developing world and from organisations working to provide accommodation and furnishings to refugee families.

COP NEWS

The Community of the Passion has been able to meet on a weekly basis during 'lockdown', thanks to the technological access provided by Zoom. The Community met for liturgical reflection and prayer over the Easter



Triduum and it went so well that there was a consensus among members that such meetings should become a weekly feature on Sunday afternoons. The recent easing of 'lockdown' has seen a change to meeting on a fortnightly basis. The Core Group continue to make great strides in paving the way for greater autonomy for the Community.

JESUS AND THE PASSION OF AN ARTIST

by Martin
Newell CP

HOMILY AT THE FUNERAL OF FR JOHN SHERRINGTON CP

A long time ago, someone said that to understand John Sherrington, you always have to remember that he was an artist first. And then of course he was a Passionist. And then an ordained priest. As a Passionist, the image that John seemed most fond of was that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, standing at the foot of the Cross. For John, his Passionist vocation was first and foremost about standing at the foot of the Cross, standing with the crucified of today, in solidarity and with love, and finding God and Jesus with them, among them and in them. It was about finding, in his own phrase, 'sites of suffering' and standing there, staying there, being with those in whose wounds we can see the cross of Christ. And in whom, especially, we can see Jesus.

But John perhaps brought a particular artist's way of seeing this, of living it.

It seems to me now, that one way to understand how John tried to live his life, is that he was trying to live as an icon. An icon of Mary, mother of Jesus, standing at the foot of the Cross, yes. And an icon of Jesus in His life, Passion and Resurrection. I hope that John, as an artist, would appreciate that image. After all, after the Resurrection, Christ lives in us all. We are all, 'after the Resurrection', living presences of Christ in the world: a Christ who is now always the Crucified and Risen One, who brings us hope of God's love, both in this life and the next.

One of the things about an icon, is that it is not a photograph. It's not trying

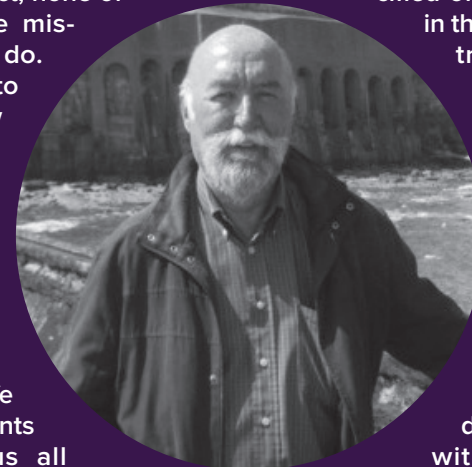
to be an exact copy of the person it's trying to represent. An icon writer is instead trying to pick out, in a stylised way, some of the key features of the subject, which seem to the artist to be the most significant.

John wasn't perfect, none of us are. He made mistakes, like we all do. He wasn't trying to be the new Messiah either. But in the way that an icon, a work of art and beauty can touch us at a deep level, beyond words, I feel John and his life and his commitments have touched us all deeply, beyond words. For me, over the years since he was the first Passionist I got to know, even when I have seen very little of him, he has always been a presence in my life, showing the way along a path, both inspiring and challenging.

An icon of the Risen Christ, like the

risen Jesus himself, would not be without wounds. Jesus' hands, his feet and his side still showed the scars of His passion and cross: the consequence of his commitment to live in solidarity with the poor and outcast, the oppressed and neglected and crucified of his time and place, in the name of God. This truth of Jesus, it seems to me, was true of John too. John did not try to hide or remove his wounds. Instead, he allowed them to give him that extra sensitivity to those suffering around him, to deepen *his* solidarity with the poor and outcast, the oppressed and neglected, in the name of God.

To his life as a street sweeper, carer and trade unionist, John brought his working class background in a mining town. Perhaps, if you will excuse the pun, he 'mined' these experiences to understand what he could contribute



in solidarity to the struggles for liberation and racial justice in the Philippines and apartheid South Africa; to life in the house with young local homeless people in New North Road, and to the community on the Pembury Estate.

To his work with people living with HIV and AIDS, and those struggling with feelings and experiences of rejection by God, Church and society because of their sexuality, John brought a deep sensitivity borne of personal experience and struggle.

To his life as a Passionist, John brought his experiences among and as one of the crucified of today.

He brought what he experienced and what he learnt from his life as a sweeper, care worker and trade unionist: he brought what he learnt from and among those rejected so often by both Church and society. To his membership of the Church, among an Order that traditionally worked to keep alive the memory of Christ's suffering and Passion by preaching, John brought what he learnt from his experience of vulnerability and powerlessness, as well his stutter, which he overcame but never lost. His vulnerability and his sensitive nature as an artist didn't

always make life easy for him, but he never gave up.

What John learnt from these experiences of shared vulnerability, he brought to his way of being vocations director, director of studies, and Provincial: He brought them to the way he initiated the Community of the Passion, and to the way he was a good neighbour and friend in Byker. I'm sure he brought these experiences to other parts of his life too.



John Sherrington CP with John Thornhill, Community of the Passion member.

Like any good icon writer, John's deep passion, through all his life, was never to stop communicating and living a deep feeling for the love of God. And despite his struggles with really-existing Christianity and Catholicism, with the Church and with us Passionists, John always sought out and found people in the midst of all that, sincerely seeking God, and

loved them for it.

I don't know if he knew the phrase, but I think as an artist John would have appreciated the saying of Dostoevsky that "the world will be saved by beauty". Beauty is of course not just physical. It can be musical, moral or spiritual, to name just three. But it seems to me that the world will be saved by beauty

because of the way beauty can inspire people, can lift their spirits.

Powerful oratory or propaganda can inspire people for good or ill. True beauty, on the other hand, it seems to me, can only lift the spirit and inspire aspirations to the good, the beautiful and the true. John sought to live a life that was faithful, full of love and beauty. Like an icon writer, he wasn't about filling every space with busyness, but getting the important lines just right. Beauty works at a deeper level. I believe John's influence has been something like that too.

In our Gospel reading today, we heard Jesus speak about the 'seed dying and yielding a rich harvest'. John did not generally, even during his four years as Provincial, have a high profile ministry, either in the Church or in wider society. In common with many others, his was more of 'a hidden life'. But he planted seeds that have gone deep but which have borne fruit, are now bearing fruit, and I hope and pray, increasingly will bear fruit. Fruit that will last.

John, in the words of our first reading today from the book of Wisdom, allowed himself to experience "testing", and even "punishment, as mortals see it" in this life. Trusting that, in following the Crucified and Risen Jesus, it *would* yield a rich harvest. Only maybe, like the work of many an artist, a harvest that would only be fully recognised after his earthly life had finished.

As St Paul said in our second reading, John, with his gentle sensitivity and sometimes nervousness or reticence

to speak, did not come among us with a show of oratory or clever words, or relying on the strength of his own personality. And he perhaps struggled with that same 'fear and trembling' that St Paul speaks of. Instead, he came with what was essential. Again, in the words of the letter to the Corinthians, John came to speak and witness only to Jesus, and Him Crucified, in the power of the Spirit who makes all things new: that we might depend not on the ideas of worldly power, or of the powerful of this world, but on the power in powerlessness of the God on the Cross.

For this we give thanks. And we pray for John now. We pray for ourselves, and for each other, as we mourn our loss, and heaven's gain. We do this in confidence that our Redeemer lives, that the Lord is our shepherd, and John's too. That John *has* taken his good deeds with him, and gone to a God who he trusted is full of healing warmth and welcome. A God who is full of not only merciful love, but also the joy of a good gin and tonic. For all this we give thanks to God, as we wish John *bon voyage*. Despite my rare venture into French, he's not going to his home-from-home in France: because, despite the impression John might have given sometimes, France is not actually heaven on earth, or paradise itself! But we do indeed wish him *bon voyage*, a sweet journey into the peace and joy of the presence of God. To meet his Mum and his Dad, and all who've gone before him and us. And so we comfort one another in our time of need, offering our prayers and thanks to God. Amen.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE

*an Appreciation by
Ged Murphy*

Fr Christopher Kelly CP

RIP (02/04/1919 - 23/03/2020)

My first memory of Fr Chris is from Ilkley, West Yorkshire, when I was only eleven years old. I was part of a school trip that was set to go out by coach for the day. However, a determined ram was blocking the school driveway. As teachers and pupils stood round scratching their heads wondering what to do, Fr Chris arrived. He walked up to the sheep, grabbed it by the horns and dragged it down the drive and into the nearby field. I am sure that somewhere I still have a black and white photo I took of this event.

A couple of years later, on a hot summer's day, I was helping Br Leo (RIP) in the retreat house kitchen. When all the lunch and washing up was finished I wanted to go down to the town for a swim. As I ambled across the Monastery yard Fr Chris, who was gardening, saw me and asked what I was up to. When I told him, he promptly gave me a hoe and told me to clear the path up to the Calvary and through the woods. Br. Leo told me that in future I should purposely walk past Chris carrying a broom or pushing



Fr. Chris with Ged at a Spurs match

a wheelbarrow. The next day, Chris looked up and saw me but this time he never stopped me. So, I was able to get my trunks and towel and go off for my swim! When I told him this some years later, he said, "He was just an innocent abroad"!

One thing I always admired about Fr Chris was that he treated everybody the same, whether high or low, young or old. He was always even-handed with everyone. He loved the people at St Joseph's Social Club and nothing made him happier than listening to a good Irish band and watching the people enjoy a dance.

When he reached his 100th birthday, after his big Mass and party, he wanted to revisit some significant places from his past. He went to Broadway in the Cotswolds, where he first joined the Passionists (via the backdoor, because

nobody answered the front door!) some 80 years earlier. He took a trip to Sutton St Helens, where he was ordained priest some 75 years ago and on to Ilkley, where he was the rector for many years. We also went to watch Tottenham Hotspur Football Club play against Everton at their new stadium after a parishioner turned up with two tickets for the match.

I asked him in January what he wished to do for his 101st birthday. Would he like a party? He said, "No, nothing" When I asked 'why?' He said, "It gets boring after the first 100"!

As age made him more infirm Fr Chris always appreciated what was done for him and thanked everyone who looked after him. He was much loved and admired by all who cared for him. Chris was a true gent. May he rest in peace.



INTRODUCING

**CHRIS
DONALD**

In April, Chris Donald began working part-time for St. Joseph's Province as a Media and Communications Worker. Chris's role will be focused on developing the Province's communications strategy, and expanding the ways we keep alive the memory of Christ's Passion through the use of digital and print media.

Here, he tells us a bit about himself:

It's great to be exploring this new role as part of the Passionist team. Starting a new job under national lockdown is a bit surreal, but everyone has been very gracious!

I live in South Birmingham - not far from Austin Smith House - with my wife, Ayomide, and my 2-year-old daughter Erin. My wife and I are part of a faith-based arts organisation called Sputnik, which ministers to Jesus followers in the creative industries and helps to fund their work. I'm an artist myself: a musician foremost, but I also write fiction and create digital art. Ayomide and I are also part of a local evangelical church community.

If there is such a thing as a 'conventional' job, I don't think I've had one. In my early twenties I fell into professional graphic design, and ended up self-employed for over 10 years, doing bits of everything - film editing, music production, making t-shirts - some of it paid, some of it practically voluntary.

At the same time as I started work, I came to faith, and lived in a small community with other believers in Coventry, for several years. Life was rich with close fellowship, lots of art, and volunteering in the local community. Although there was a youthful naivety there, it's still etched on my mind as one of the formative experiences of my faith.

In recent years I've been discovering more about my Scottish ancestry and the roots of Celtic Christianity, partly out of a desire for my daughter to know it, along with her Nigerian heritage on the other side! In 2018 I took a 10-day pilgrimage (on bike) with a friend, around the West Coast of Scotland. Traditional Celtic pilgrimages have no 'end point', but we did pass through Iona, as you might imagine.

I love the storytelling inherent to Celtic faith, the mixture of myth and history; the instinctual understanding of ecology and our place in nature; the simple assumption of socialist values and localism. I might be getting a bit 'rose-tinted', but I've found a lot there that both inspires me, and feels like home. It's strengthened my passion for land reform, ecological revolution, and much more.

I'm glad to be working with the Passionist Family. I'm looking forward to meeting people and hearing your stories; hopefully it won't be too long until it's safe to do so!



DOMINIC & COVID-19

A MAN FOR OUR TIMES *by Ben Lodge CP*

The new normal is the “in” phrase, but the reality is we live in not so strange times.

It is, and has been difficult for many to cope with the pandemic: physically, emotionally, spiritually. But I would like to suggest that in fact the situation we are facing is not so new or strange.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus

encounters lepers on several occasions. Leprosy was contagious, dangerous, frightening (cf. Covid-19) – and led to expulsion from the village or town. Self-isolation/quarantine. People lived in fear of this terrible disease for which there was no cure.

Round about the year 1350, 100 million people plus died of the Black Death in Europe. Again there was no known cure, but there are records of entire

villages self-isolating. People lived in genuine fear.

The game-changer has been the development and availability of antibiotics since the Second World War.

Several times Dominic Barberi and Ignatius Spencer travelled from England to Rome, often travelling overland to Marseille or Genoa, and then sailing to Civitavecchia where they would spend several days in quarantine before going on to Rome. The two diseases Europe lived in fear of were cholera and typhus.

During his novitiate in Stone in 1847, Ignatius (already an ordained priest), was sent to minister to the occupants of the workhouse – many of whom were suffering from cholera and malnutrition. Eventually he succumbed to the disease and was given less than two hours to live. Ignatius was one of only a few of the early Passionists in England who survived disease, but at no point is there any record of any them fleeing from the people for their own safety.

The annals of the Province for 27 August 1849 record that Dominic died suddenly at the Railway Hotel in Reading while on his way to Woodchester. Fortunately, he had Fr. Louis with him who had just returned from Australia. Dominic had made up his mind to travel alone, but Fr. Louis wanted to visit the Superior of the house in Woodchester. At first Dominic would not consent, fearing that it was offending against poverty, but having gone into the chapel to pray, changed his mind and ordered Fr. Louis to

prepare for the journey.

As they journeyed by train Dominic experienced excruciating pain around his heart, with the result that he was obliged to be lifted off the train at Pangbourne station. As the cholera was then sweeping England, and Dominic was vomiting, it was presumed his attack was cholera. He was refused accommodation at the Inns, and was obliged to lie for an hour on a little straw in a cottage owned by a Protestant.

The annalist comments: How this must have reminded him of the suffering of the Divine Babe of Bethlehem. There lay the worn-out missionary who had prayed and toiled for so long for the conversion of England, in that bleak desolate-looking little cottage abandoned by all, for whose salvation he thirsted, with only a companion kneeling by his side to prepare him for eternity. But the coldness and want of hospitality of the people gave him no concern. Fr. Louis had just time to administer the last Sacraments, and to receive some instructions about the governance of the Province.

At the arrival of the next train he was lifted in and conveyed to Reading, where at the Railway Hotel he experienced every attention. But his complaint was beyond all human succour and at about three o'clock P.M. he died abandoned and almost alone, but he died in the poverty he had practised and the solitude he loved. The corpse that evening was removed to London and thence to the little chapel in Stone, Staffordshire.



*May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus
Christ and the sorrows of Mary our
Mother be always in our hearts.*