

FORMATION AND CATECHESIS

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Passionist Mission and Evangelization: A Living Crucifixion with Christ

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This catechesis highlights the rhythmic source and resources of Passionist mission and evangelization. The SOURCE being the Passion and Death of Jesus Christ. The RESOURCES are two-fold: **our Passionist communities** partaking of the stupendous love ensuing from our Lord's Passion and **the signs of the times** pointing to the crucified of today with whom we share such love. In animating our charism, the *Memoria Passionis*, St. Paul of the Cross was inspired by the Apostle Paul's *desideratum* for every Christian community: "We Preach Christ Crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23). This reflection likewise presents Passionist evangelization in view of that *desideratum*: WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED. The FIRST section deals with the evangelical nature of that "WE" gathered by St. Paul of the Cross; the SECOND presents the radical



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evangelizing dynamics of “*PREACHING*” that every Passionist community undertakes; and the *THIRD* section reflects on the vitality of “*CHRIST CRUCIFIED*,” which calls for a daily evangelical fusion of Christ’s Passion and the crucified of today.

Evangelization in the Crucified “*WE*”

Today, there are plenty of social issues that zealous evangelizers may choose as mission topics: the disintegration of families, the displacement of youth, individualism, migration and refugee crises, ecological issues, digital hyper-relationships, children and women’s plights, miseries due to war, famine, the global pandemic, and so on. For these issues, there are global agencies and non-governmental organizations that are readily attentive. Accordingly, in our Congregation, many of our skilled and dedicated Passionists embrace these issues for some specialized or “*à la carte*” apostolates. Nevertheless, a more fundamental Passionist response to these issues goes much deeper than crisis intervention and strategic measures. We respond by way of *COMMUNITY* inseminated by the love springing from the Crucified Christ. Such a Crucified *COMMUNITY* disseminates the Passion of Christ to offset disintegration, displacement, superficial relationships, and palliative responses to human suffering.

At the time of our Lord Jesus Christ, there were issues and crises easily comparable to what we have today, some even worse: imperial subjection, intra-religious discrimination, an unjust economic situation, and so on. Christ responded to these situations not just by way of conflict resolution programs but by digging deeply into the root of those crises—humanity’s utter disconnection from God, the source of all life and this world. The entire evangelical program of Christ sought to gather all people into the Kingdom of God—*EVANGELIZING* is, primarily, a gathering. The apex of such evangelizing (gathering in God’s love) is accomplished in Christ’s crucifixion: “*And when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself*” (John 12:32).

St. Paul of the Cross endeavored to sustain such evangelizing communion effected by Christ. In the *Memoria Passionis*, St. Paul connects daily life with the Passion of Christ not just by way of psychologically remembering what happened two thousand years ago or by mere reenactments as undertaken by visual artists and Passion theater performers. St. Paul of the Cross undertakes *REMEMBERING* by pursuing daily union with Christ’s suffering—1)



in contemplation—prayer and mortification; 2) by sharing such a crucified communion with his first companions (community); and 3) by spreading such overwhelming love to the crucified of his time like the people in the Tuscan marshlands.

PREACHING as Daily Living of the Passion

There have been debates regarding the specific forms of preaching that we should prioritize—retreats, popular missions, parishes, schools, JPIC, and other alternative apostolates. There are considerable reasons and motives why any of the above were preferred by St. Paul of the Cross and prescribed by the early fathers of our Congregation. Whatever grounds exist for the primacy of any of the above forms, however, we return to our radical understanding of Passionist preaching—*LIVING* Christ Crucified. For St. Paul of the Cross, “*We Preach Christ Crucified*” evangelically means *WE LIVE CHRIST CRUCIFIED*. “*If the message of the Cross has not first penetrated our own lives, we ought not presume to proclaim it to others*” (CP Rule and Constitutions, #9).

Hence, St. Paul of the Cross emphasizes this radical ripple of Passionist evangelization: 1) we live the message of the Cross in our daily union with the Crucified Christ; 2) we share a crucified life with our brothers (and sisters) in community—crucified





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amidst the joys, pains, consolations, frustrations, health, illness, abilities and frailties in community; and 3) this lived message of the Cross is our very proclamation to others—our very link and union with the crucified of today. With this radical preaching, by way of living and witnessing the Passion of Christ, evangelization becomes easily applicable to any form of preaching—be it retreat, popular mission, parish mission, indigenous peoples mission, and so on. When WE LIVE CHRIST CRUCIFIED, all specific forms of evangelization follow.

It has to be constantly noted that this LIVING is communal living or communal preaching—WE PREACH. A Passionist preaching in a parish, for example, draws from his Passionist community life the content of his preaching to the parishioners. He also brings back to the community the fruits of his preaching—whether spiritual or temporal returns, affirmative responses, emotional fatigue, and allows the community to own it and re-energize the individual preacher. These are some of the benefits of the six-month-enclosure and six-month-apostolate rhythm in the early years of our Congregation. We balance the centrifugal (outward) and the centripetal (inward) dynamics of our communal apostolic life.

THE CRUCIFIED OF CHRIST TODAY

A recurring question that challenges our Passionist charism concerns the seeming reductionism of the redemptive act of Christ into pathocentrism or over-emphasis on suffering. St. Paul of the Cross, however embraced the Passion of Christ not in terms of passive submission to the pervasive reality of suffering but of drawing from the love springing from the suffering of Christ. The vulnerable love breathed out by Christ on the cross remains the most powerful antidote to the sufferings of today, which are largely traceable to humanity's distancing from God, distrust among people and nations, abandonment of commitment and responsibilities toward the weak and the young, individualism, hunger for power, and so on. For us Passionists, we do not stop preaching Christ Crucified until there are no more crucified today.

When I was still a student working in a kidney hospital in Manila, a nurse asked me, *“Brother, I saw a very bloody movie on the crucifixion of Christ—that really necessary...that violence and unbearable suffering to be watched over and over again?”* I answered, *“Try telling that to a cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy—try telling her ‘I cannot stand with you in that pain—is it really necessary?’”*

We preach Christ Crucified by standing with those who are crucified in hospitals, in jails; crucified by hunger, by spiritual emptiness, by relational voids and never get tired of staying with them as Christ suffered for us. For someone who loves, there is no respite from being present and sharing the cross borne by the beloved. Hence, the Passionist mission is a creative tarrying with the cry of the suffering from all corners of the world throughout the ages. Pope Francis addressed the participants of the 2018 General Chapter with the same encouragement: *“In this age of change...you are called to be attentive to the presence and action of the Holy Spirit, reading the signs of the times...St. Paul of the Cross was very creative in responding to the needs of his time, recognizing...that ‘the love of God is ingenious and is proved not so much by the words, as by the deeds and examples of those who love’ (Rule 1775, XVI). Creative fidelity to your charism will allow you to respond to the needs of today’s people, staying close to the suffering Christ in order to bring his presence to a world that suffers.”*

