

THE LOVE OF THE PASSION

The title contains two meanings. It refers to the love of the Passion that fills, inspires and motivates every Passionist. The Passion is shorthand for the crucified Jesus who willingly suffered and died for love of us. The second meaning refers to the kind of love that is revealed to us in the passion of Jesus. It is the love of one who willingly lays down his life for his friends. I want to spend some time looking at this second meaning.

The English word passion is often used to indicate the depth of emotion and commitment one brings to a situation. To have passion about something is to be on fire with enthusiasm and commitment. To be passionate about something is to give one's whole attention and energy to that thing. Jesus also had passion in this sense because he gave his whole life willingly to fulfill his mission and his Father's will.

The word passion also has the meaning of being passive, of suffering something, of being on the receiving end as opposed to being active or the protagonist. Passion and passivity are intimately related. In his passion, Jesus was set upon by others who inflicted pain and suffering on him. He was on the receiving end of cruel beatings and other forms of torture. He was tied, led away, slapped, accused, badly treated, crucified. This helpless passivity is an important meaning of passion.

In the first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul explores the significance of the passion in terms of power and wisdom. He contrasts the power and wisdom of God manifest in the passion with the power and wisdom of those who crucified Jesus. From a human point of view, the cross is the manifestation of human weakness and foolishness. However, Paul wants us to see in Jesus on the cross the power and wisdom of God.

It is the utter passivity and helplessness of Jesus in his passion that makes him seem foolish and powerless. He is in the hands of others and he has no control over the events as they unfold. He is on the receiving end. He is being dominated and controlled by more powerful forces. He is not in the driving seat. This is the strange way God chose to reveal himself and to save the world.



THE LOVE OF THE PASSION

Christians try to ponder the mystery of the cross and learn its lessons. It is not easy because like all human beings, Christians also want to be wise and powerful in the usual human ways. The history of Christianity shows the Church's preoccupation with human power and human wisdom translated into forms of authority and teaching that show little sign of the weakness and emptiness of Jesus on the cross. Jesus emptied himself while the Church has too often tried to exalt itself with the trappings of human power and wisdom.

Passionists like all Christian missionaries go into the world with a desire to give, to communicate, to help others, to be dispensers of good news and good things. This immediately puts them in the role of the dominant. The Christian evangelizer is one who already possesses everything that is of value and in his generosity is willing to give to those who are without. We can see this model at work in many forms of missionary activity. Here we see enacted the classical roles of master and servant, the dominator and the dominated. It is not always expressed in cruel and inhuman ways but it is still a subtle form of domination and control.

The love we find in the passion is not the dominating love of one who possesses all and cheerily dispenses it to others. It is the love of one whose life is emptied of all agency and attractiveness. It is the love of one who is passive, helpless, on the receiving end of cruelty and some kindness. The love that flows from the passion has no trace of the dominance, arrogance, over-confidence of the powerful givers but is the helpless love of one who is totally dependent.

I want to suggest that the love Christian missionaries are sent to share with the world is this kind of passion-love. It is not love dispensed from on high by people who possess everything. It is rather the love that comes to life in the humble attitude of open, respectful receptivity. It is the love of hospitality offered to the stranger, the love of respectful listening to the other, the love of humble acknowledgement of the gifts and blessings coming from the other. It is not a form of domination and control but of humble and respectful acknowledgement of the God-given dignity of every person and of all creation. It is by approaching our neighbor in this attitude of humble passivity and receptivity that we will bring to life the saving and transforming love of God in the world.

This new approach is not a ruse to win the other but is an attempt to learn from the love of Jesus on the cross. The only power that can save, heal

THE LOVE OF THE PASSION

and transform the world is the power of love revealed and made present in the humble passivity of Jesus on the cross. This is the passion-shaped love that Passionists witness to and hope to share with the whole world.

The world today is threatened by the hatred and violence that arises from fear of the other. The Christian missionary is sent to meet every other who is seen as a bearer of God's image and a bearer of unknown gifts. Our mission is to affirm the image of God in every human being, and to encourage the flowering of their gifts for the good of the world. This can only happen when we approach our brothers and sisters with humble respect and receptivity.

Passionists are seeking to renew their mission in these changing times. The image of Jesus helpless and passive on the cross shows us how to love in a non-dominating way. We are not crusaders, charging into the world to attack the enemy. We are the disciples of Jesus who loved his own to the end and showed us the way of humble service and love of all people, Jews and Greeks, good and bad, male and female, believer and non-believer. Because our lives are centred on Jesus crucified, we are called to be masters of his passion shaped love.