

SUPERIOR GENERAL'S



LENTEN MESSAGE 2022



Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

I greet you with Christ's peace and as we begin this opportune time of Lent, filled with great hope, I share with you some thoughts on the subject of **inner healing** which you might like to make an area of focus for your reflection and call to repentance and renewal in this graced time.

After having battled through and surviving the difficult years of the global Covid-19 pandemic (which continues to be alive in our midst), the world is now facing the threat and possibility of a global war with the recent military invasion of Ukraine by Russia which has already caused senseless loss of lives and untold suffering for people on both sides – and beyond. We express our hope and hear the yearning for peace from all people of good will. However, is this hope and yearning for peace simply a cessation of the present conflict, and an absence of war? Surely, this is our desire for the sake of those who are trapped in the present suffering. However, in the context of our Lenten pilgrimage, I propose that we go deeper into ourselves and listen to where the Lord is calling **us**, calling **me**, to be truly **renewed** – as is the goal of this *'kairos'* (favourable, right, opportune) time, LENT!

I recall the beautiful song (in English) called: *Let there be peace on earth*. The lyrics of this song was written by Jill Jackson and the melody composed by her husband Sy Miller in 1955. I quote here from a stanza of the lyrics:

*Let there be peace on earth,
and let it begin with ME;
let there be peace on earth,
the peace that was meant to be.*

The words of this song need to be understood within the context of the author's life. In an interview, Jill Jackson talked about her background and the context of the song. She said:

"When I attempted suicide and I didn't succeed, I knew for the first time unconditional love—which God is. You are totally loved, totally accepted, just the way you are. In that moment I was not allowed to die, and something happened to me, which is very difficult to explain. I had an eternal moment of truth, in which I knew I was loved, and I knew I was here for a purpose."

If we yearn for peace, then we must be peacemakers; we must be **at peace** ourselves. My desire for peace must begin with ME. Am I at peace with myself? To find my peace, the peace offered by Christ, I must clear the path of everything which is an obstacle to peace within me. Often these obstacles are unhealed wounds and hurts which need **inner healing**.

Our lives are full of ups and downs; it is not always smooth sailing. We face misunderstandings and there are times when we feel treated unjustly by members of our community or family, the ministry we are in, or by those in authority. These experiences leave us deeply hurt and when we find it difficult to forgive the offender, then we feel very unhappy. There seems to be a big block which prevents us from enjoying peace of mind and leaves us feeling disturbed. In such a situation, many other areas of our life are affected: we are unable to pray properly, we cannot concentrate on our work, and we lack vigour and enthusiasm in our lives. This is when we know we are in need of **inner healing**.

Inner healing is not just about healing the heavy load from the **past** which burden us, but it is also directed at **present** situations, relationships, and **future** fears, anxieties, frustrations and loneliness.

The author, Dr. Gerry Jampolsky stresses that "the present" [NOW] is the only time we have, and so we should not allow the past or the future to have destructive power over us. He says that we are **liberated by love** as we are freed from unfree and unloving attitudes.

*“At the acceptable time I listened to you,
And on the day of salvation, I helped you.”
Behold, **now** is “the acceptable time,”
behold, **now** is “the day of salvation”.*

(2 Cor. 6:2)

In this Lenten time, as we commit to being more loving and present ourselves for inner healing, we come to see that God is more interested in changing **me** and changing **others** – helping us to grow, changing our attitudes – than in changing **situations**.

We can reflect on how Jesus prayed to his Father in the Garden of Gethsemani to take away the chalice/cup of suffering...in other words, to change the situation. But the Father did not do that. Instead, He did something better. He came Himself to share the Passion, so that Jesus was strong enough to move towards Calvary and Resurrection. The Father revealed Himself not as the God of Power, but as **the God of presence**. This opens up the deep meaning of **compassion**, which is **shared helplessness** – the helplessness that generates strong hope because it is founded not on what is human, but on what is divine.

This is the Christian attitude of accepting weakness and finding there the love of God embracing me, as I embrace my God who is ever present in time of need. As Maria Boulding says: *“Our strengths can sometimes be a greater obstacle to God’s work than our weakness.”* Contemplate Jesus in his Passion and gaze upon Christ Crucified on the Cross.

Healing and loving go hand in hand: when you heal, you love; when you love, you heal. To heal is to love, to help oneself and the other person to grow in wholeness...to discover the true real self.

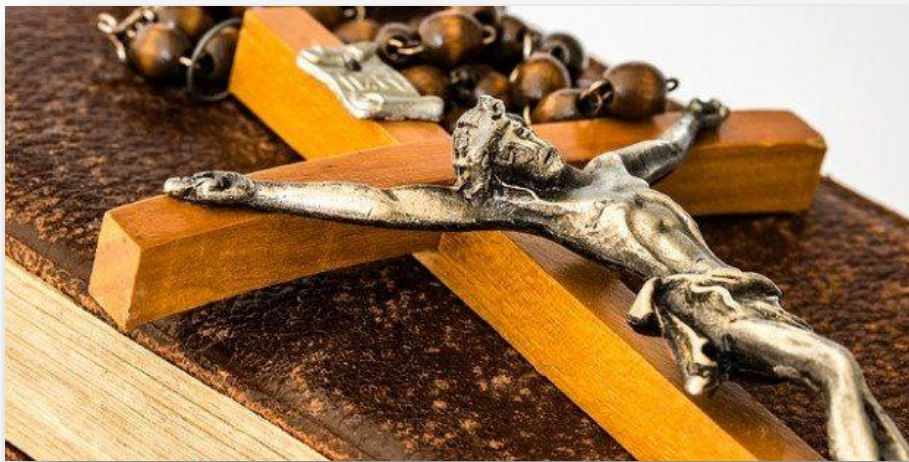
The process of inner healing is not an easy quest to commit to or engage with. We must have the strength to face it. Prayerful reflection on God’s unconditional, non-possessive, creative love for us can make us strong to face the hurts and wounds we have suffered (which influences our lives even now), and it can release the power of God’s presence within us to heal ourselves.

Thomas Merton said: *“The root of Christian love is not the will to love, but the faith that one is loved. The faith that one is loved by God.”* This is the Good News that sets us free...the belief, acceptance and experience that I am loved – unconditionally loved – by God. God’s love is the foundation upon which rests our identity (who I am), our integrity (the truth about myself), and our hope (how I live my life).


“Liberation is the experience by which a person realises in a personal way that he/she is loved and is enabled to act out of this realisation.”

(Gerard Fourez, SJ)

The journey of Lent is the acceptable time offered NOW to those who are open to face their need for inner healing and find the gift of peace. This is an invitation to walk as a wounded pilgrim with Christ in his passion, death and resurrection which, for us Passionists, is a sure way of finding, and promoting, the experience of God's overwhelming love and mercy. Let us adopt the hope expressed by Pope Francis in his Ash Wednesday homily this year:



“May our gaze look at the Crucified Lord, so that our hearts are opened to the touching tenderness of God, and in his wounds place our own wounds and those of our world.”


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