

SOLEMNITY OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

19 October 2025

250th anniversary of his death

DEAR PASSIONIST BROTHERS AND SISTERS,
DEAR FRIENDS OF THE PASSIONIST FAMILY,



This year, the Solemnity of St. Paul of the Cross is a special occasion that coincides with the **commemoration of the 250th anniversary of his death**, which occurred in the late afternoon of **18 October 1775**, here in the Generalate in Rome.

We wish, first of all, to express our gratitude to the Founder for his example of holiness and faith, for his patience and humility, for his profound mystical and spiritual life, and at the same time for his practical and organizational skills.



In order to understand him and the apostolic and spiritual legacy he left us, we need to tune in to his journey, particularly his last years of life, which saw him "leading" and "in charge" of the Congregation until the end, despite the gradual deterioration of his health.

Let us start from 1769, recalling Paul of the Cross' participation in the mission at the church of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, due to the insistent request of the Cardinal Vicar who wanted him as preacher despite the fact that he was weak and indisposed. The result was resoundingly positive, with great participation of the people and many conversions. This was the last mission in which he actively participated.

In the spring of 1770 Paul traveled for the founding of the monastery of the cloistered Passionist nuns in Tarquinia (at that time still a project that would not be realized until the following year) and for his last canonical visit to the communities of Monte Argentario (which, because of the bad weather, he reached partly by ship from Civitavecchia to Montalto, then on horseback to Orbetello and finally on foot). Paul emerged from this long journey increasingly weakened and battered, and from December 1770 until the summer of 1773 he was *"nailed to his bed with pains."*

Precisely during the last five years of his life that he lived almost entirely as a *"sick man,"* he achieved long-awaited results, such as the founding of the Monastery of the Passionist Nuns (in Tarquinia, on 3 May 1771), the establishment of *"a retreat"* in Rome (taking possession of the monastery and Basilica of Sts. John and Paul, on 9 Dec. 1773), and the new approval of the Rule by the Pontiff (with the Bull of Pope Pius VI, on 15 Sept. 1775).

They were years of consolation for him because of the consolidation of the Congregation (which numbered over a hundred religious divided into 12 retreats), the friendship and confidence of the Pontiffs



(who granted him audiences and came to visit him at Sts. John and Paul), and for the support and backing of many friends and benefactors. However, at the same time, there were moments of sadness and weeping, such as the death of Fr. Marcaurelio Pastorelli (on 16 March 1774), the last of his "*companions of the first hour*," and then with the unexpected death of the "*greatest*" of the Congregation's benefactors, Pope Clement XIV (on 22 September 1774).

In 1775, we find Paul infirm, stuck in bed "in his room" at Sts. John and Paul but still committed to leading the Congregation as Founder and Superior General.

The first part of the year was full of activity for him, with significant events, such as the visit of the new Pope, Pius VI (on 5 March 1775); the many visits of friends, benefactors, acquaintances and pilgrims to Rome for the occasion of the Jubilee; the celebrations of the General Chapter (12-15 May 1775) and the Chapters of the two Provinces, of the Presentation (the original province) and Our Lady of Sorrows (the coastal and Campagna regions of Italy) on 15 and 16 May.

He had all the Chapters celebrated in Rome, at the Generalate, so that he could meet personally with all the superiors and capitulars and offer them his words of hope about the future of the Congregation.

Prior to the General Chapter, although weak, he undertook, with the help of a few of the religious, to review, step by step, the Rule of the Congregation in order to propose improvements that would be approved by Chapter vote, and then by the Holy Father. In this action he was "looking to the future," driven by the desire to make Passionist life "more livable," fearing that some rigidities or excessive radicality might be unbearable for future religious.

The General Chapter did not go along with Paul's "*vision*", rejecting many of his requests for changes in the Rule; however, they



discovered that he adhered totally to the Chapter decisions. The same thing happened during his re-election as Superior General. It was his clear intention to end his term of office with the General Chapter, but it was not possible for him, because despite his protests and entreaties, he was re-elected by a unanimous vote on the first ballot, confirmed by a special Rescript of Pope Pius VI.

After the General Chapter, his health condition did not allow him to do anything more. He was able to celebrate his last Mass with difficulty on 15 June 1775, the solemnity of *Corpus Christi*, in the little chapel adjoining his room.

As the summer of 1775 arrived his situation worsened due to his inability to feed himself regularly. Thus began the gradual decline that would lead to his death. His weakness was accompanied by pains of various kinds which he described saying-- *"It seems to me that my soul wants to be detached from my chest; I no longer have in my whole body four fingers of free and painless space."*

Despite this situation, he *"still took an interest in everything, dictated letters to the secretary, gave warnings to the religious and gave talks to the community,"* and he continued to receive some visits, especially from prelates and ecclesiastics, as well as from friends and benefactors. Much of the time he spent in silence, in prayer and in contemplation. Toward the end of August his weakness reached an extreme level, and at the suggestion of his doctor, who considered his end to be near, Paul asked to be allowed to receive Viaticum.

During the morning of 30 August he had all the religious of the community summoned to his room *"wishing to have the pleasure of communion in the presence of the whole religious family; and yet he wished that Holy Communion be brought to him from the church to express his last sentiments to all and to ask forgiveness as Superior General of the Congregation and to*



make the profession of faith." He asked that the religious bring the Blessed Sacrament from the Basilica in a solemn procession with candlesticks and a canopy, and this was done.

In the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, Paul raised his arms exclaiming-- "*My dear Jesus! ...I protest that I want to live and I want to die in communion with the Holy Church,*" and then, aloud, he recited the Creed. Then he added, "*since I for so many years have governed our Congregation, I want to state my last and principal recollections.*" He then transmitted to those present what we know as the "*SPIRITUAL TESTAMENT OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS.*"

Interestingly, although exhausted by weakness and sorrow, Paul lived this spiritual moment with great jubilation, lucidity and clarity, renewing his faith and conveying to his brothers key directives for the future of the Congregation's life.

After this day, Paul's life continued to decline due to illness. Motionless, with exhausted and aching limbs, he multiplied his acts of surrender-- "*I want neither to live nor to die, but only what my good God wants.*"

Those who came to visit him, noted his serene and tranquil state of mind. He used to say-- "*I am sorry that my suffering distresses you; it is nothing to me*" and "*Sit tempus nostrum advenit, moriamur fortiter! When death approaches, let us die courageously.*"

On 29 September he asked to receive Viaticum again, at the end of which he sent for the First General Consultor, the Procurator and the Rector and told them-- "*I die content because I leave the Congregation in your hands; however, I urge you, love the Congregation and the observance.*"

As October was nearing its end, after experiencing many days of silence and sorrow, he was absorbed in prayer and recollection.



On the evening of 7 October, *"he went to Confession because the following day he wanted to receive Extreme Unction, which he prepared for with great interior recollection. On the 8th, the day dedicated to the Nativity of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Father Giovanni Maria [Cioni], at about 2:30 P.M. gathered the whole community, together with Father Vincent [Strambi] who reminded him of the effects of this sacrament and then anointed him. During the rite Paul had his hands folded and shed abundant tears."*

On the morning of 18 October he asked to receive Holy Communion and then asked Brother Bartholomew [his infirmarian] not to let anyone in *"because he wanted to be alone in holy silence spending time with his God."*

Around noon, the Passionist Bishop Thomas Struzzieri arrived. The visit greatly cheered Paul who had been waiting for him, knowing he had been traveling for days.

After the conversation with the bishop, not even an hour had passed when Paul entered the last moments of his life, spiritually assisted by the religious of the community.

"Father Paul meanwhile had his eyes opened and gazed at the large Crucifix that was and is still hanging on the wall of his room, on the left side of the bed, smiling and cheerful, as if it were not he who had to die."

"Suddenly his face lit up and his eyes sparkled, and with great joy he motioned with both hands to those present to make way, and then with one hand made a sign of invitation to come to him ... Those present sensed that this was a vision."

"Half an hour before he expired, Bishop Struzzieri, speaking for those present, pleaded with the dying man-- "Father Paul, in heaven remember the poor Congregation for which you labored so hard and all of us your poor children!" And the Saint with great fervor nodded his assent."



"A quarter of an hour before he died he closed his eyes. His face was serene, as if he were sleeping pleasantly. In this state he peacefully expired, without anyone noticing, having remained with his face turned to the Crucifix. He died in his room overlooking the facade of the Basilica. It was 4:45 P.M. on Wednesday, 18 October 1775."

The Commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the death of St. Paul of the Cross gives us an opportunity to recognize in him a special gift to the Church, and at the same time it invites us to assume our responsibility in taking up his legacy and his expectations for the life of the Congregation.

We thank the Founder for "the memories" he wished to leave to us his children in his "*Spiritual Testament*," to help us safeguard, in personal and institutional history, the purpose of our vocation which is "*to promote the Memory of the Lord's Passion for the salvation of souls.*"

Collecting, then, the Founder's recommendations, we can summarize them with three themes: Love one another in the love of Jesus Christ; Love the Church; Love the Congregation.

First of all, there is the fundamental call for the Congregation's religious to take seriously "the new commandment" of Jesus: "*that you love one another. As I have loved you, so also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you love one another*" (cf. Jn. 13:34-35). This brings us back to the identity of our personal and communal vocation which is not primarily aimed at a service to the Church or society, but at evangelical fraternity that witnesses to the closeness of the Kingdom of God.

The Founder presents it to every Passionist as his first wish: "*Behold, my dear brothers, what I want of you with my whole heart, both of you here present, as well as all others who now wear the Habit of penance and mourning in memory of the Passion and Death of our loving, Divine*



Redeemer, as well as all those who will be called by God in future times to this poor Congregation and small flock of Jesus Christ.”

The Founder was not unaware of the difficulties that fraternal life can present, inviting every Passionist, past and present, to root their vocation in the love of Christ. Becoming "disciples of the Lord" is not automatic; rather it comes from accepting and sharing the preference that God has manifested for each of us.

There is also the Founder's invitation to show *“filial affection to Holy Mother the Church and entire submission to its visible head, the Roman Pontiff. To that end they will pray day and night in their prayers for the Church and for the Supreme Pontiff. They will also strive to cooperate, as much as they are able [...] in accord with our Institute, to promote in the hearts of all devotion to the Passion of Jesus Christ and to the Sorrows of Mary Most Holy.”*

This love for the Church is a call for us to commit ourselves to serve the Christian communities where we minister, as he did, living the "charism of the Passion." Our collaboration with the Church, in its various local expressions, is expressed through our charismatic presence which has as its goal the salvation of people via the proclamation of God's love revealed in the Passion of Jesus. We cannot be mere pastoral workers serving the needs of the local churches; rather we must always guard our specific identity which is the *"Memoria Passionis."* From this we can judge the value and future of our apostolic activities, which can be neither generic nor occasional. Loving the Church means offering her our authentic service as Passionists, which stems from the Passion of Jesus, passes through the suffering of our brothers and sisters, illuminating it with the salvific proclamation of Christ Crucified and Risen.



In his Testament, the Founder entrusted the Congregation of the Passion to his children asking them to love it, guard it, defend it and make it grow. St. Paul of the Cross ended his life serenely and confidently, knowing that the Work inspired by God and willed by Our Lady of Sorrows would be carried on by his successors. Throughout his life, however, he encountered uncertainties and great difficulties, which slowed down the foundation, but without ever losing confidence and Hope.

In 1752 [29 November] writing to Thomas Fossi, Paul confided his fear that he would no longer be able to complete the foundation, but at the same time he was convinced that the Work that had begun would be accomplished by its Inspirer: *"...Now my only expectation is death, and I believe it is closer than my friends think. But first I expect to drink a great cup of bitterness, which is made sweet by resignation to the Divine Will. This will be to see the work begun crushed to the ground, for the appearances are such. I am waiting in peace and hope that after I am in the tomb, the Lord will raise up someone else."*

In 1775, now at the end of his life, he confided to his spiritual daughter Rosa Calabresi: *"I by the grace of God, do not lose heart, but firmly hope in the mercy of God, through the merits of the Passion of Jesus Christ."*, attesting that God had always provided for him in all needs, both for himself and for the Congregation: *"When we were few, God provided for a few; when many, for many."*

Today, we too have reason to be concerned about the future of our Congregation, about the difficulties we face inside and outside, about our limited resources. However, we must always see it as the Work of God, accomplished by Paul of the Cross more with the virtues of faith and hope, than with his human abilities.



Let us therefore love our Congregation, work for it and, if necessary, suffer for it, always looking at it with the eyes of hope which alone sustains us in fidelity to our vocation, despite our limitations and uncertainties.

The Founder's Testament also shows his special gratitude for those who helped him and the Congregation with their generosity and professionalism by granting them a share in the spiritual goods of our Congregation. Therefore, we should not be surprised that on his deathbed our Founder reserved a special promise for the family of the nobleman Antonio Frattini and Dr. Giuseppe Giuliani. *"I leave as a testamentary memorial the prescription that on the day of the death of Anthony and of his wife, Agatha, for whom I pray to the Lord with all my heart that they have a long life, the funeral take place in this church, and that all the religious offer the suffrages that are prescribed for the deceased in the Congregation [...] Since I am also obliged to Doctor Giuliani, who has assisted me with so much charity in my long sickness, I leave him as my testamentary memorial that, if he should wish to withdraw among us to be at the foot of the Crucified and prepare himself for death, he be kindly received and treated with all charity and shown love."*

The presence of these "*Lay Passionists*" in the Testament of St. Paul of the Cross sheds light on all those people who throughout the history of the Congregation, in various places and times, have shared and supported with their presence and generosity, the mission of our communities. More than being an exception, this is a constant that still gives strength and support to the Passionist Charism today.

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the death of St. Paul of the Cross, we therefore want to renew our gratitude to him for his example and his work, allowing ourselves to be challenged by his Testament by seriously taking to heart what he transmitted to us and



entrusting ourselves to his intercession for us and for the Congregation, as he promised: *“I leave you and I will await all of you in paradise, where I will pray always [...] for all of you...”*.

To help us in our preparation for the Solemnity of the Founder, the General Council has decided to accompany the Novena with a moment of prayer and reflection that will be broadcast daily from the room of St. Paul of the Cross, through the digital platform “passiochristi.org”. The desire is to enter the Room where the Founder lived the last moments of his life, making our own the experience of the religious who, at his explicit wish, assisted him with prayer and trepidation, inspired with faith and hope.

We entrust, therefore, the journey of the Passionist Family to the intercession of her who from the beginning accompanied the Founder's inspiration, making our own the invocation he expressed in his Testament:

*“You, O Immaculate Virgin and Queen of Martyrs,
by the sorrows you experienced in the Passion and Death
of your beloved Son,
give us your motherly blessing
while I place and leave all under the mantle of your protection”.*

Amen.

Fr. Giuseppe Adobati, C.P.
Superior General

Retreat of Sts. John and Paul, Rome
7 October 2025
Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary.