



**A Guide to the Room of
St. Paul of the Cross
at the Generalate of
Sts. John and Paul**

Lawrence Rywalt, CP

The Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ

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The Holy Year 2025
The 250th anniversary
of the death of St. Paul of the Cross

Cum permissu:
MOST. REV. GIUSEPPE ADOBATI, CP
Superior General

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INTRODUCTION

During the last three years of St. Paul of the Cross' life that he spent in this Room, he surely prayed many prayers including Holy Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Holy Rosary, and many devotional prayers. However, among these is one that he prayed extemporaneously as he dictated his Last Will and Testament here on 30 August 1775 [see below for additional quotations from this document]:

"Yes, my dear Jesus, I hope, although I am a sinner, that I will be near you and see you in paradise, and at the moment of my death give you a holy embrace to stay united with you forever and to sing your mercies forever and recommend to you the poor Congregation, which is the fruit of your Cross, the fruit of your Passion, the fruit of your death, and pray you to give your blessing to all the religious and benefactors of that Congregation.

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."

For 250 years since St. Paul of the Cross died in this Room on 18 October 1775, innumerable people have visited and prayed in this place. Countless priests, especially Passionists, have celebrated Holy Mass at the altar where the Founder himself celebrated the Eucharist. Although there are objects in this Room that are antiques and could be considered pieces suitable for a museum, this is not a museum. Above all it is a "sacred space" and a place of prayer. The objective of this small Guidebook is to help those who visit this site to experience Paul's presence and become more familiar with his extraordinary life which he concluded within

these walls. Additionally, it is our hope that studying Paul of the Cross' life, the visitor will better understand and appreciate the charism of the Congregation of the Passion that he founded.

This Guidebook, like the others that I have written, was a collaborative effort. Therefore I would like to thank my fellow Passionists, Frs. Alessandro Foppoli, Rafael Blasco, and José Gregório Duarte Valente for the translation of this text from the original English into respectively, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese. I would also like to thank Dr. Eunice dos Santos, General Archivist, for her invaluable assistance during my research. Additionally, I wish to acknowledge the work of Andrea Marzolla, who skillfully and patiently did the digital formatting of this work. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the Superior General, Fr. Giuseppe Adobati and his Council for their encouragement and approval of this publication.

May those who come to visit and pray in this Room receive St. Paul of the Cross' blessing and keep in their hearts the memory of the Passion of Jesus Christ and the Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary: *"I leave you and will await all of you in paradise, where I will pray always for the Sovereign Pontiff, for the Church that I love so much, for all of you, for all the Congregation, for its benefactors, and for all those persons for whom I ought to pray. I leave all of you, present, absent, and future, my blessing: "May the blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, descend upon you and remain with you forever."* (Last Will and Testament)

Lawrence Rywalt, CP
Sts. John and Paul, Rome
18 October 2025



Portrait of St. Paul of the Cross by Guido Francisi, ca. 1918.

I. HISTORICAL NOTES

1. The Arrival of St. Paul of the Cross and the Passionists



Basilica of Sts. John and Paul and the adjacent monastery, ca. 1860.

The original monastery that the Passionists found when they arrived at Sts. John and Paul in Rome in 1773 is partially located in this area of the room used by St. Paul of the Cross. There were religious of various institutes and Congregations that lived here prior to the arrival of the Passionists. The last of these religious were the Vincentians (Congregation of the Mission) who had resided here from 1697 to 1773. During

a moment of political upheaval in the Church due to the suppression of the Jesuits (Society of Jesus), Pope Clement XIV, an admirer and friend of St. Paul of the Cross and the Passionists, proposed that the Vincentians leave this site and relocate to the former Jesuit novitiate and church of Sant'Andrea on the Quirinal hill. On 7 December 1773, the Vincentians left this monastery on the Celio. On the afternoon of



Pope Clement XIV

9 December, without any publicity, the small Passionist community definitively departed from the Hospice of the Most Holy Crucified (originally located near the Basilica of St. John Lateran) and officially took possession of the monastery and basilica of Saints John and Paul. The seventeen religious (twelve priests and five Brothers) sang the *Te Deum* before the Blessed Sacrament in the Basilica and, after praying at the tomb of the martyrs, went up to the monastery. Having greeted the few friends who had gathered with them, the religious prayed vespers and compline. At midnight they rose to chant matins and lauds, praying for the needs of the

Church and especially for their great benefactor, Pope Clement XIV.

On 10 December Paul drew up some norms for the Celian Hill community so that it might be *"the good fragrance of Christ in every place but particularly in this holy city, where, more than elsewhere, holiness of life, modesty, and the pattern of all virtues should shine, and that the religious be holy in body and spirit and life-like portraits of Jesus Crucified for the greater glory of God."* On the same day he sent a circular letter to all the retreats of the Congregation inviting everyone to thank God *"for the new and splendid blessing granted to the Congregation" [...]* He sent a letter to the Pope, expressing his gratitude for the approval of the Congregation as a legal entity and for having given it, in Rome *"a church, a house, and a place to serve the Divine Majesty in holiness and justice all our days, to contemplate lovingly the most bitter sufferings of the Crucified, and to replicate in ourselves the virtues of such a Divine Model."*

The Passionist religious initially had rooms in the wing off the main entrance (currently the "Garbatella" section of guest rooms). Additionally there were rooms, including a kitchen and refectory (currently the retreatants' refectory) along the corridor leading to the current refectory. There was no third floor of rooms. The choir of the community was formed from the façade of the basilica above the portico of the main entrance (currently the general postulation museum) and located at the end of this corridor. The community suggested that the Founder reside in this room (where he died) because he could no longer walk, and it would have been difficult for him to climb the



Pope Pius VI

steps to the area where the rooms of the religious were located. Additionally, since he received many visitors (due to enclosure, women were not allowed in the monastery) this location was more convenient and less disruptive for the rest of the community.

Subsequently, Fr. Joseph Hyacinth Ruberi (1729-1802) was appointed the first Superior of the full community composed of thirty-four religious. This numerous and select community could decorously fulfill liturgical services in the Basilica, ministries in the city, and particularly in the surrounding countryside which from the Celian Hill extended to the marshes and the sea. The re-

ligious also cultivated the garden and received retreatants or other persons who came for confession or spiritual advice. It was Paul's desire *"that in the new retreat perfect observance and great fervor of virtue be maintained."* In order that the religious in the new retreat serve God in a true spirit of virtue and holiness, he fervently exhorted them *"to maintain an inviolable peace and fraternal charity with a decided purpose of tending to holy perfection."*

Now almost permanently confined to his room because of his ailments, Paul would occasionally convoke the entire community, but more frequently he wished to speak with individual students, giving them *"suitable advice in order that they would become men of prayer and true servants of God."* In the meantime, one of the first companions of Paul and one of the original members of the community, Fr. Marco Aurelio Pastorelli (1693-1774), became seriously ill. One day the Founder asked to be carried to his room to visit him. *"They encouraged one another to suffer, they consoled one another mutually with holy discourses, and they separated in tears, never to see each other alive again."* Fr. Marcaurelio died a holy death on 16 March 1774.

On 26 June, the feast of Sts. John and Paul, Pope Clement XIV visited the Basilica. Then he went up to the monastery and greeted not only the religious but also many secular clergy who were present for the occasion. Afterward he went to the room of Paul of the Cross and spent some time alone with him. There was a spirit of intense joy between these two friends during what would be their final meeting in the monastery and Basilica that the

Pope had given to the Founder and his poor Congregation. However, about two months later, Paul's joy was turned into immense sorrow on hearing of the death of the Pope on 21 September. He ordered solemn suffrages to be offered in all the retreats for this Pope who had solidly established the Congregation in the Church and given it a worthy residence in Rome.

After a conclave lasting about four months Pius VI was elected pope on 15 February 1775. Although Paul had not known him personally, on 5 March, during the celebration of the Forty Hours Devotion in the Basilica, the Pope also visited the monastery of Sts. John and Paul. In the original sacristy Pope Pius received the homage of all the religious, offering them great consolation. He then went up to the room where Paul lay on his sick bed. Paul received him with deep emotion. On leaving, the Pope *"gave him an affectionate kiss on his forehead along with his apostolic blessing and left him with the spiritual consolation of having been visited by two popes within eight months."*

Paul had come a long way from that September day in 1721 when he was humiliated at the door of the papal palace on the Quirinal Hill and was barred from meeting the pope. However Paul was certain about the inspiration he had received concerning the Congregation. Now it was a reality in the Church. We may well understand the joy of the religious as expressed by his infirmarian, Bro. Bartolomeo Calderoni (1732-1796), when he stated--*"Divine Providence has disposed that during the short time we have been in this house we should be visited by two popes. It is a clear sign that the Lord*

wishes to protect this poor Congregation in such stormy times for religious institutes." (Cf. *"History of the Passionists"*, Vol. I, Fabiano Giorgini, pp. 195-199).

Paul of the Cross died in this room on 18 October 1775. Following his death the Superior General who succeeded him, Fr. John Baptist Gorresio (1734-1801), wrote a circular letter to the religious of the Congregation informing them of the details of his death. Following are excerpts from this letter:

"It is generally known that for the last five years or so our Father Paul of the Cross, was quite ill. However, on the feast of Sts. John and Paul, Patrons of the Holy Basilica, 26 June 1775, he began to suffer certain ailments and stomach cramps... This made it difficult for him to take the necessary nourishment to keep up his strength... In this dangerous condition, he was too weak to offer the Holy Sacrifice, so he had one of the Religious do this early every morning in the little chapel attached to his cell; during the Holy Mass he devoutly received Holy Communion. As his condition continued to grow worse, on 30



Particular of the reliquary of St. Paul of the Cross (Basilica of Sts. John and Paul)

August he asked that Holy Viaticum be administered to him solemnly in the presence of the entire community and that the bells be rung for the occasion. When all the Religious had gathered in his cell, before Holy Communion, he made a very fervent profession of faith and then presented to all the Religious, present and future a few recommendations, as his spiritual testament.

As he approached closer to the end, it pleased our Lord to ever more refine and purify him *'tamquam aurum in fornace'* (as gold in the fire). Beyond the fact that he could take no solid food, liquid nourishment could soon no longer be given him, in spite of his great thirst, because of the pains that even a sip would bring him; add to this his loss of speech and to his almost life-long rheumatism, sciatic pains, infections of the gum and bedsores. Once he indicated that there was hardly a spot as wide as four fingers in his whole body that was not racked with pain. When asked how he felt he answered he was oppressed with suffering. Sometimes he would say that he felt as if he were dying and that his soul was being pulled out of his body. However, with all this he was ever fully resigned, peaceful, calm, and entirely abandoned to the Divine good pleasure. Thus, once Father John Mary [Cioni] of St. Ignatius intimated that Jesus wanted him to die crucified in imitation of Him. Immediately he indicated he was most content with whatever was pleasing to his God.

On the morning of 18 October, the feast of the glorious St. Luke, to whom the sick Father Paul was very devoted, he wanted to receive Viaticum once more and for the last time. In the afternoon, he received a very agreeable



Bro. Bartolomeo Calderoni

visit from one of his first companions in the Congregation, one whom he loved and revered greatly, namely Bishop Struzziere... This visit was quite short. The Bishop hoped to have time for a more congenial visit with his Father of old. Nevertheless, this was not to be granted to him. Hardly had he taken a bit of refreshment when he was notified that Father was about to go to heaven.

This is what took place. Suddenly Father Paul felt a violent chill; and he immediately told his infirmarian, Brother Bartholomew- 'My journey is near; call Father John Mary for me that he recommend my soul...' The infirmarian noticed that the patient was growing steadily worse; the entire Community was called and the prayers commending a soul to God were begun... Surrounding the bed of our beloved Father, the Religious were kneeling together with some clergy,

who were making Spiritual Exercises in the Retreat, and Mr. Antonio Frattini, Master of the Apostolic Palace and an eminent benefactor as well as Procurator of the Retreat, with his elder son, Vincenzo-- all in fervent prayer for the dying patient. During the recommending of his soul, Father Paul kept his eyes fixed on the crucifix and on the picture of the Sorrowful Mother; it was clearly noticed that he had the use of all his faculties except that of speech [...]

Since, when he was still able to speak, he often humbly asked that he be permitted to die on the straw mattress, clothed with the Holy Habit and with a rope about his neck, protesting that he wanted to die as a poor penitent sinner, this was done for him; and for it he showed particular gratitude and satisfaction.

A very short time before his last moment Bishop Struzzi said to him: "Be

sure and remember the Congregation and all your sons when you are in Paradise." His sign of assent was particularly fervent and enthusiastic. About a quarter of an hour before his death Father Paul closed his eyes and relaxed as if in a peaceful slumber and thus he quietly and tranquilly passed to a better life about 2.30 P.M. on the said 18th day of October 1775, the day dedicated to the glorious Evangelist St. Luke.

The body was left in the cell where he died placed on boards, his head on some bricks, a Crucifix in his hands, his forehead strewn with ashes and a stole about his neck, as the Holy Rule prescribes. Until the following morning, the Religious were alternately guarding the remains reciting psalms and other prayers for his holy soul. On the morning of 19 October 1775, around six o'clock, Father Paul was carried in procession to the church..."



Death scene of St. Paul of the Cross in his Chapel (Basilica of Sts. John and Paul)

2. The Room of our Holy Founder



The room of St. Paul of the Cross, 1918.

This "Room" where St. Paul of the Cross lived during the last three years of his life and where he died actually consists of two rooms: one which served as his bedroom and the other that functioned as a small chapel where he celebrated Mass. Since 18 October 1775, when our holy Founder died, this room has been carefully preserved, along with several items that belonged to him. While awaiting the completion of the cause for his beatification (1 May 1853), various relics of St. Paul of the Cross were displayed for the piety and devotion of our religious and the faithful who visited this site. In early 1853, being certain of his imminent beatification, the superiors quickly worked to prepare this locale, including all the objects that were associated with the Founder during this final period of his life.

Cardinal Luigi Lambruschini (1776-1854) offered half of the amount of money needed for the work-- 300 scudos. Two days after the beatification, by special privilege, he wanted to be the first to celebrate Mass in that room on the altar that was erected and consecrated several hours before by our Passionist bishop, Giuseppe Molajoni (1780-1859). A description of the work performed at that time can be found in the "Platea" (record) of the Retreat of Sts. John and Paul. It notes that "the rooms of the Blessed" were "prepared in the nicest and most tasteful manner. An altar was erected in the room where the Blessed died, that includes a painting of the Blessed at the moment of ascending into glory, painted by [...] Mr. Gregori. There is also a devout image of the most holy Cross that is believed to have been used by the Blessed when he preached holy missions... The adjacent Chapel, where the Blessed celebrated

Mass, is preserved as it was at that time, that is, there is the very altar that the Blessed used with all the decorations that there were at that time: only a few minor objects of decoration and practicality were added to this small chapel".

This arrangement remained virtually unchanged for 64 years. During the General Consulta that took place on February 14, 1918, the Superior General and his Curia studied a proposal for significant changes to the room, given that "after so many years of use it is in so shabby a state that it detracts from devotion and risks dismaying the laity who visit it". Therefore, it was decided, among other things, to cover the walls with a damask cloth, to gold leaf the ceiling and to pave the floor with marble. Thus, it would be similar to "the room of almost all the other Saints who are venerated in the Eternal City which are decorated sumptuously." (Book of the Consultas, 1914-1925, p.149) The work began immediately and was completed before the feast of the Saint on 28 April 1918.

From 1918 until 1967, the room remained virtually untouched. However, by 1967, the year of the 100th Anniversary of the Canonization of the Founder, many visitors, including eminent personalities, proposed the idea that a different appearance could be given to the whole setting, so that at least a visitor could understand what it originally looked like. In particular, the damask wall covering had deteriorated and was discolored and even torn in several places. Therefore the superiors gradually concluded that a general and radical restoration of the room was needed, restoring it as much as possible to its original state when the Saint died there.

During the General Consulta of 1 June 1967, an overall restoration plan was prepared and approved. The actual work, which began in August, took several months of careful and delicate work. On 18 October, having completed the restoration work, it was possible to celebrate Mass and pray in that room, now completely transformed once again. The major restoration work addressed the following areas: the walls were completely freed not only from the damask cloths, but also from any other objects or decorations. The wooden ceiling was restored to its original simplicity, eliminating all the ornaments and colored decorations that had been added. The marble floor covering was removed revealing the original red terracotta tiles that remained. The altar that was previously used [in the room] was removed and was replaced with a free standing one of iron and copper. The large crucifix with plaster corpus, which was used by the Saint when he preached missions, was restored to the wall above the altar. The two large display cases that contain the relics of the Saint that were previously placed on the lateral walls were removed and replaced with a free-standing display case. The door and the transom above the door were freed of all decorations and additions and were restored completely to their original appearance.

While the room inhabited by our Holy Father underwent many changes and renovations, the adjoining chapel, where he used to celebrate Mass, remained untouched, even during this restoration of 1967. (*Acta Congregationis*, January 1967) In early 2017, fifty years after the last restoration of the Room, the Superior General, Fr. Joachim Rego, and his Council, realized that this sacred

space of the Congregation once again needed to be restored. He appointed a committee consisting of a General Consultor and several religious of the local community of Sts. John and Paul, to organize the restoration work together with the guidance of a team of professional restorers.



Death mask of the Founder prepared by the artist Gian Domenico Porta.

After studying the proposals of various experts, a final proposal was examined and approved. The restoration consisted of the following work: restoration of the pavement; repainting of the walls using color schemes of the 18th century; the cleaning and restoration of the wooden ceiling and main door; the replacement of the windows; installation of museum-style lighting; the restoration of the small wooden altar where St. Paul celebrated Mass as

well as the small painting of Our Lady of Sorrows on the altar. Additionally the Chair of the Founder and the Mission Crucifix were restored. Finally a display case was prepared for relics of objects

that the Founder used during his final days in this room and a new, free standing altar was commissioned for the celebration of Mass with larger groups of people.



The room of St. Paul of the Cross, 1967.

II. VISITING THE ROOM

1. The room where St. Paul of the Cross died

A) The scene of his death

At the time of the restoration of 1967 a large painting was commissioned to depict some of the details of the death of the Founder. Paul is presented on his death bed gazing toward heaven. Around the bed are gathered several religious of the community as well as the Passionist bishop Thomas Struzzi (1706-1780) who enjoyed a very special relationship with Paul. The Founder is depicted wearing a rope around his neck (the original may be viewed in the display case). Paul would frequently wear a rope around his neck as he preached public missions as a form of penitence. During the 18th century in Italy, objects such as chains and ropes were worn while preaching missions or during penitential processions as forms of public penance, this being the way in which those condemned to death used to be led to the gallows. Following his death, Fr. John Baptist Gorresio (1734-1801), the Second Superior General, wrote a Circular Letter to

the Passionists informing them about the death of Paul of the Cross. Since he was present when Paul died, he included this detail—*“Since, when he was still able to speak, he often humbly asked that he be permitted to die on the straw mattress, clothed with the Holy Habit and with a rope about his neck, protesting that he wanted to die as a poor penitent*



Painting depicting the death scene of St. Paul of the Cross.

sinner, this was done for him; and for it he showed particular gratitude and satisfaction."

Additionally, the artist used his imagination to add elements of the scene in heaven. In the heavenly scene is: (L-R) St. Paul the Apostle, the Patron saint of Paul of the Cross; Jesus; the Virgin Mary; and Fr. John Baptist Danei, the beloved brother of the Founder who preceded him in death (+1765).



B) The Mission Crucifix

This crucifix is the one that St. Paul of the Cross used when he preached a Mission in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, here in Rome. It was the last mission that he preached 6 years before his death. (A large painting depicting this event currently hangs in the

community refectory of Sts. John and Paul.) The year was 1769 and Paul was in the midst of negotiations with the Holy See for the final approval of the Rule during his lifetime. A new Pope, Clement XIV had just been elected and Paul travelled to Rome to present him with a petition asking for the confirmation of the approval of the Rule. While the examination of the Rule was taking place, the Cardinal Vicar of Rome, Cardinal Marcantonio Colonna (+1793), asked Paul to preach a mission in the city as part of the Jubilee celebration for the election of the new pope. Paul was already an old man (75 years old) and openly acknowledged that he did not have the physical strength of his youth. Consequently, Paul excused himself saying that he was in poor health, and furthermore, he was deaf. The Cardinal replied, *"What matters is that the people who come to listen to you aren't deaf; your voice sounds fine to me."*

However, a few days before the opening of the mission, Paul became ill with a high fever and vomiting. Pope Clement sent his own doctor to attend to him. Paul was deeply impressed by the Pope's kindness and exclaimed that he, who was the "least of the sons of the Church," was unworthy of such attention. The mission began without him; however, three days before the mission concluded, Paul felt well enough to preach. On 17 September, Paul went to the church to preach.

Fr. Giovanni Maria Cioni and St. Vincent Strambi provide some details of the event. Paul was so weak that he needed assistance to get up onto the platform where he stood in place, leaning against his staff, barefooted and with his head uncovered. He began to preach with great fervor and energy in

his voice, as if he had no ailments at all. The people, including clergy, nobility and ordinary people could not believe their ears. He preached with intense "holy apostolic freedom". Many who heard him publicly stated their intention to amend their lives and give themselves wholly to God.

On September 21, the last day of the mission, the crowd was so great that in addition to the Basilica, the square in front of the Basilica was filled with over two thousand people. In fact, there were so many people that the rector of the Basilica feared that the crowd would become unruly and so he requested that a company of soldiers be sent to control the situation.

This was the crowning success of Paul's more than fifty years of apostolic activity. Here in Rome, the place where his dreams were being fulfilled, he was enthusiastically received, and his preaching was a source of great spiritual benefits. In a letter dated 27 September, several days after the closing of the mission, Paul wrote to Fr. John Baptist Gorresio, expressing his thoughts about the event-- "*I ended my mission on the Feast of Saint Matthew. There was a great crowd of people at every session, along with canons, prelates, nobility, common folk of every sort, priests, and brothers in great numbers. All willingly listened to this broken-down, ignorant old man and they were blessed with fruitful results: Benedictus Deus! - [Blessed be God!]*"

C) The small table

Upon entering the Room, on the right-hand side, there is a small, very simple wooden table. It is one of the few pieces of furniture that were in this Room at the time of the Founder. To ver-

ify this fact, there is a small, handwritten note that remains affixed to the table. It states: "*St. Paul of the Cross would lean against this small table as he recited the Divine Office and meditated on the most Sacred Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

During the Processes for the Canonization of Paul, Fr. Giuseppe Vigna stated that "close to the side of his bed, very near to his face, there was a small night-table on which he had a small brass crucifix which, when it was raised, he gazed upon intently [...] Afterward he would pick up the little brass crucifix and would be overwhelmed in tears for love of Him, who *propter nimiam charitatem suam, qua dilexit nos*, [“because of the great love he had for us”, Eph. 2:4] did so much and suffered so much for ungrateful creatures. (Processes, Vol. III, 1437v, p. 429)



D) Relic display case

In the corner of the Room, near the large, concelebration altar, there is a glass-enclosed display case with various objects that St. Paul of the Cross used while he lived here. There are small signs identifying each of the objects.

First shelf: his eyeglasses; hand-held crucifix; small locket with an image of the Virgin Mary.

Second shelf: Books for spiritual reading; a "Sign" (Passionist emblem) that he wore; his hand-held rosary.

Third shelf: Small glass containers for water and wine (cruets) that he used for celebrating Mass; a pocket watch; the holy water fount.

Bottom shelf: the altar Missal for Mass; the penitential rope placed around his neck as he was dying.

E) The Painting of the Child Jesus Sleeping on the Cross

St. Paul of the Cross had this painting for more than 25 years in his room in the monastery of Vetralla (Italy), and then from 1773 until his death in 1775 in this room. However, this subject of the Child Jesus asleep on the Cross predates St. Paul. Frequently, Eastern and Western iconographic traditions closely connected the birth of Jesus with his redeeming death. Therefore, until the Middle Ages, it was quite common to find in sacred iconography representations of the Infant Jesus gazing at the instruments of the Passion or, more commonly, asleep on the Cross. However, the subject was unusual at the time of Paul of the Cross and in fact, there was very little devotion to this image of the Child Jesus lying on the cross in the 17th and 18th centuries

(the century of Paul). How is it, then, that Paul had this painting?

During spiritual direction and in his letters, our Founder encouraged and guided people to meditate and to live in intimate union with the Incarnation and the Passion of Jesus. One of his "spiritual daughters," Sr. Rosa Maria Teresa of the Crucified Redeemer, a nun of the Carmel of Vetralla (VT), assimilated this teaching of Paul so well that she wanted to render it visible in a painting-- although we do not know if she painted it or if she had someone else paint it. In the Spring of 1758, she donated a painting of the Christ Child on the Cross to Paul, who received it with "great pleasure", seeing that the religious had understood thoroughly his thought and his spirituality, i.e., that the Passion begins with the Incarnation. Paul enjoyed the painting so much that he kept in his room and promoted devotion to the same. Thanking the nun, he wrote, "*I greatly appreciate in the Lord the charity you have shown me with the devout and beautiful Bambino, and I wish to benefit from the symbols with which you have adorned it. Truly, to rest and sleep on the cross in the way you have depicted it requires one to be an infant in innocence, simplicity, and annihilation by a true mystical death to all that is not God with total abandonment and perfect resignation on the bosom of the lovable Highest Good.*" (L III, 8 April 1758)

Two years after Paul received the painting of the Child Jesus "reposing" on the cross, he gave it to a woman he guided in spiritual direction and who was suffering from a serious illness, saying: "*contemplating the Child Jesus asleep on the cross, you must learn to sleep interiorly on the cross of suffering in sweet silence, persevering in faith*



and patience". Paul tried to help her to transform her suffering into grace, and encouraged her to accept the cross of illness, so that it could become a means of self-knowledge and human and spiritual maturity. In fact, Paul of the Cross saw the entire life of Christ, from the cradle to Calvary, in the light of the Passion. The mystery of the Incarnate Word is enlightened by the mystery of the Passion. For him, Christmas was not only the historical event of the Incarnation, celebrated as the supreme act of the love of God; that night in Bethlehem reminded him of a Child lying on a cross. In this image, Paul contemplated the Word that took flesh without any comfort, as a victim destined for death. His letters written during the Christmas season show how

he understood and lived the mystery of the Incarnation.

At Christmas 1761, Paul wrote to another nun of the Carmel of Vetralla, Sr. Maria Angela Cencelli: *"I would wish that you celebrate Christmas in the poor stable of your heart, where the gentle Jesus will be born spiritually. Present this poor stable to Mary Most Holy and to Saint Joseph so that they may adorn it with virtues so that the Divine Infant will be happy there. Many years ago, I had an Infant painted on German paper that depicted him sleeping quietly on a cross. Oh, how much that symbol pleased me! I gave it to a crucified person of holy life who was directed by me as long as she lived [...] I wished, as I de-*

sire for you, for that soul to be a child in purity and simplicity and that she sleep on the cross of the gentle Jesus.”

The painting depicts the Child Jesus asleep on the Cross. Along one of the sides of the Cross there is an inscription in Latin of a biblical verse from the Song of Songs, 5:2: “Ego dormio, sed cor meum vigilat” - “I was sleeping but my heart kept vigil”. In the Processes for his Canonization, Fr. Giuseppe Vigna (of Holy Mary) testified about the objects that Paul had in this room while he was

dying, including this painting. He stated: “On the right hand side of his room there was a small painting of the Child Jesus sleeping on the cross [...] The Servant of God looked lovingly at the large crucifix [see above] and was moved by love; then he gazed at the Child sleeping on the cross and he was inspired to accept all that he was suffering out of love for the One whom he loved [...] and since he could not repay the blood [shed by Jesus] with his own blood, at least he offered Him his tears.” (POR 1437v)



Death scene of St. Paul of the Cross in copper, from a portable altar prepared for the Room in 1967 by the artist Adelmo Cialone of Tivoli.

2. The small Chapel



and the Basilica and especially down to the original sacristy of the Basilica. The large wooden chair with a leather seat and back-support was fitted with metal stirrups on either side into which wooden beams were inserted. In this way individuals, frequently his brother infirmarians, could lift it and carry Paul wherever he wished.

Historically, until the reform of the Passionist Rule, all of the Retreats (monasteries) of the Congregation were under strict enclosure, that is, no women were permitted to enter the Retreat beyond the front door. Consequently, when Paul wished to meet with women,

A) The Chair

This was one of the objects that was originally used in this room and it had a special place in the final years of the Founder's life and was adapted to his physical needs. It is also an object that successive generations of Passionists have revered not only because it was used by Paul in his infirmity, but also because it was present during his mystical experiences in this Retreat.

When Paul arrived here in 1773 he was already an elderly man, 79 years old, and had great difficulty walking. Therefore, the community devised a type of chair that could be used to transport him within the monastery



The apparition of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child to St. Paul of the Cross and Rosa Calabresi.



The altar where St. Paul of the Cross celebrated Mass, 1773-1775.

in particular, those who came to him for spiritual direction, he had to be transported in this chair to the original sacristy of the Basilica.

At the time of St. Paul of the Cross the façade of the Basilica was different than what we see today, the result of the restoration of the titular Cardinal Spellman. The space between the three columns on the left and on the right was walled in, creating rooms on either side. The room on the right hand side was the sacristy of the Basilica (the current sacristy was built in 1847). One of the women whom Paul of the Cross met there for spiritual direction was a young woman named Rosa Calabresi (1743-1805). In her testimony during the Processes for the canonization of Paul of the Cross,

she testified that on several occasions, while she was present, Paul “levitated,” i.e., he rose and hovered in the air, while seated in this chair. The following is her description of one of these events (POR, No. 1979): *“During the many times that I had the good fortune to confer with him [Paul] about things concerning my soul, I observed that he became so inflamed, that he remained as if bewildered and out of his senses. Additionally, many times I had the consolation of observing him, not only alienated from his senses, but also in the air, his body elevated from the chair. Furthermore, he was elevated to such a degree that he surpassed with his body the arms of the same chair on which he sat, and in this state he remained for the space of an hour or so with his eyes turned toward heaven, fixed and motionless, without ever blinking an eye. The cheeks of his face were rosy, and his hands were raised in the air in the form of a cross or he had them folded on his chest. His head was surrounded with resplendent rays, that sometimes dazzled my eyes [so much] that I could not keep my eyes fixed on his face.”*

B) The Altar of St. Paul of the Cross

Adjacent to the Room of the Founder is a small chapel situated under the stairwell of the belltower of the Basilica. While the neighboring room inhabited by our Holy Father underwent many changes and renovations, this chapel remained largely intact. Here Paul prayed and celebrated Mass on this very small and rustic wooden altar. It is semi-enclosed in glass and can be viewed beneath the altar cloth and from the right-hand side. The *altar stone* in the center of the altar bears a mostly illegible inscription attesting to the fact that St.



C) The Image of Our Lady of Sorrows

At the time of the Founder, this image of the Sorrowful Virgin was located above the altar where it is still situated. It is by an unknown artist and there is no information about its history. What is known with certainty is that Paul frequently prayed before this image and had various mystical experiences as he contemplated it. Paul shared with Rosa Calabresi one of these episodes that she recounted during the Processes for his canonization (see POR, 2000v). This is her testimony: *"One day after Mass, I was praying in thanksgiving, and behold I heard someone calling me from the image of Our Lady of Sorrows which I kept on my altar in Rome. Then I distinctly saw Our Blessed Lady with the sword in her breast and with tears in her eyes. She shared with me details of her sorrows in words that would have shattered stones. In particular she told me that her sorrows had been most atrocious because of the great love she had for her Son, and because of the incomparable extent of her feelings that were a sea of sorrows. I prayed and asked our Lady Most Holy to tell me about what had caused her the greatest suffering during her Son's Passion. She answered me that the greatest sorrow which pierced her heart was to hear that they accused Jesus of being a deceiver (fraud), and they reproached her for not having raised him well."*

Paul of the Cross celebrated Mass on this altar in this room at Sts. John and Paul in Rome. The altar frontal panel was probably added some time after his death.

An historical note: In addition to St. Paul of the Cross and the many Passionists and other clergy who celebrated Mass at this altar, the young seminarian, Angelo Roncalli, the future Pope St. John XXIII, also prayed at this altar during the retreat he made here in preparation for his priestly ordination (1 to 10 August 1904). In his book, "Diary of a Soul", he wrote—*"Near my room was the room where St. Paul of the Cross died. There, every afternoon, we practiced saying Holy Mass. Everything up there breathed of holiness, nobility and sacrifice. Lord, how I thank you for having sent me to that holy place for my immediate preparation for the priesthood!"*

BIOGRAPHICAL TIMELINE OF ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS

- Birth - Ovada, 3 January 1694
- Baptism - Ovada, 6 January 1694
- He enlists in the military - 1716
- The great vision - Castellazzo, 1720
- Vestition and Foundation of the Congregation - Alessandria, 22 Nov. 1720
- He writes the Rule of the Congregation - Castellazzo, 2-7 December 1720
- Beginning of his apostolate - Castellazzo, Lent 1721
- First trip to Rome - September 1721
- First presence on Monte Argentario - October 1721
- He definitively leaves Castellazzo - March 1722
- Sojourn in Gaeta - 1722-1723
- Sojourn in Troia - August 1723
- Permission to gather companions - Rome, 21 May 1725
- Sojourn at the Shrine of the Civita, Itri - May-September 1726
- Sojourn at the Hospital of San Gallicano - Rome, September 1726
- Priestly Ordination - Rome, 7 June 1727
- First Mass - Rome, 8 June 1727
- Death of his father, Luca Daneo - Castellazzo, 22 July 1727
- Definitive return to Monte Argentario - February 1728
- First formal Mission - Talamone, December 1730
- Foundation of the first retreat - Monte Argentario, 14 September 1737
- First approbation of the Rule - 15 May 1741
- Religious Profession of the first Passionists - 11 June 1741
- Death of his mother, Anna Maria Massari - Castellazzo, 10 December 1746
- Death of his brother, Ven. John Baptist - Vetralla, 30 August 1765
- Solemn approbation of the Rule and of the Congregation - 23 November 1769
- Final visit to the retreats of the Congregation - 1770
- Foundation of the first monastery of Passionist Nuns - 3 May 1773
- Assumes possession of Retreat of Sts. John & Paul - Rome, 9 December 1773
- Death, Rome - 18 October 1775
- Beatification - 1 May 1853
- Canonization - 29 June 1867



The chalice used by
St. Paul of the Cross in this Room.

A Passionist Pilgrim's Prayer

God, source of all grace and holiness,
look with love on us, your faithful people
who visit this holy place where the history
of the Passionist Congregation is retold
and the relics of Saint Paul of the Cross are venerated.
Grant that we may participate in the "grateful memory of the Passion"
and follow the example of St. Paul of the Cross
by witnessing your love.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

