

# OVADA NEWSLETTER

A Newsletter of Passionist Spirituality

Number 1, 2007

## THE PASSIONIST LIFE

While the Passionist charism is truly shared by many, we do see a need to strengthen the inner group of professed men who can commit their whole life – mind, strength, spirit, soul and heart (Lk 10:27) to the promotion of the *Memoria Passionis* (the Memory of the Passion).

Every baptised person is called to follow Christ, but our call to a professed, evangelical life is a call to follow Jesus in a radical way – to live simply and share one's resources, to listen reverently and heed God's word and to give our very selves and dedicate our deepest energy to the good of others.

Today the invitation of God to a young man to give himself totally to a life of poverty, obedience and celibacy is a rare gift. I once thought that a vocation was a gift to the individual – and indeed it is – however, today I also see a vocation as God's gift to a whole Congregation or Diocese.

We all recognise that the last forty years have swept away many social conventions, spiritual practices and community values that affirmed and promoted a choice for a life of poverty, obedience and celibate loving. This is not to judge harshly the spirit of today's society – let us simply note that there are radical differences in the lives our nieces and nephews and those younger people that we know, compared to our own years as teenagers and young men.

Yet we need not stand idle and watch life go by. If we live with resurrection faith then we must be open and searching for the signs of new life that surely are around us. Indeed the recent Passionist General Chapter reminds us that:

*The passion for life and formation inevitably implies also a passion for promoting Passionist vocations. Trusting in the God who gives life, we see vocational promotion as the task of all and so we should present our way life as an authentic way of being human and Christian. We also give proper respect to normal human values, and duly seek to discern (with the help of the human sciences) whether*

*candidates have the gifts and capacities that are needed, to make our life a viable option. (GCD 2000 4.4)*

Certainly the young men and women of today need to pray for the insight to see their vocation and the strength to live it. However, in a like manner, let us strive to present religious life in a meaningful way to young people and let us pray for the grace to attract vocations to the Passionist way of life.

Some weeks ago I was leafing through an American publication in which hundreds of Religious Orders, including the Passionists, advertised their mission and charism. Among the many pages I found a general similarity – warmth, dedication to mission and an invitation to community. Some orders presented themselves through words alone; others used images, captions and questions regarding one's life search or life values. Mostly I just glanced at each order's offerings and turned the page to the next 'vocations ad'.

However one page held me. It was two contrasting pictures of Damien de Veuster (Damien of Molokai). The first picture depicted him as a young man; the second depicted him as an older man whose face was ravaged by leprosy. The caption

beneath simply stated, 'Love changes everything'. It was striking. It was unconventional and counter-cultural. As a strategy is hardly seemed logical, why advertise religious life by means of a leprosy-ridden face? Yet it held me.

Upon reflection I recognise that it appealed to me because it spoke to the values and idealism that inspired so many of us. (Here too I recognise that I am a product of my own family and education etc. and that perhaps such a strategy may not even work today).

However what did impress me about this 'ad' was that it was different. It did not disguise the cost of love and dedication and it spoke the truth in a raw way. Most of all it seemed to be to be an overwhelming affirmation of the power of the cross.

Could it be that we prepare our home to receive vocations



by increasing our fidelity to the Passionist charism and by asking the Crucified One to deepen his influence over our lives and ministry?

### **From that day, the disciple took her into his home**

Can it be that the Spirit is leading us to 'prepare our home' for vocations, but first making a place within our lives for others who share the Passionist spirit? That is, are we being led and 'readied' so that we are prepared for vocations by sharing our charism wholeheartedly with others? Is this one of the ways in which God's spirit is guiding our Congregation? The General Chapter itself reminds us that 'Fidelity to the original charism and to prophetic fraternity are achieved in the measure that we make space for others to journey with us, and become a pluralist family, having Christ crucified as the luminous source that draws all to Himself'.

I do believe that we are addressing this concern. We believe that the Passionist mission will be maintained, that our message of the cross will be heard and that our professed membership will be vitally involved at all levels of our outreach. What we do not know is how this will happen. It is true that we foresee that the professed membership of the Congregation to be a smaller, older group of men. While this 'demographic' is real and may not be ignored, let us face the future in hope.

In part we may face the future with hope because numerous 'lay Passionists' – in yet undefined ways – are prepared to share our mission. God's spirit is leading other men and women – who we see as members of 'the Passionist family' – to make the Memoria Passionis the centre of their life and activity. Many of these lay Passionists stand ready to help us. 'You are not alone', they said to us at the General Chapter, 'the thousands of lay Passionists whom we represent are in solidarity with you, to keep alive the Memoria Passionis'.

In his letter to the General Chapter, Pope John Paul II spoke about sharing our Passionist charism with the laity. The Pope recognised this as 'a sign of ecclesial life, urging reception and development'. He hoped that 'those whom the Spirit calls to draw from the same fonts' will find the religious to be 'brothers and, above all, guides able to form them in an authentic Passionist spirituality.'

Thus our openness to the Passionist family and our generosity in offering formation opportunities to those men and women who associate with us, must surely be a part of the spirit we require to attract new vocations to our professed life. So let us treasure what we have inherited, let us embrace all that we have now and let us strive to be open to the future that God holds out before us.

Partnership with laity does exist, but it is found in a myriad of forms across the Province and means different things in different houses. The advent of the Passionist Companions – joining professed and lay members in a new

entity – is a most exciting development for us. It is one real sign of hope and life for us. Can we not share this spirit even more so with young people today?

So let us pray about this. Let us ask God for wisdom and insight in our efforts to address the reality of the Passionist family.

### **We proclaim Christ crucified ... he is risen**

Each year Easter reminds us that the Resurrection was a gift of God to the Church; Christ came again. Yet the disciples were slow to realise the fullness of this new presence of the one they loved and followed (Lk 24:13–35). Perhaps this is an ongoing aspect of our response to the eternal Easter – we slowly come to see the presence of Christ amongst us as he appears to each generation.

In the particular situation of vocational animation, perhaps we need to ask, 'How is the risen Christ inviting potential candidates today?' In the imagery of Luke's Emmaus story we may ask, 'In what ways is Jesus walking with young people today (24:15) listening to their concerns (24:19), instructing them (24:27) inviting them into deeper communion (24:30) and sending them to evangelise the community (24:33)?'

Let us prayerfully examine our own outreach to young people and other potential candidates. Let us strive as a province community and as individual communities to nurture and inspire anyone who comes closer to us seeking to discover the message of the cross. Like the risen Jesus before us, can we not accompany, challenge, instruct and invite potential candidates to share with us our mission?

Let us presume that anyone seeking to follow God's call in Passionist life will be a person who is already attracted to, and moved by, the suffering of Jesus for us. Someone looking at us will hope to discover the love of Jesus enfleshed in our charism and way of life. Again do we not need to ask God's help to reveal the Death and Resurrection of Jesus more clearly to others?

However, above all, let us be hopeful people. If we are faithful to our charism to keep alive the memory of the Passion, and to the commission of St Paul of the Cross – that we love one another – then surely God will send candidates and associates to join with us in mission.

### **A task for all**

For this, we need the help of the whole Passionist family. Each person associated with us, each Companion, each professed Passionist and each community has a role to play in assuring the future of our Passionist mission.

Once again, my invitation is simply this. Let us pray for vocations and for wisdom and insight so that we may be ready and prepared to receive the gift of vocations.

*The passion for life and formation inevitably implies also a passion for promoting Passionist vocations.*

*Let us treasure what we have inherited, let us embrace all that we have now & let us strive to be open to the future that God holds out before us.*

## THE PASSION OF JESUS IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

*'The Passion of Jesus is a Work of Love'*

(St Paul of the Cross to Sister Maria Innocenza of the Sorrowful Mother, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1757, Letter 1077)

**M**atthew's account of Jesus' passion is a forceful drama that commands two full chapters of his Gospel (26:1–27:66). With sober, controlled language, St Matthew retells the events of Jesus' last hours of life. The rhythm of the narrative is fast paced. It begins with a prelude in which the Passion is solemnly predicted and Jesus' opponents concoct their death plot (26:1–16). Orientation to the decisive moment of the Passion continues with the events surrounding the final Passover meal (26:17–35), where Jesus interprets the meaning of his impending death.

The pace quickens in Gethsemane with Jesus' urgent prayer, followed immediately by the arrival of Judas and the mob who come for the arrest (26:36–56). Jesus is taken before the Sanhedrin where he risks condemnation by fearlessly confessing his true identity, while at the same time Peter denies his discipleship before the servants and bystanders in the courtyard (26:57–75). As Jesus is being brought to trial before Pilate we learn of Judas' tragic fate (27:1–10). The trail before the Roman governor reaches its climax as Jesus is rejected and condemned by his own people (27:11–31). There follows the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus, a scene of almost cosmic proportions in Matthew's account (27:32–56). The drama ends on a muted note of expectation as the crucified Messiah is buried by a disciple (27:57–61) while the leaders nervously insist that Pilate place a guard at the tomb (27:62–66).

[ ... ]

Matthew's 'theology', that is, the significance he gives to the death and victory of Jesus, is the primary goal of our study. The evangelist communicates that 'theology' not by explicit comments but through the very telling of the awesome events of the passion.

*The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, Donald Senior, C.P., Michael Glazier, Wilmington Delaware, 1985, p. 47–48.

## PASSIONIST SYMBOLS



### *The Heart*

**T**he heart symbolises the centre of the person. In the Bible, it represents the inner person; it is the place of the understanding and wisdom, of memory and imagination. The heart has a central role in the spiritual life: it thinks, it decides, it makes plans, it acknowledges its responsibilities. Symbol of love, the heart is, for the Chinese, the cave in which there shines 'the light of the spirit'.

¶ In the *Treatise on Mystical Death* we read: 'I want my heart to be a room for Jesus ... giving him the key alone, so that he can be the sole owner, living there as he pleases and hiding away in it whatever he wishes'.

¶ Many of Paul's letters are prefixed with references to the heart, 'May our dearest Jesus live always in our hearts', 'Long live Jesus, our true Good and the Joy of our hearts', 'May Jesus, who is a fire of love, inflame our hearts', 'May the Passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts'.

¶ The heart remembers the Passion of Jesus which the Passionist Community is to promote; thus when Paul speaks of promoting the memory of the Passion, he does so in terms of the heart.

¶ The memory of the Passion seeks to light the fire of divine love in the hearts of those who are touched by it, and so it is the most effective means for overcoming evil.

¶ The symbol of the heart reminds the one who wears it that they must strive after purity of heart in order to proclaim the Word of the Cross.

## ST PAUL OF THE CROSS ON VOCATION

Let us talk about your vocation. You can have no doubts as to the Divine Will regarding the holy call that has persisted so long. O dearest one! correspond to what the Highest is asking of you. God is calling you to a holy life and for you, etc. So it is not to be wondered that the enemies make such an uproar. The world desires you and, therefore, plants so many snares. It holds out weddings, delights, amusement, happiness. The devil urges them and makes them seem sweeter and more pleasing than they are. The senses would embrace them willingly. What is to be done in this conflict? Retreat to the mountain. Save yourself on the mountain – but more on the mountain of myrrh that is Calvary – and see oneself in the divine mirror that overcomes the world.

This battle God permits for his great servants. And because they have overcome, they are now saints. My dear son, let the world howl as much as it likes. Spit in its face by paying no attention; regard it as hanged. Drink, my son, at the lasting spring of eternal life. Drink from the chalice of Jesus. It may seem a bit bitter to the palate, but how sweet to the stomach of the soul! Your pious mother understands this well, and, if you cannot convince the rest in any way, it will be necessary to flee. You are not alone here; great saints of God did that. What a great thing it would be for you to do likewise. Be patient for a little while longer.

Letter 111, to Francis Appiani, 1736

With regard to your vocation, wait on the loving breath of the Holy Spirit and live entirely abandoned in the divine arms of Jesus Christ, who is mindful of the state in life you should embrace. Be sure that if you are faithful to God, he will open a wonderful path so that you may find a place apt to lead to the highest perfection. But for now take care of yourself as best you can in your home, where you have occasions to exercise great acts of virtue at every hour and every moment. I do not have instruments of penance in keeping with your state. If I had them, I would send them to you. I wish, however, that your instruments of penance be great humility of heart, a subjection in exact obedience to your elders, even to your inferiors, in the house, even to the servant. Oh, what a fine foundation this is to build a high edifice of sanctity! Above all, be mortified in your opinions, especially with your tongue and eyes, keeping them well guarded. A true servant of God, when walking, sees only as much earth as is needed to bury her and goes always recollected in God in the company of Jesus Christ.

Letter 995, to Teresa Palozzi, 1755

## PASSIONIST SAINTS



MAY 16

SAINT GEMMA GALGANI

Saint Gemma was born in 1878 near Lucca, Italy. From her childhood she dedicated herself to meditation on the Passion of Jesus Christ. She was orphaned and charitably welcomed into the home of a deeply Christian family.

She had a singular devotion toward the Eucharist and toward Jesus Crucified. Graced with special supernatural charisms, she offered herself to God for the conversion of sinners. Her ardent desire was to enter the Passionist Nuns but was never realised because of various difficulties, including poor health and the publicity surrounding her extraordinary graces. She distinguished herself as an extraordinary exemplar of holiness in the midst of the world. She had many visions and at times the stigmata, the wounds of Jesus, were visible on her body. She died at Lucca on Holy Saturday, April 11th 1903 at the age of 25.

*I should willingly give every drop of my blood to please Him and to prevent sinners offending Him. I shall be satisfied only when I am a victim, to make reparation for my innumerable sins and for the sins of all the world.*

*Do grant, oh my God, that when my lips approach Yours to kiss You, I may taste the gall that was given to You; when my shoulders lean against Yours, make me feel Your scourging; when my flesh is united with Yours, in the Holy Eucharist, make me feel Your passion; when my head comes near Yours, make me feel Your thorns; when my heart is close to Yours, make me feel Your spear.*