

# OVADA

a newsletter of passionist spirituality

## Sharing the Passionist Charism



To mark the beatification of Pope John Paul II we offer some of his reflections on St Paul of the Cross and the Passionist Charism

*From the Message of Blessed John Paul II to the Passionist General Chapter, 21 August 2000.*

THE PASSIONIST CONGREGATION was born in the Church 'to promote the grateful remembrance of the blessed Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ' (Rule of St Paul of the Cross, 1775), the supreme and definitive revelation of the Trinitarian Mystery, and it draws from the Eucharist the necessary energy for its whole life to become a memory and a following of the One who was crucified and rose again....

The death of Christ on the Cross is the greatest expression of a life that is given. It opens the way to the fullness of endless life which the Father grants his Son in accepting his total sacrifice: 'The Cross is the superabundance of God's love poured out upon this world' (*Vita consecrata*, n. 24).

From the beginning, Passionists have given the faithful the precious service of teaching them how to meditate on the Passion of Christ, which the revered founder defined as 'the greatest and most stupendous work of the love of God'.



Pope Benedict XIII approved Paul's community *vive vocis oraculo* at the Church of the Navicella in 1725

Considering the good you have done, how can I not ask you to continue being teachers of prayer and special witnesses to Christ crucified, drawing from the mystery of the Cross the strength to cultivate generously a passion for life, especially through dialogue and sharing in your communities? How can I not remind you that such a mission demands courage and joy in facing the problems of religious life in every particular historical moment? For the believer the lived moment always has the features of an 'exodus journey', which 'inevitably includes everything that pertains to the mysterium Crucis (the Mystery of the Cross)' (*Vita consecrata*, n. 40).

The Crucified One has loved us 'to the end' (John 13:1), beyond the measure and possibilities of human love. This is the source from which Passionists must draw their own spirituality in a very particular way: to love where it is most difficult to love; to love where love is most needed. Today's society offers endless areas for this special apostolate....

In your Chapter work you have reserved special time for reflection on sharing your Passionist charism with the laity. This is 'one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as communion', which has grown in recent times and is 'a new chapter, rich in hope, in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity' (*Vita consecrata*, n. 54). It represents a sign of growing ecclesial vitality which should be welcomed and developed. I fervently hope that those whom the Holy Spirit calls to draw from the same sources of your charismatic spring can find in you brothers and, especially, guides who can not only share your charism with them, but,

above all, form them in an authentic Passionist spirituality.

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## the memory of the passion today

*On 14 September 1994, Blessed John Paul II sent a letter to the Superior General of the Passionists, Father José Agustín Orbe gozo Jauregui, to mark the Third Centenary of the Birth of St Paul of the Cross, whom the Pope described as 'this great mystic and evangelizer of the eighteenth century. John Paul II pointed out that the Passion of Jesus was 'the central focus of the life and apostolate of St Paul of the Cross who, first of all, had a personal, mystical experience of the Passion and then proclaimed it to others in his preaching and spiritual direction'.*

HE UNDERSTOOD PROFOUNDLY the teaching, especially vivid in the Gospel of John, according to which the Passion of Jesus is also his glorification, his exaltation, inasmuch as it is the obedient acceptance of the infinite love of the Father and his participation in all of humanity. Further, he saw in Jesus Crucified, according to the expression in the Letter to the Colossians (cf. Col 1:15), the living image of the Father, the perfect icon of the invisible God. Some of the expressions through which he manifested his deep understanding of the mystery of the Cross remain justly renowned: 'The Passion of Jesus is the greatest and most stupendous work of Divine Love' (*Lettere*, II, 499) and 'the miracle of miracles of Divine Love' (*ibid*, 726). 'From the sea of Divine Love – he was accustomed to say – flows the sea of the Passion of Jesus and these are two seas intermingling one with the other' (*ibid*, 717). For him, nothing could be more efficacious for the conversion of the most hard-hearted than the preaching of the Passion of Jesus.

The fundamental task of the Church in every age – especially in today's world – is to lead humanity to encounter Christ, to encounter the Paschal Mystery which, through his Cross and Death leads to the Resurrection. Christ is united with each individual through that mystery, through it he reveals the countenance of the Father and fully reveals the

# karol wojtyła on st paul of the cross

translation by Fr Silvan Rouse CP

*Shortly before being elected pope in 1978, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła (Blessed John Paul II) wrote an article entitled *The Spirituality of the Passion and the Paschal Mystery – A Reflection on St Paul of the Cross*. A question which was often raised in the period after the Second Vatican Council was whether a Spirituality of the Passion was now obsolete because of the renewed emphasis on the Resurrection of the Lord. After a lengthy treatment of the spirituality of Saint Paul of the Cross, Cardinal Wojtyła goes on to explain a number of relevant texts from the Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*). Here is his conclusion:*

THE CONCILIAR TEXTS SPEAK of the Paschal Mystery which contains – united in itself – the Passion and Resurrection of the Saviour. At the same time these texts seek, possibly in a broader way, to bring light on the enigma of human realities and on the duties of man in the modern world and to emphasise in all this all the moral meaning and all the hope that true values can be a reality in the contemporary world. As the Constitution (*Gaudium et Spes*) has a pastoral character, it is addressed to all men without exception. The subject of this is the world

and the Church in the world and for the world. This, of course, does not mean that we simply make the secular position of the world our own. The Constitution constitutes a positive affirmation since it proceeds from the Paschal Mystery. The Paschal Mystery says to men at least this: that the road toward the realisation of true value is linked to effort and fatigue. Now every effort, every fatigue is in some way a participation in the Cross. The true discovery and the realisation of true realities is an analogy of the Resurrection. Truth, justice and order are attained by fatigue and the annihilation of selfishness. The Council, in proposing the Paschal Mystery to all men in this way supposes that truth, justice and order are realities obtainable for all.

All this was known to St Paul of the Cross: indeed he knew still more. He knew – as few others – what the price of these values was in the plan and economy of God, how much all that cost which constitutes the full analogy of the Resurrection of man and which enables the Paschal Mystery to produce fruits beneficial to humanity.

This lived knowledge and experience of Saint Paul of the Cross became a benefit for the Church, a benefit not only personal, but belonging to that plan and economy for which the Church exists and for whom it serves. Despite appearances to the contrary, we experience it still in the times of Vatican II, which has opened up the Paschal Mystery so abundantly to all.

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individual to himself (cf. *Redemptor hominis*, 10–13). In the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris*, on the Christian meaning of suffering – a document particularly close to of the charism of your Congregation – I dwelt on the mystery of the Cross in relation to the dramatic problem of the suffering of humanity and emphasised that it is precisely through the Cross that Christ is united with all of humanity (n. 20).

Humanity today vividly perceives the dramatic effects of suffering and clearly senses that we cannot abandon the individual to face his suffering alone. Much can be done by one who, in charity, is in solidarity with the suffering, especially when he is capable of transmitting the good news of the re-

demptive value given suffering through the Passion of Jesus....

St Paul of the Cross communicated his 'charism' of the Passion above all to his 'companions' who, from the very beginning, he was inspired to gather together. Later, through those companions, the charism was transmitted to the entire Congregation and to those Institutes and Movements in close association with it. The Church has recognized the authenticity of this charism, entrusting the specific responsibility of perpetually keeping alive the Memoria Passionis in personal and communitarian research and in every phase of the apostolate. Indeed it is of vital importance that this be done in such way that the Cross of Christ not be

rendered void of its meaning (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17), in order to unmask that deception by which the world tends to appropriate to itself the gifts of God and thus distort the image of Christ which is present in the baptised believer.

This discernment requires total detachment from the things of the world as well as an authentic spirit of poverty, virtues close to the heart of your Founder. In regard to these virtues, he often spoke of the key role of mystical death in order to be reborn in God, inviting the individual to be totally immersed in his own nothingness, that is, to be deprived of all power, of all possessions and of all wisdom.

Faithful to the tradition which makes them masters of prayer (cf. Const. 37), Passionists continue to develop a solid spirituality which communicates to other souls who are thirsting for perfection, the desire to be partakers of the 'emptying' of Christ that they be reborn to a higher life each day (cf. *Redemptionis donum*, 10). This presupposes an attentive listening to God, an obligation which, in his spiritual testament, St Paul of the Cross resolved to safeguard and protect through poverty, prayer and solitude. For it is precisely this listening to God which make it possible for us to listen to mankind in its suffering and in its hungering for God and for justice.

The Passion of Jesus and human suffering constitute one of the most pressing concerns for theology and the human sciences today. They lend themselves as matters of discussion and dialogue both with Christians of other confessions and with other believers and, in general, with any individual sincerely searching for justice and love. Among the sons of St Paul of the Cross there are numbered several precursors to the ecumenical movement,



Pope Clement XIV gave solemn approval to the Passionist Congregation by the Bull *Supremi Apostolatus* in 1769

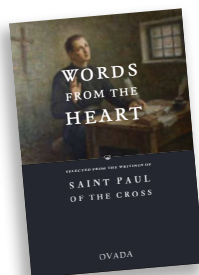
dedicated to the apostolate of Christian unity, such as Blessed Dominic Barberi and Fr Ignatius Spencer. These men felt they had inherited the deep concern for unity of your Founder, an intention which pervaded his prayer life.

Passionists today must be and do no less, but must continue to point to Christ crucified, to Him who, by his sacrifice, destroyed every barrier of separation and reconciled each man and woman with God and with one another (cf. Eph. 2:11–12). As was the Apostle, they, too must be personally zealous for the Cross of Christ, an object of ridicule even in today's world, but of profound wisdom for those who are searching for God, for justice and for peace.

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