

MESSAGE TO THE PASSIONIST FAMILY
Commemorating the Approval of the Rule and
the First Passionist Professions in 1741

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,



275 years ago, on 11 June 1741, Paul of the Cross, his brother John Baptist and the members of the first community of the Congregation, gathered at the foot of the altar in the small church on Monte Argentario dedicated to the Presentation of Mary in the Temple, and for the first time publicly professed the four “simple” vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and *“of promoting with all their strength and power the devotion to the sorrows of Jesus Christ in the hearts of the believers”*. It was the third Sunday after Pentecost. They had been attending a spiritual retreat of ten days; their hearts were filled with inner joy and gratitude for God’s mercy. After the profession, all the religious unanimously asked Paul to be their leader with the title of “Superior”. It was on that very day, for the first time, that they displayed on the habit the Passionist sign.

I am well aware that these facts can seem a bit too far removed from our lives today. After all, 275 years have passed from those early days! However, I would like to share a short message commemorating our early beginnings which I believe can offer us some meaning and food for reflection today.

On 15 May 1741, Pope Benedict XIV had approved the Rule with a “rescritto” (rescript) which Paul received from Rome on the 30 May. Together with this document sent from Rome, there was also the permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament inside the monastery. Paul of the Cross could see in those two “graces” granted by the Holy See, the confirmation of God’s goodness towards him and all his religious family. He saw the insights received in Castellazzo becoming a reality. After so many difficulties and sufferings, the Passionist life was now recognized by the body of the Church as a way of attaining holiness through its community life and ministry.

The sign, which the members were now wearing on their habits, was a reminder to everyone of God’s great love and mercy shown in and through the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. By their vows, they became “living memorials” of this Love to all the world.

My hope is that we do not just rejoice in commemorating the 275th anniversary of the approval of the Rule; but rather that we also remember that there were people from the beginnings of our beloved Congregation – like you and I - who were deeply committed to following Jesus Crucified and who put into practice the spirit and the message hidden behind those inspired words which they professed.

Far be it for me to remind you that our Congregation's rules, constitutions, documents, letters and Chapter decrees are not just "holy texts" to be venerated and read with devotion and a nostalgic sense of pride. Surely it is not the texts on paper, but the grace of reflecting its spirit and making them come alive in concrete and practical ways which give us our specific identity and mission in the Church as Passionists. Perhaps this can be a good point for us all to reflect on both personally and communally.

I was inspired to discover that in the official document sent by the Pope for the approval of the Rule (the "*Rescritto*") was quoted a "special condition" put to the Passionists by the Cardinals who studied and evaluated the Rule on the Pope's behalf. This "special condition" required the Passionists to commit themselves to preach and serve in those areas and islands where, due to the unhealthy environmental conditions, the people are abandoned and forgotten. From our very beginnings, the Church has named our special vocation to show a preferential option for the suffering, the marginalised, and those who are "the crucified" of their times.

As we remember this, no doubt, joyful moment for Paul of the Cross and his first companions on 11 June 1741, may we - his companions today - also take the occasion to review and renew our commitment and vocation to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus as the greatest act of God's love and mercy, and to promote this memory in the lives and hearts of the people today..." *especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow.*" (Const.#3)

Let us keep challenging ourselves as Passionists to 'look back' and appreciate with greater depth the SPIRIT of our Holy Founder, so that we may 'look forward' to live and practice with fidelity our Passionist vocation in the various contexts of the church and the world of today.

"May the Passion of Jesus Christ be always in our hearts."

Fraternally,


Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General

Roma, 11 June 2016