



**CIRCULAR LETTER ON THE OCCASION OF
THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CANONIZATION OF
ST. PAUL OF THE CROSS**

“A Celebration and Call to Holiness”

My dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

on 29 June 2017 we Passionist religious, together with the men and women of the Passionist Family, will have the opportunity to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Canonization of our Father and Founder, St. Paul of the Cross. It will be a unique opportunity to rediscover and cherish the gift that God has bestowed on the Church in the person and spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross and, through him, in the gift of the Congregation of the Passion to the Church.

In the Bull of Canonization promulgated by Pope Pius IX on 7 June 1867, the Church officially recognized the heroic virtues of Paul of the Cross and on 29 June, the Holy Father canonized him in St. Peter’s Basilica – one of twenty-five men and women who were canonized that day. One hundred years later, on 29 June 1967, the then Superior General, the Servant of God, Theodore Foley, wrote a Circular Letter to the Congregation to mark the centennial of the canonization. In this Letter he highlighted the importance of the event:

“St. Paul of the Cross sanctified himself in being our founder. All the divine help given to him from the origin of his vocation up to the last hours of his life was intended to make him a prototype for those who came after him. They too, as St. Teresa of Avila advised her religious, must each one found the congregation all over again in their hearts and so be able to continue the proper spirit and specific work initiated by the first father and founder among God’s people. The personal sanctification of Paul of the Cross, therefore, commended in his canonization, was intended by God to be the model of the holiness, corporate and individual, which should always flourish in the Congregation. It is the pattern of the way in which his sons should bear witness to Jesus dying and rising in their midst. Thus, they already announce the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is why his canonization has a special meaning and import for us, his disciples of today.”

And he continued: *“The centenary of Paul of the Cross brings the burning question: ‘Is each Passionist today so bearing out the dying and rising of Jesus that thus the life of Jesus, revealed to the world in Paul of the Cross, is being seen today by the world in each of his followers?’”* This is a fundamental and ongoing question for us to reflect upon 50 years on as we find fresh ways to witness to our Passionist charism, life and mission amidst the challenges of the world today in the 21st century.

The challenges that Fr. Theodore Foley and the Congregation had to confront that centennial year were truly challenging: the renewal called for by Vatican II; the acceptance of the newly adopted Constitutions and the extraordinary General Chapter of 1968.

Today the Congregation has different challenges: Congregational restructuring for greater vitality of our life and mission; the crisis of religious vocations and life, especially in the global north; the absence and questioning of the existence of God; the wide abandonment of the institutional church; the vast movement of peoples across the globe as refugees and asylum seekers, including the scourge of human trafficking, due to wars, persecution and search for a better future.

However, we have also seen signs of hope for the future, particularly in the younger parts of the Congregation (3 new Vice Provinces created in Africa), the possibility of new missionary endeavors in places of suffering where Passionists can offer hope through proclaiming the Gospel of the Passion, and the growing recognition and collaboration with the laity who are gifted with and committed to the charism. Next year, 2018, we will celebrate our General Chapter which will offer us the opportunity to reflect and study on how we are authentically living our Passionist vocation in the spirit of St. Paul of the Cross today.

I urge you, my brothers and sisters, not to allow this event of the 150th Anniversary of the Canonization of St. Paul of the Cross to pass by unrecognized. Rather, I encourage every Province/Vice Province and the local communities, in collaboration with the members of the wider Passionist Family, to plan and celebrate cultural, educational and liturgical activities which will facilitate within the local church an introduction to, and/or a deeper rediscovery of the extraordinary person of St. Paul of the Cross and his spirituality of the depths of God's love emanating from the Passion of Jesus. How enriching it would be for us individually and communally to focus on the mind and heart of our Founder and delve into his vision of the Congregation and its mission in light of our present times.

I can share with you that here in Rome several projects are already in progress, such as the restoration of the much-visited Room of St. Paul of the Cross where he lived the final years of his life and where he died. Additionally, we are in process of preparing the publication of a walking tour of Rome: "In the Footsteps of St. Paul of the Cross" to enable Passionist pilgrims and others to appreciate Paul's presence and ministry in this city. Also, the local community of Sts. John and Paul is programming a 3-days lecture series later in the year, as well as various liturgical celebrations.

It goes without saying that the marking of such an anniversary as the Canonization of our Founder is a faith event and a reminder to all people in the Church that St. Paul of the Cross, by his example and writings, can assist us in our journey to holiness of life. Thus, the elements of prayer, reading, studying and reflecting on the writings of St. Paul of the Cross are especially central to this celebration. Meanwhile, we believe that the prayer of Paul of the Cross for his sons and for the Congregation which he loved so much and for which he worked and fought so courageously and intensely, is a great source of strength and support for each of us and for the Passionist Family.

Fifty years ago, Fr. Theodore Foley noted the importance of deepening our appreciation for our Founder and our Passionist charism in order to confront the particular challenges of that time: *“I would like to emphasize the need we have at this time to pray fervently and perseveringly to our father, St. Paul of the Cross. The possibility of gain or loss for us in this period of change and adaptation are incalculable.”*

May the efforts of our religious and the Passionist Family at large to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the Canonization of St. Paul of the Cross be a source of great grace for the Congregation and for the entire Church.

***May the Passion of Jesus Christ
be always within our minds and hearts,
so the life of Jesus too, may be in us.***

*SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Roma
25 March 2017
Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord*

Fr. Joachim Rego CP
Superior General