



MESSAGE TO THE PASSIONIST FAMILY ON THE FEAST OF ST PAUL OF THE CROSS

19 October 2017

My dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,
Greetings of joy and peace from Rome in the Passion of Jesus –
our HOPE!

As we commemorate the feast of St Paul of the Cross in this year which marks the 150th anniversary of his canonization, we are encouraged by the living spirit of this Saint who keeps challenging us to follow the call to holiness which he found in the memory of the Passion of Jesus – *“the shortest way to perfection”*. We acknowledge and celebrate the holiness of Paul Danei who discovered the secret to true life and the way to God’s compassionate and merciful heart – *“the pearl of great price”* – in the Passion of Jesus: *“the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love.”*

In my Circular Letter to the Passionist Family to mark this anniversary which occurred on 29 June, I expressed my hope that this event would be an enriching time 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.”*

“Our present times” have been dark and dismal indeed! The world continues to experience so much suffering: wars, hatred, discrimination, denial of human rights and freedom, terrorism, indiscriminate killings, natural disasters. Very much to the fore in our memories at this present time are: the senseless Las Vegas shootings; the unimaginable destruction caused by hurricanes, flooding, earthquakes and landslides; the persecution of the Rohingya people

in Myanmar and other refugees and displaced peoples; the struggle for self-determination in Catalonia and Kurdistan; the racial discrimination and promotion of hatred by white supremacists in the US....

I ask myself: *What would be the mind and heart of the Founder in these present times?* In fact, it seems that our present times are not too much different from the times of the Founder. He also experienced in his time of history: wars and domination by foreign powers, lawlessness and fear, disease and climate change, the tyranny of existential distance and the marginalisation of peoples, the unequal gap between the rich and the poor. Yet, Paul of the Cross was convinced then, and would be equally convinced now, that it is in **the Passion of Jesus** that we can find meaning and see possibilities for a renewed future. It is **there**, in **the Passion of Jesus**, that we find **HOPE** for visioning and seeing life differently!

Keenly aware of the evils that afflicted the people of his time, St Paul of the Cross never tired of insisting that the most effective remedy is the Passion of Jesus, “the greatest and most overwhelming work of God’s love.” – (Const.#1)

So, *what is our vision and mission as Passionists in response to these present times?* As Passionists today, our vision is “to remember and keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus”; and our mission is clear:

We wish to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected; we seek to offer them comfort and to relieve the burden of their sorrow. The power of the Cross, which is the wisdom of God, gives us strength to discern and remove the causes of human suffering. For this reason, our mission aims at evangelizing others by means of the Word of the Cross. – (Const.#3)

As preachers and communicators: *What is the message that we can offer?...*to those who have lost everything (loved ones and property) and must start life over again from nothing; to those who live imprisoned by fear; to those who will forever bear physical and psychological scars and wounds; to those whose dignity is impoverished; to those who have lost faith and hope and can see no light at the end of the tunnel?

Our message must be one which is rooted in the charism of the **'memoria passionis'** - that impelling force, dynamic energy and awesome gift of the Spirit, founded on Jesus, Crucified and Risen - **our Hope!** We believe that Christ's life - his Passion, Death and Resurrection - gives our lives meaning. Our faith in Jesus gives us confidence to face the future, no matter how bleak some days or some problems seem. Because, in the end, our belief and hope is that Jesus has already won our salvation and the happiness that comes with it.



In his encyclical ***Spe Salvi (Saved by Hope)***, Pope Benedict XVI made the claim that *“a distinguishing mark of Christians (the followers of Jesus Christ) is the fact that they have a future.”* They do not know the details of that future, but they know that *“their life will not end in emptiness.”* Pope Benedict reminds us that the virtue of hope enables us to face the burdens of daily life, no matter how heavy. Hope is the virtue that keeps us from discouragement in the face of life's anxieties and challenges. Hope re-directs our tired, troubled hearts towards God, opening our heart in expectation of eternal happiness with God.

Let us live our charism as **prophets of hope**, sincerely believing what we preach because God is at the very heart and centre of our lives. As Passionists in these present times, our mission must reflect a **hopeful spirituality** - one of surrender and trust into the hands of the One who calls us to proclaim the Gospel of the Passion of Jesus as a manifestation of the unlimited and boundless love of God. In the words of St Paul of the Cross: *“The Passion is the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love.”* **This** is the Good News of hope and life which opens to us the possibility of healing, courage and renewed vision. **This** is how we will *“evangelize others by means of the Word of the Cross”*.



In speaking of the call to be **missionaries of hope** recently, Pope Francis said: *“may we rejoice in God’s saving power (revealed on the cross), never lose heart, and help others to look to the future with confidence.”*

May Mary, Mother of Holy Hope accompany us in the joyful living of our vocation; and through the intercession of St Paul of the Cross, I pray for a continual and faithful remembrance of his desire that ***“the Passion of Jesus be always in our hearts.”***

HAPPY FEAST DAY TO YOU ALL!

Fraternally,

Fr. Joachim Rego, C.P.
Superior General