

HOLY CROSS PROVINCE PASSIONISTS COLLABORATING WITH SHARED GIFTS IN KEEPING ALIVE THE MEMORY OF THE PASSION

Online Keynote Address, CRUC Province Assembly (8 June 2021)

Hi, everyone! I have good memories of our time together two years ago when we gathered for the Provincial Chapter in Sierra Madre. It was a truly enriching time of participation, sharing, prayer, dialogue, listening, deepening, community and commitment to an unfolding journey of visioning and action.



On this occasion, however, due to the grip of the highly infectious Covid-19 pandemic which is stalking every human person and forcing them to perpetuate its life by transmitting its poison to others, we are called to unite in solidarity for the welfare of ourselves and for the common good. And so, here we are, resigned to meet one another not *bodily* - which is the normal way of human encounter, but *virtually* – thanks to the marvels of modern technology. Of course, it's not the same as “being there” with you in person, but we can still be connected to see, hear and speak with each other. We want to call to mind those words of Pope Francis during this pandemic: “...*we are on the same boat...all of us called to row together.*” I thank you for inviting me to be a part of your community.

I believe that in this Assembly you will be reflecting on and evaluating the continuing work and direction of the Vision Fulfillment process in the Province. However, I will be focusing more on the nature of your collaboration and engagement with one another in the common search and discernment of the Province's mission.

It's been a privilege for me as a Passionist to be part of and participate in two Provincial Chapters of the Holy Cross Province. Each time I have been

inspired to see the ever-growing collaboration of ‘vowed’ (professed) and ‘non-vowed’ (lay) persons in the life and mission of the Province. This joint relationship and collaboration between professed and lay is a relatively new awareness and phenomenon in religious congregations and is happening on two levels:

- 1) On the level of being drawn or attracted by the **charism** of the congregation - which is recognized as a spiritual gift given to the Church;
- 2) On the level of being involved in the **mission** of the congregation - which is an integral part and responsibility of all the baptized in the evangelizing mission of the Church.

Your own Province has been attentive to this and have expressed it in this way:

For some time now, we Passionists have recognized that the charism, the spirituality, of St. Paul of the Cross, which is the spirituality of the Passion of Jesus, is not something we “own” or control. It is a gift from God that is open to all of God’s people, whether they are lay, vowed, or ordained. This was explicitly stated in the Passionist General Chapter of 1994: “Our charism is a great gift. Our vocation to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus does not only belong to our Congregation or to our communities; it is open to all those human beings who are moved by the action of the Holy Spirit. We accept the call to live in communion with so many men and women who witness to its relevance and vitality.”



We need to always keep in mind that our Congregation and its mission is not separate, or exempted, from the life and mission of the Universal Church. We are not an “alternative church”. On the contrary, our Congregation exists by the legitimate approval of the Church to contribute to its mission of evangelization through the lens of our particular charism: *the memoria passionis*. As is stated in our Constitutions #2:

Recognizing in Saint Paul of the Cross the action of the Holy Spirit, the Church with her supreme authority approved our Congregation [and its Rule], and entrusted us with a mission: to preach the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.

In Constitutions #5 we are reminded that by our consecration through a special vow to the Passion of Jesus “our Congregation takes her place in the Church so as to dedicate herself fully to its mission.”

And finally, in Constitutions #62:

To our own Congregation, the Church has entrusted a special share of her apostolate. She urges us to keep constantly alive in the hearts of the faithful the memory of the Passion, in which the love of our Saviour is so eminently expressed; and she looks to us by our apostolic labours to render more and more fruitful that redemptive love.

The collaboration between lay and vowed members of religious congregations (including ours) is a growing reality and will continue to develop, as long as there is a greater understanding and promotion of the ecclesiology issuing from the Second Vatican Council, which teaches that **all the baptized** are the Peo-

ple of God, are part of the Body of Christ, and belong to the Community of Disciples. As such, **all the baptized** have a share in the spiritual gifts and are co-responsible in the evangelizing mission of the Church. They are not simply followers of Christ, and not simply disciples, but they are ‘apostles’ – ‘sent’ by Christ as missionary disciples. There is need for us, when dealing with the question of lay participation, to make a paradigm shift from viewing them as mere *collaborators*, to recognize them as **co-responsible** for the Church’s be-

ing and action. This was a new challenge introduced by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009 to emphasize the ecclesiology envisioned and articulated at the Second Vatican Council.

Recently I received a letter from the Passionist Companions’ Group in Dublin, Ireland. These are lay people who, after participating in a Passionist formation Institute in 2006, felt drawn and attracted by the Passionist charism. They wrote:

Our inspiration to gather as Companions comes from the General Chapter of 2000 and the statement: ‘The Passionist charism, like life itself, is a gift for which we are eternally grateful; and one that we may not dispose of as though it were our own personal property. Those who wish to stand with us at the foot of the Cross, to contemplate the love of God and then proclaim its saving power, can rightly be called “Passionist”, whether they are men, women or children.’ When we first heard this in 2006 at the Institute, it resonated deeply with us; it touched something that we felt, but to that point, had been unable to describe in words. That statement continues to resonate today. We always ‘felt’ that we were Passionists. However, our calling has

*been to live our lives as lay persons, some married, some single, others once married but either now, sadly, widowed or separated. The 2000 statement assured us that it is more than just 'feeling' that we are Passionists; we **are** Passionists.*

I was truly moved by the conviction, identification and sense of belonging to the Passionist Congregation which they expressed. The letter goes on to explain the way in which they live and promote the charism through their vocation as lay people and speak of their **right** and **responsibility** as apostles of evangelization – not just because or as a consequence of the decline or diminishment of professed Passionists in the Province...

...we believe, without doubt, that there is no place to talk about growing older, less able, dying out, etc. as long as the Companions are about. It is our wish; indeed, it is who we are, that we want to live out the charism of the Passionists and St Paul of the Cross in the lives that we live and if we are faithful to that, then it is only the case that there is a greater dependence on different messengers today when others are not as capable.

For most of the 300 years history since the foundation of the Passionist Congregation which we are commemorating during this Jubilee Year, the focus of Passionist life and mission has been very much on those 'professed' (vowed) men and women who have embraced the religious life within the Congregation. Responsibility for the Institute is entrusted by the Church to those who follow the way of the consecrated life. However, we know from our Congregation's history, and from our own experience, that there have been countless people (lay, religious and ordained) who, through the gift of the Spirit, and/or through their connection with members and works of the Congregation, have also kept alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus, with some even feeling and identifying themselves as 'Passionists'. These, too, can be considered today as the "companions" which St. Paul of the Cross desired to gather in community. This was expressed well by Tim O'Brien during the Province Assembly in 2018:



During our time in Houston, it occurred to me how Holy Cross Province is in a time of evolution. Since coming on the scene in 1999, I have seen a lot of changes, not the least of which is the engagement of laity in the life of the province. Laity have embraced

the Passionist Charism and answered the invitation of the congregation to join in the mission.

During the strategic planning process in 2006, the mission of the province was delineated and included laity as members of the Passionist Family. This inclusion is in the spirit of mutuality where we recognize common ground and the boundaries that define vowed and lay life. We are together in this and we continue to explore what this means, and how we see this engagement playing out into the future.



Those who feel attracted by a charism or spirituality, need a sense of belonging to and identification with the Institute which is founded to give witness to and promote that particular charism. It is the duty of the Institute, then, to arrange for them appropriate formation and support which will nurture and deepen in them the Spirit's call and empower them to be co-responsible for mission in accordance with the Institute's vision. I commend your Province for offering this support. I understand from the Province newsletter that 14 members of the Passionist family are being sponsored this year for formation enrichment in the context of our charism and mission.

I believe **a new way of being Passionists** is being imagined and emerging with the engagement and collaboration of the laity in the Passionist life and mission of Holy Cross Province – and in other parts of the Congregation. Again, we remember that this discovery must be undertaken in tandem with the Church and for the fulfillment and enrichment of her mission. In fact, our Congregation's call, for **“renewing our mission”**, especially in this Jubilee Year, is a process in mutually discerning the path being opened up by the Spirit for us.



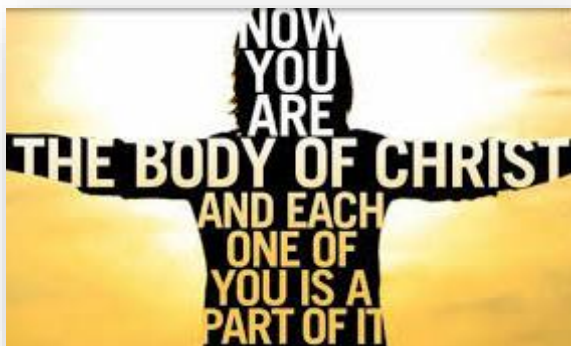
How should we proceed with this process? Again, in parallel with the Church's direction in our times under the leadership of Pope Francis, the mode we can follow is the pathway of **synodality** – an ancient concept in the life of the church which has been given new emphasis and vitality today. Synodality is not just a method, but the mode of being of a church which wants to go out in mission. It is a way towards a re-thinking, re-imagining of the Church's (and of our Congregation's) role in today's society. This requires that we undergo **conversion (metanoia)** – a new way of understanding and approaching how we do our mission. For us, Passionists, our contribution in mission must also bear the mark and be inspired by the specific vision of our charism: the *memoria passionis*, with the awareness that, as Pope Francis said in his message for our Jubilee: "For a charism to endure over time, it is necessary to adapt it to new needs, keeping alive the creative power of its beginnings." The Pope went on to express his hope and offer us a challenge for our mission:

I hope that the members of your Institute will feel «branded» by the mission rooted in the memoria passionis. Your Founder, Saint Paul of the Cross, calls the Passion of Jesus «the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love» (Letters II, 499). He felt consumed by that love and wanted to set the world on fire with his personal mis-



sionary activity and that of his companions. It is very important to remember that «Mission is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people. When we stand before Jesus crucified, we see the depth of his love which exalts and sustains us, but at the same time, unless we are blind, we begin to realize that Jesus' gaze, burning with love, expands to embrace all his people. We realize once more that he wants to make use of us to draw closer to his beloved people. He takes us from the midst of his people, and he sends us to his people; without this sense of belonging we cannot understand our deepest identity» (Ap. Exhort. Evangelii gaudium, 268).

Perhaps in your engagement with the “Visioning” process of the Province, and now with the “Vision Fulfillment”, you have acted in a synodal way; if not, it is worth considering this approach as a *modus operandi*. For this, it is important



and necessary to understand well the concept of ‘synodality’. The International Theological Commission in 2018 defined ‘synodality’ as “*the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.*” Key is the **Holy Spirit**.

The term ‘synodality’ is generally understood to represent a *process of discernment*, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, involving bishops, priests, religious, and lay Catholics, each according to the gifts and charisms of their vocation. However, as Pope Francis said: “*Without the Holy Spirit there is no synodality*”. It is not simply a question of like-minded people coming together to share, discuss, and come up with statements and plans and strategies. Rather, in synodality, we gather as a community of faith, of worship, of service and of mission. The call of Jesus and his vision of the kingdom of God (God’s reign, God’s rule) is central and the goal. Listening, dialogue, silence, prayer and discernment are necessary elements.

Synodality is not simply about involving people in decision-making, but involving all the baptized in **discerning God's will** and **listening to the Holy Spirit**. It is about *prayerful discernment* which needs space and time, and which



must mature in contemplative silence. The goal is to be attentive to the movements within – the movements of the Spirit – and thus to perceive God’s desire in knowing the best way to keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus as God’s saving love and compassion in the situation of the contemporary society and world. As Pope Francis expressed in his Jubilee message to us:

This significant centennial anniversary represents a providential opportunity to move towards new apostolic goals, without giving in to the temptation to «leave things as

they are» (Ap. Exhort. Evangelii gaudium, 25). Contact with the Word of God in prayer and reading the signs of the times in daily events will enable you to perceive the creative presence of the Spirit whose outpouring over time, points out the answers to humanity's expectations. No one can escape the fact that today we live in a world where nothing is the same as before.

The little known, but highly contagious and lethal *corona virus* has certainly made us aware of this. We cannot ignore the reality or pretend that we have not, personally and communally, been affected by the very particular experience of life in recent times. We are living in a time of history when a global pandemic has severely altered our lives and forced us to consider our priorities, values, and even re-imagine life in a different way to what we have become accustomed. However, while the current pandemic has accentuated the mental, psychological and financial stress for us all, it has also highlighted our **'interdependence'**. Like it or not, we are made profoundly aware that we are all linked to one another, and we must relate with one another in *solidarity*. As Passionists, we are a community of brothers and sisters united around the charism of the *memoria passionis*; we are related to one another and interdependent on each other in a common mission. Our *interdependence* must be transformed into *solidarity*, which is a contemporary expression of commitment for the **common good**. However, as we know and see strongly emerging in many parts of the world, the tendency towards *individualism, nationalism, provincialism, separatism, isolationism* is constantly lurking in the shadows and tempts us to go it alone. This interrupts the harmony between *interdependence* and *solidarity*, and creates a *dependence* of some on a few, creating, as a result, a situation of inequality and marginalization. Solidarity, instead, demands a new mindset which thinks in terms of *community*. Pope Francis speaks strongly to this question in his message for the World Day for Migrants and Refugees this year which is titled, *Towards an ever wider 'we'*:



*The present time...shows that this "we" willed by God is broken and fragmented, wounded and disfigured. This becomes all the more evident in moments of great crisis, as is the case with the current pandemic. Our "we", both in the wider world and within the Church, is crumbling and cracking due to myopic and aggressive forms of nationalism (cf. *Fratelli Tutti*, 11) and radical individualism (cf. *ibid.*, 105). And*

the highest price is being paid by those who most easily become viewed as others: foreigners, migrants, the marginalized, those living on the existential peripheries... The truth however is that we are all in the same boat and called to work together so that there will be no more walls that separate us, no longer others, but only a single "we", encompassing all of humanity... building together a future of justice and peace, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

In the crisis of the current pandemic, we cannot not consider the possibility of also finding the hidden 'opportunity' for something new. Many people want to return to 'normality'; to get back to business as before; to continue from where we left off. But the pandemic is not just a temporary disturbance and interruption in our lives; rather, it is a *watershed moment* for the world, i.e., a critical turning point in time where everything changes and will never be the same as before. As Pope Francis said in his General Audience of 19 August 2020:

The pandemic is a crisis, and we do not emerge from a crisis the same as before: either we come out of it better or we come out of it worse. We must come out of it better and build something different... Recovering from the pandemic will require action rooted in tangible love, anchored in hope and founded in faith, otherwise, we will come out of the crisis worse.

How about us? How are we responding to this crisis? What has changed? What needs to change? Where to from here? What is the call and direction being discerned to take forward from now on?

Like the Israelites exiled in Babylon, we, too, may have lost faith and patience; but the Lord calls us to hope, to see with new eyes, to listen with open hearts, and co-create a future according to God's plan: "*See, I am doing something new...can you not perceive it?*" (Is. 43:19).



The challenges we are facing at this time gives us the opportunity **to be prophetic**: to be enlightened by the Gospel and, thus, renewed in Christ. It is a time to read in the ‘signs of the times’ God’s desire for us: *“to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with God”* (Micah 6:8).

So, my hope is that, through your personal reflections and communal discernment, your Assembly will be **a time of renewal** for yourself, for your community, for the Province,

and for our Congregation. I invite you to join with me in praying and working towards this hope – to go forward *“with mind and heart renewed”*.



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