

**OUR EVOLVING PASSIONIST LIFE**

Towards the end of his life St Paul of the Cross was saying Mass and suddenly he stopped, his eyes filled with tears, and he remained motionless, weeping, for a few moments. Afterwards, he explained that he had seen, in something like a vision, "my children in England". It was only in the following century when Fr Dominic Barberi and his three companions arrived in 1841, that this vision of Passionists in England was fulfilled.

On his arrival, Dominic began to adapt the Passionist vision of St Paul of the Cross to the context he found in England. Dominic was not 'different' to Paul when he was in Italy, but when he came to England, he was 'different', because the context was different. Dominic found rapid industrialisation, large scale movements of people and desperate living conditions. We, inspired by Dominic and Paul of the Cross, are trying to live out a contemporary understanding of the Passion in our context.

We have at the heart of our spirituality a loving memory of the Crucified Christ, by which is meant meditation on the love and mercy of God. God so loved the world that he sent his only Son, not just to be among us but to take the form of a slave and die a brutal death at the hands of the Roman Empire. It is this passionate love which is the glory of God, and it is this same love, revealed in the life and passion of Jesus, which gives us hope. The apostolic outlook of a Passionist is very much to see the Crucified God in His Crucified Ones – that is, to see the face of the suffering Christ wherever humanity or God's created earth suffers, and to respond in love and mercy.

**Passionists have always understood the Passion of Christ as being the most overwhelming work and revelation of God's love, and meditation and preaching on this Love and His Passion continues to be central to our Passionist life. Implicit in our desire to 'keep alive the memory of the Passion' has always been an understanding of God's solidarity in the Passion with human suffering.** Since the times of Paul of the Cross and Dominic the understanding of the Passion has **made some elements more explicit. This has led** us to believe that, humanly speaking, Jesus was crucified as a result of His challenging of the oppression and violence of the Roman Empire and the Temple state, as well as Jewish rebels. This leads us to understand God's love, as revealed in the Cross and Passion, as being a non-violent love with a passion for justice for the poor and those on the margins, all life and all of God's good creation. **It is this love of God that we seek to communicate as we minister also to the spiritual needs of our society, which experiences the 'absence of God' and yet continues to seek that deeper meaning found in the spiritual life. And in what Pope Francis has called our 'sister earth' we see also our suffering neighbour in need of solidarity and protection, as we seek to grow into a fuller understanding and practice of a sustainable way of life and witness for all God's creation and the life of the whole earth community.**

Dominic was beatified during the Second Vatican Council, and one of the Council's themes was to prepare the Church for effective mission in the modern world, and Dominic is a great model for such mission. This brings us to our own times and to the challenge of the 'new evangelisation', the project of preaching the Gospel afresh to the people of our own age. When Paul of the Cross thought of the Passionist mission in England, he thought of everyone becoming Catholic. When Dominic came to England, along with Ignatius Spencer, he entered into dialogue and asked everyone to pray for "unity in the truth". As an Anglican, John Henry Newman had said he would become a Catholic if he saw them walking among the poor of the slums of the great cities and going where others feared to go. In Dominic, his prayer was answered. [1].

Reading the signs of the times and the sources of our charism, (cf Perfectae Caritatis) Passionists in England have moved into the contemporary Inner Cities following in the footsteps of Dominic. The Council taught that peoples of all faiths and none are children of God, and we reject nothing of what is good and true in them, wherever it is to be found. (cf Nostra Aetate) Inspired by the example of those who have gone before us, we are called to follow this tradition of mission in dialogue among the urban, (post)industrialised poor and crucified, among large scale movements of people of all faiths and none. In doing so, we remember the words of Paul VI in Evangelii Nuntiandi, repeatedly recalled by Popes since then when speaking about the New Evangelisation: "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." This mission of the New Evangelisation we understand to be a co-operation with God in building His Kingdom, which

begins on earth and through the Cross and Resurrection is fulfilled in the Beatific Vision. We pray for the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, as we seek to respond to this challenge and call.

One example of our aspirations is our presence in inner city Birmingham. Living as a community centred on prayerful contemplation, among people who have migrated from across the world, we offer a home to the crucified Christ represented by asylum seekers who have been rejected instead of being offered a welcome and hospitality in our country. We have dedicated our community to the memory of Austin Smith – a pioneering Passionist who pointed towards new ways of keeping alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus.

As well as seeking directly ourselves to be credible witnesses to our Passionist vision, we also aspire to work in solidarity with all people of good will – especially within our own Catholic traditions - who are prepared to help analyse and seek strategic ways of promoting relevant Gospel outreach, challenging where necessary and encouraging where possible, in order to help build God’s Kingdom at the heart of contemporary culture. This commitment to sharing the Gospel mission, includes especially participating in the community, life and work of Passionist Partners.

### OUR MISSION TODAY

Celebrating and affirming the richness of the witness of all our brethren to the memory of the Passion through our common life and work, we recognise also God’s call to “the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are” (Evangelii Gaudium, 25) and the need “to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” (EG 33) Each of us will have a different part to play, according to our gifts and stage of life. We all need mutual support and prayer, as well as understanding and respect for our variety of ways of responding to this call. We see this especially in our sick and elderly brethren who daily live Christ’s Passion in their very selves.

Acknowledging these truths, inspired by the life and witness of St Paul of the Cross, Dominic Barberi and our brethren who have gone before us, and guided by the teaching of the Church and our Constitutions, we affirm our desire to continue to contemplate, and witness to, the passion of Christ in history and in the world today.

We affirm our commitment as a Province, to work for the growth of our Charism which is so valuable a part of the Church’s mission, by committing time and resources to:

- **Partnerships:** supporting and working in partnership with other groups and movements in the Church which are in harmony with our Charism and Province Vision, especially Passionist Partners.
- **Vocations and Formation:** encouraging others to join us and grow into our Charism and Province Vision through Vocations and Formation work

We recognise the call to a ‘new evangelisation’. Therefore, we continue to seek ways to live the following of the Crucified One which are appropriate in our context today, and effective in keeping the memory of the Passion alive in our hearts and in the Church and world today.

And so we affirm and encourage the commitment of our brethren to:

- **Communities Present at ‘sites of suffering’:** to live prayerful community alongside the crucified of today, especially at ‘sites of suffering’, as an authentic means of standing by the cross of Jesus
- **Hospitality for the Crucified:** to offer hospitality in our houses for those who bear the wounds of Christ’s cross, as a means to solidarity in life and work with the crucified of today
- **Witness to the Passion and Non-Violent Cross:** inspire others, by word and deed, with the knowledge of God’s love and mercy as revealed supremely in Christ’s Passion *and the non-violence of the Cross and Resurrection*

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1. *“If they [Catholics] want to convert England let them go barefooted into our manufacturing towns-let them preach to the people like St. Francis Xavier-let them be pelted and trampled on-and I will admit that they can do what we cannot...What a day it will be when God will make arise among their Communion saintly men such as Bernard and the Borromeo’s...The English will never be favourably inclined to a party of conspirators and instigators; only faith and sanctity are irresistible.*