



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PASSIONISTS ON THE OCCASION
OF THE 44th GENERAL CHAPTER
OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE PASSION**

*To the Most Reverend Father José Agustín Orbegozo
Superior General of the Passionists*

1. I am happy to send you my Message on the occasion of the 44th General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion of Christ, being held at Itaici in the Brazilian state of São Paulo. I offer you my cordial greetings, which I affectionately extend to the Capitular Fathers working with you in reflection and important programming for the Passionist Spiritual Family.

The General Chapter is always a moment of grace and represents a forceful call to seek the authentic roots of the institute, thus guaranteeing fidelity to its own charism. For your congregation it is a question of studying how better to live today the precious heritage entrusted to all the sons of St Paul of the Cross. To do this, it is necessary to listen humbly to the Holy Spirit, with loving attention to the signs of the times, while examining, adapting and relaunching the singular gift that God has given the Church and the world through your holy founder.

2. Your Chapter is being held during the Great Jubilee of the Holy Year 2000. For the first time, it is being held on the Latin American continent, far from the General House of St John and Paul on the Caelian Hill, which my Predecessor Clement XIV entrusted to the Passionists in 1773. With this choice you have wanted to pay homage to the great continent during the 500th anniversary of its evangelization by stressing the universal and missionary nature of your congregation and, at the same time, by expressing solidarity with particular regions unfortunately marked by poverty and injustice. In addition, by this significant "pilgrimage of charity" you intend to respond to what I wrote in the [Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee](#): "The coming of the third millennium prompts the

Christian community to lift its eyes of faith to embrace new horizons in proclaiming the kingdom of God" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 2), and spurs Christ's disciples to embrace fervently "the missionary task of the Church in view of the demands of evangelization today" (ibid.).

How can we not emphasize that from its origins the Jubilees have represented for the Passionists significant phases of renewed dedication to the service of the Church? In the Holy Year of 1725, while on pilgrimage to Rome, your founder obtained the first verbal approbation of the new family from my venerable Predecessor Benedict XIII, and in the Holy Year of 1750, with several of his confrères, he fervently preached the Jubilee mission in the Roman Church of St John of the Florentines and received the praise of Pope Benedict XIV.

3. The theological reflection and spiritual atmosphere of this Jubilee, a year "to give glory to the Trinity" and an "intensely Eucharistic" year (cf. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 55), offer your religious family a providential opportunity for spiritual enrichment. It was born in the Church "to promote the grateful remembrance of the blessed Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rule of St Paul of the Cross*, 1775), the supreme and definitive revelation of the Trinitarian Mystery, and it draws from the Eucharist the necessary energy for its whole life to become a memory and a following of the One who was crucified and rose again.

This harmony with the Jubilee is clear even from the Chapter's theme: "*Passion of Jesus Christ, Passion for Life*", which intends to emphasize how, in the light of the Crucified One, the meaning of life is to make a gift of it in the service of others: "The Son of man has come to serve and give his life in ransom for many" (*Mk 10: 45*).

The death of Christ on the Cross is the greatest expression of a life that is given. It opens the way to the fullness of endless life which the Father grants his Son in accepting his total sacrifice: "The Cross is the superabundance of God's love poured out upon this world" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 24). The life given for us on the Cross is offered to us in the Eucharist as food. It is human-divine life; it is the life which the Word took from the Virgin Mary at the moment of the Incarnation; it is the life glorified in the resurrection and ascension into heaven; it is the life which the Son received from the Father from all eternity.

By receiving the Father's life in faith, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, the believer is brought through the Eucharist into the very heart of the Trinitarian Mystery.

4. This is the profound reality of faith to which everyone of you, dear Passionists, will surely return in frequent prayer and meditation, in an attitude of humble conformity to the salvific will of Christ. In the Eucharist Christ calls every disciple to be, as he is and with his help, "bread broken" and "wine poured out" for his brethren, always keeping his gaze on the mystery of the Lord's death and resurrection.

From the beginning, in fact, Passionists have given the faithful the precious service of teaching them how to meditate on the Passion of Christ, which the revered founder defined as: "the greatest and most stupendous work of the love of God". Many of them have borne witness even to martyrdom, as the Bulgarian Bishop Eugene Bossilkov, Inocencio Canaura Arnau, Niceforo Díez and his 25 companions, whom I have had the joy of raising to the honour of the altars.

Considering the good you have done, how can I not ask you to continue being teachers of prayer and special witnesses to Christ crucified, drawing from the mystery of the Cross the strength to cultivate generously a passion for life, especially through dialogue and sharing in your communities? How can I not remind you that such a mission demands courage and joy in facing the problems of religious life in every particular historical moment? For the believer the lived moment always has the features of an "exodus journey", which "inevitably includes everything that pertains to the *mysterium Crucis*" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 40).

The Crucified One has loved us "to the end" (13: 1), beyond the measure and possibilities of human love. This is the source from which the Passionist must draw his own spirituality in a very particular way: to love where it is most difficult to love; to love where love is most needed. Today's society offers endless areas for this special apostolate.

In this context the preaching of missions, an apostolic tradition of your congregation since the time of your founder, also finds its place. Through this extraordinary apostolic method you can spread devotion to the Passion of Christ among the people and in every setting. It is certainly necessary to think of new pastoral methods according to the various cultures and traditions; but your primary concern must always remain the proclamation of Christ, who from the Cross renews his invitation to people of every time to follow him with faithful and docile abandonment. Following the example of St Paul of the Cross, may the Passionist feel it his special duty to offer to the Christian people this exceptional opportunity for evangelization and conversion. Among other things, popular missions are most appropriate in the context of the Jubilee Year as well. Together with this commitment never omit, but rather intensify the spiritual exercises for the clergy and people, teaching them to cultivate a spirit of recollection and prayer. Let every one of your religious houses, which has been given the significant title of "retreat" since the beginning, be a place of contemplation and silence for fostering an encounter with Christ, our divine Redeemer.

5. In your Chapter work you have reserved special time for reflection on sharing your Passionist charism with the laity. This is "one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as communion", which has grown in recent times and is "a new chapter, rich in hope, in the history of relations between consecrated persons and the laity" (*Vita consecrata*, n. 54). It represents a sign of growing ecclesial vitality which should be welcomed and developed. I fervently hope that those whom the Holy Spirit calls to draw from the same sources of your charismatic spring can find in you brothers and, especially, guides who can not only share your charism with them, but, above all, form them in an authentic Passionist spirituality.

I gladly entrust your Chapter work and all your generous intentions to the Blessed Virgin, to St Paul of the Cross and to the many saints and blessed who enrich the centuries-old history of your institute, that they will help you to repose today your original charism, which is an effective leaven of evangelical fruitfulness in the contemporary world.

With these wishes, as I promise a remembrance in my prayer for each of you, for the entire Passionist Family and for those you encounter in your daily apostolic ministry, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you all.

From Castel Gandolfo, 21 August 2000.

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