

INTRODUCTION.

Preaching the Crucified Christ to a Suffering World

“The world goes on forgetful of the pains of Jesus, which are the miracle of miracles of the love of God. Pray that God send his servants from this Congregation to sound the trumpet of holy preaching to awaken the world.”

St. Paul of the Cross

St. Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionist Community, experienced a time of great social upheaval and turbulence. Europe had just stemmed the tide of the Turkish war which threatened the continent at the Battle of Vienna. The Protestant and Catholic division continued to plague local stability. The old aristocratic order was being attacked by the emerging systems of nationalism. Several philosophies attempted to make sense of this new European reality from John Locke’s liberalism to Edmund Burke’s conservatism. And yet, amongst all this activity and development, the poor were in large parts ignored and left to focus on their own survival and left with few options like thievery or brigandry.

Like his philosophical contemporaries St. Paul of the Cross recognized that one of the fundamental problems affecting his turbulent times was a lack of meaningful existence. Unlike his contemporaries Paul did not believe that the emerging social meaning had to come from outside the traditional Christian faith. Rather, as the above quote suggest, Paul believed that the greatest of personal and social messages was in the mystery of the Passion. What better message of empathy could there be to a world steeped in the midst of suffering then the message of the suffering servant. With the powerful meaning that this message could convey one could understand Pope Benedict XIV enthusiasm in making the supportive comment, “This Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ should have been the first to be founded and it has arrived at last.”

St. Paul of the Cross did not deny the immense suffering that was afflicting his world. In his massive correspondence we catch a glimpse of the numerous forms of personal suffering that he ministers to as a spiritual companion. For Paul one of the great problems of his world is that with all the suffering that was being experienced and the naturally imperfect condition of humanity, especially in its lack of humility, there was a growing tendency towards human arrogance, unbridled anger, and violence. People and society needed to come to an understanding of their suffering and find meaning in what they were experiencing. That became the mission of St. Paul of the Cross. Instead of looking at social philosophies Paul believed, quite fervently, that the greatest consolation and meaning to the condition of human suffering was the great love that God displayed in the Paschal Mystery. The love the Jesus had for God in accepting his life threatening mission. The love God had for Jesus in the Resurrection. And the love God had for humanity through this sacrifice. St. Paul of the Cross, like St. Paul the Apostle, believed that in understanding the suffering of this world through the prism of the Passion would condition humanity to compassionate love rather than antagonistic hate. In that sense he

would accomplish what St. Paul the Apostle wrote in his letter to the Romans “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

As we can see from the two excerpts on the cover of this workbook both in the Passionist Constitution and the Bishop’s document “Justice in the World” the Paschal Mystery is the fundamental image for understanding how God relates with our world and in turn how we, as disciples, are to relate to our own society. The suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus is the ultimate validation of Jesus’ message and of God’s power.

The central focus of Jesus’ message was on God’s love for us and our reciprocal love to God and neighbor. The radical point of this message was that it placed an emphasis on personal and social responsibility for the welfare of the entire community on all of us. Reflect on the 25th chapter in Matthew where Jesus emphasizes the social and personal responsibilities that will determine the final judgment and consider how vast a social program the local authorities would have to implement to address all these concerns. Such a benchmark on social responsibility would challenge any authoritative social structure whose tendency would be to focus on maintaining, defending and accruing its own political preeminence.

Thus it was that Jesus’ message, like the messages of his prophetic predecessors, raised the ire of his own local authorities. This group responded to such a message with the full might of their worldly power. The suffering and death of Jesus represented the response by worldly powers to the social implication of policies based on love of God and neighbor. It is in the Resurrection of Jesus that the full power of the Paschal Mystery is revealed. The ethic that stems from the love of God and neighbor is rewarded with the power of God’s great love. In the Paschal Mystery the worldly power to rule through fear and death is overcome by the Divine power that loves and creates life. That is how the Paschal Mystery becomes the cornerstone for understanding how we as Christians are motivated in addressing injustices that deny the fullest expression of God’s love to humanity.

We as Passionist see ourselves as servants of the Paschal Mystery who preach on how the passionate suffering of Jesus relates to the passionate suffering of our contemporary world. We see our ministry as both a personal message that consoles the suffering members of God’s creation and as a social message that reiterates Jesus’ message of a society that feeds the hungry, welcomes the stranger, takes care of the sick and visits the prisoner.

Through the Paschal Mystery the suffering victim is consoled and social structures are challenged. It is important to preach both the personal and social dimensions of this fundamental article of our faith. The most recent General Chapter of the Congregation of the Passion asserts this under its fifth decree:

Another priority is that of commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. This commitment is profoundly rooted in our charism. Our Constitutions express our desire “to share in the distress of all, especially those who are poor and neglected...” (Const.#3). We believe that the power of the

Cross offers us the strength to discern and to alleviate the burden of suffering experienced by the poor and the marginalized of our world. The preferential option for the poor has a central role in the process of Restructuring, guiding us to channel and utilize our resources. Furthermore, the ecological crisis of the world in which we live invites us to be concerned about the safeguarding and the protection of creation.

The commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation that is already present in various areas and apostolates of the Congregation should be integrated into all levels of planning in the Provinces, Vice-provinces and Vicariates including the area of initial formation. With this goal in mind, we must avail ourselves of the good use of available contacts and networks within the Congregation.

It is with this reflection and with this decree in mind that we present to you this workbook. This workbook is a resource of the JPIC office and members of the JPIC Committee will offer articles on social analysis, theological reflection, and other helpful resources that can be used for our apostolate and individual ministries. We hope that by providing this resource and by promoting workshops on specific JPIC topics we can serve the Congregation in promulgating this decree and we can serve our overall Mission by emphasizing the social implications of the Paschal Mystery.

How to use this workbook

This workbook is to be resource in at least two ways. Primarily this workbook is to be a resource for the individual member of the Passionist family in coming towards an understanding of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation within the context of the Passionist spirituality and community. We also hope that this resource can be a practical use for our ministries. Hopefully our Preachers and Pastors will find items in this workbook that they can use for their Missions, Homilies and bulletins. Ideally Retreat Directors can offer this document and retreat programs to interested retreatants. As this document has been developed by a committed group of Passionist that are working towards furthering our development of our JPIC ministries so to does this group hope to be a resource with this document in doing workshops, presentations, retreats and missions.

The workbook is divided into four parts. Part one will offer a definition and provide tools for promoting Passionist JPIC issues and ministries. Part two will break down into 5 sections that will address five social themes and offer reflections on these issues of social concern from the members of the community. Section three will have our Passionist Position Guides which offer a pro and con dialogue on some of the most pressing issues of our day. Finally we will have a selection of our Passion for Justice Bulletin which our monthly social and environmental reflections from our JPIC Office.

PART ONE: Articles on understanding and promoting JPIC

1. What is JPIC
2. St. Paul of the Cross: A man of justice and peace
3. Key Themes of Catholic Social Teaching (CST)
4. CST, an Essential Part of the Faith
5. CST and the Cross
6. The Social Dimension of Sin and Grace
7. The Pastoral Circle
8. “Actions on Behalf of Justice”

PART TWO: Social Reflections from the Passionist Community
on the issues of JPIC

1. Passion for Life
2. Human Rights
3. Economic Justice
4. Peace and Non-Violence
5. Integrity of Creation

PART THREE: Passionist Position Guides

1. The Voice of the Church in Public Affairs – Spring 2009
2. Reflections on the Economy – Winter 2009
3. Militarism – Spring 2008
4. Free and Fair Trade – Summer 2006
5. Global Warming – Winter 2006
6. The Wall: national borders in the U.S. and Israel – Fall 2005
7. The Patriot Act – Summer 2005