



St. Paul of the Cross

“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.”

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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. 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.”

St. Paul of the Cross is well known historically as a mystic and a preacher of the Passion. However another point of his life that should be emphasized is his focus on the poor and marginalized. He wanted his community to minister to the poor and marginalized people who lived in the malaria infected regions of Italy known as the Maremma. He undertook a number of direct service ministries including as a hospital chaplain. We also know that during the Austrian-Spanish battle at Orbetello around the late 1730’s St. Paul of the Cross and his early community tended to the soldiers from both sides and as he developed a trusting relationship with both armies he participated with the negotiation of a truce between the two armies. This truce spared the city from a naval bombardment. As a result the city helped St. Paul of the Cross build his first retreat.

In his vast correspondence one can see St. Paul’s orientation towards the “preferential option for the poor.” He used to say “*Look at the poor, there you will find the name of Jesus Christ written on their foreheads.*” In fact during his early design for a religious community he initially went with the name “the poor of Jesus.” While the community eventually became known as the Passionist this exhortation to be with the poor always remained as a part of his mission.

Following the teaching of the Prince of the Apostles, and that before everything else holy charity may flourish in the Congregation, especially toward the poor sick, we ordain that these are to be cared for with all charitable attention to the extent that our poverty permits.

May 20 1775; letter to the Passionist Religious

We ought to be grateful and correspond to his divine benefits by loving justice, truth, and exercising charity and the works of mercy towards our neighbor, especially to the poor.

December 26 1772; letter to a gentleman

The Passionist Community that St. Paul of the Cross founded continues his ministry of promoting the Passion of Jesus through our preaching, retreats, education and social ministries. This mission, and the social dimension that it entails, is proclaimed in our Passionist Constitution:

We Passionists make the Paschal Mystery the center of our lives.

This entails a loving commitment to follow Jesus Crucified, and a generous resolve to proclaim His Passion and death with faith and love. His Passion and death are no mere historical events. They are ever-present realities to people in the world of today, "crucified" as they are by injustice, by the lack of a deep respect for human life, and by a hungry yearning for peace, truth, and the fullness of human existence.

Article 65 of the Passionist Constitution

Prayer:

O good Saint Paul of the Cross,
you proclaimed God's wonders
in the Passion of God's only Son.

By word and deed,
you became a spiritual guide
and preacher of the gospel
to a world grown cold
to the love of Jesus Christ.

Help me to see God's love
in the merciful cross of Jesus,
and teach me to trust
in the blessings God gives.

May the Passion of Jesus
be in my heart,
and bring life to all the world.

Amen.



Solemnity

Reading:

Paul Daneo was born in 1694 in Ovado in Piedmont. During his youth, he helped his father in business. Called by God to follow the example of Jesus Crucified, he received the religious habit in 1720 and committed himself totally to asceticism and the apostolate. While temporarily engaged in the care of the sick at Rome, he was ordained to the priesthood by Pope Benedict XIII. He then withdrew into solitude on Monte Argentario together with his brother, the venerable Father John Baptist of St. Michael the Archangel and, under God's inspiration, founded the Congregation of the Passion. The principal purpose of the Congregation is to meditate on and proclaim the passion and death of the Lord. For the same purpose, he also founded the Passionist Nuns as a contemplative community. Tireless preacher of the word of the Cross, outstanding superior of the Congregation, eminent model of penance and contemplation, and enlightened director of souls, Paul of the Cross is considered the greatest mystic of the eighteenth century. He died in Rome on October 18, 1775.

Hymn:

Look down from heaven, Paul,
as we praise your deeds.
Lead on by your example
those who strive for heaven's crown

A radiant light
announced your birth.
And, as a boy,
the hand of Mary saved you
from the rushing stream.

Love branded Jesus' name
upon your loyal heart.
Marked by his triumphant sign
you gave your life to God alone.

And like a yearning deer
you hurried to the cross
to drink the grace of solitude
and let God's will be done.

Fasting was your companion;
thirst and cold accompanied you.
Visions in the night stirred your spirit,
heaven made you restless of heart.

Joyful hearted warrior,
you followed him who called,
and became another Christ,
your life another passion.

All praise to you, Trinity.
That governs all the world;
grant through Paul, our Patron,
an entrance to your heavenly home.
Amen.