

The charism of St. Paul of the Cross and of the Passionists: “To recall to mind”

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The founders of congregations are charismatic people and their spirituality is distinguished by their charism-- the Carmelite, Franciscan, Dominican, Passionist charism. Charism, in this context, is the anointing of a person by the Holy Spirit for a mission in and for the community.¹ We can interpret the charism of St. Paul of the Cross as a meditation on and “remembrance” of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Oh dearest beloved! He who really loves, whenever he remembers Friday, has reasons to die. To say “Friday” is to name the day when my God-Made-Man suffered so much for me that he gave up his life by dying on the hard wood of the cross.”²

For Christians in general, and especially for us Passionists, the Passion of Christ and his death is the founding event of our faith, because two points

1— Cfr. M. Szentmártoni, *In cammino verso Dio. Riflessioni psicologico-spirituali su alcune forme di esperienza religiosa*, Spiritualità 27, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (MI) 1998, p. 132.

2— F. Giorgini, *S. Paolo della Croce, Lettere ai Passionisti*, I, Edizioni CIPI, Roma 1998, p.758: [Preface to the first text of the Rule written at Castellazzo].



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of faith are based on that event: 1) that Jesus is the Son of God; 2) that his death was for us. “Hence the value and meaning of the cross: it saves us from death and definitively reveals to us the face of God and the measure of his love for us.”³ The charism of St. Paul of the Cross and of the Passionists is clearly “recalling to mind the Passion of Jesus”. And what does it mean to “recall to mind”? “Memorial” is the translation of the Greek term *anàmnesis* (ἀνάμνησις), which in turn translates the Hebrew *Zikkaron* (זִכָּרוֹן). In fact, Walter Kasper describes the term very well, referring to the “*anamnetic* concept of the Eucharist”, and concludes by saying that the Eucharist’s relationship with the event of Christ and the event of the cross can be described “only with the biblical category of memorial (*zikkaron; anamnesis; memory*), the actualizing memory.” (Cfr. W. Kasper, *Sacramento dell’unità. Eucaristia e Chiesa, Queriniana, Brescia 2004 p. 94*)⁴.

“Actualizing” memory, therefore, it is not a mere reminder of the death of Christ in the past. The words “anàmnesis” and “zikkaròn”, are to be understood in a dynamic-functional sense, that is, the recalling of a past fact as binding and which obliges us to act accordingly. Remembering is not a “simple spiritual or affective act, but a memory that leads to action.”⁵

In the light of this premise, the cross of Christ offers us an important lesson about action, and in this very brief reflection I would like to share my intuition focused on the effect of the combination of “unity and reconciliation”.

On the one hand, the search for unity is found in the very words of Jesus who in his last discourse to his disciples prays “*that they may all be one.*” And he adds, “*As you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me.*” (Jn.17:21). Therefore, it is a union which involves a vision, a strategy, and a single plan of action, avoiding dispersion and overcoming mistrust.

On the other hand, the spirit of reconciliation, un-

3– D. Pezzini, *La luce sulla croce, la spiritualità della passione in Giuliana di Norwich*, Cammini nello Spirito. Meditazione 3, Edizioni Paoline, Milano 1997, p. 223.

4– E. Mazza, «La liturgia come “anàmnesis”: una nozione da riesaminare?», *Didaskalia* XXXVII/2 (2007) 13-26.

5– A. Sorrentino, *Celebriamo con gioia*, Dottrinari, Pellezzano (SA) 2014³, p. 92.



derstood in the relationship between brothers and sisters, is the Christian’s motive for learning to forgive always and unconditionally. Reconciliation does not derive from reasons of personal gain or social coexistence; rather it originates within the experience of faith in which one feels reconciled with the Father, which in turn becomes the power for forgiving others.

The action of the Cross in the believer, therefore, can be a sign of unity and reconciliation and, in this sense, the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus even if divided into various provinces, is one family and we are all brothers and sisters because we share in the same charism, the one already embraced by our Founder, St. Paul of the Cross. Jesus’ Passion and cross is therefore an appeal to overcome fear of the “other” and of differences through the action of unity and reconciliation. Of course, even today there can be real difficulties in living with different cultures and traditions, but it is possible to overcome these difficulties through unity and faith in Jesus Christ.

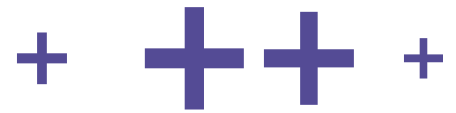
The Apostle Paul, looking at the wall of separation between pagans and Jews in the temple of Herod,





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says, “He –Christ– is our peace. He who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity.” (Eph. 2:14). The demolished wall is not a material wall but the enmity between all peoples in view of reconciliation in God so that “you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the holy ones and members of the household of God.” (Eph. 2:19) Even today, we can make this exhortation our own in the sense that even if we are from different provinces, we are all Passionist brothers, inspired by a single charism, understood in the sense of ongoing union and reconciliation. A Passionist from the province of Italy [France and Portugal] who goes to the Passionists of Africa is neither a foreigner nor a guest, but a brother, as indeed was the first goal of our Founder-- to find and create brothers. We need to remember this!

There are ambiguous and even obscure feelings of human nature that bring our frailties into the open. Among the most common and persistent is envy, which creates division. However our Founder warned us and even showed us a different way

when he urged us—“The other temptations, if one is faithful to combating them, also do a great good; they humble us, they teach us, they purify us like gold in fire. Be very humble, but with that true humility of the heart that makes the soul a friend to one’s self-contempt and submission to all.”⁶ We must be faithful and therefore remember these treasures that we have inherited. The cross of Christ also offers us a lesson in true love that goes beyond simple tolerance “because ... it is on the Cross of the beloved Good that the true love of God is exercised.” (Letters I, 491)⁷

The testimony of the Apostle Paul to the different primitive communities invited them to consider a life consistent with the faith they professed, in brotherhood, as a characteristic of Christian life: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.” (Col.3:11) Furthermore, he repeats the same teaching to the community of the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal.3:28) Therefore, this invitation represents a strong reminder of the need according to which we must all feel that we are one, and this same exhortation together with the “memory” of the treasures of our Founder, invite us, in the context of union and reconciliation, to avoid all superiority, separation, exclusivity, divisions, discrimination and every insular mentality.

In our Congregation of the Passion of Jesus, there must be no distinction between different cultures, because Christ is in everyone and everything. I believe that motivated by these elements of union and reconciliation with our brothers and sisters, we can live in unity and communion among ourselves, with the Church and in relationship with the Father.

6– Key points of the spirituality of St. Paul of the Cross, n. 4, in <<http://www.passionisti.org/index>. [Letters I, 178, Francesca Lucci, March 3, 1738]

7– Riflessioni tratte dalle Lettere di S.P.D.C., «sedici ‘Perché’ “... uno più prezioso dell’altro”, n.3, Parola di S. Paolo della Croce...

