

A Grateful Remembrance... **FROM the FOOT of the CROSS**



Dear Family and Friends,

The sacred season of Lent, Holy Mother Church's annual "40-day retreat," is once again upon us. It's a time of spiritual renewal, of growth in prayer, penance, and works of charity. It's a time to meditate on the sufferings of Christ as we prepare to commemorate His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

As you might have guessed, we Passionists feel right at home in the Lenten season! Our charism shines brightly during these 40 days, when the entire Church turns her heart towards the Paschal Mystery of her Divine Bridegroom in a more intentional way. Our special vow "to promote devotion to and grateful remembrance of the Passion and Death of Christ," which informs our way of life year-round, is especially meaningful during this time.

In this newsletter, in addition to the usual community updates and photos, we wanted to share *from our hearts* about the mystery of Our Lord's suffering love for us. It is our prayer that these reflections help you to enter more deeply into the celebrations of Holy Week—the most sacred week of the year. May you receive in a new way the powerful graces that flow from the Pierced Heart of Christ, graces that can transform the way you live your daily Christian life!

Know of our prayers for you, your loved ones, and all your intentions during the sacred Paschal Triduum. We look forward to meeting you on Calvary and at the empty tomb!

Mother John Mary and the Passionist Community of St. Joseph Monastery
Lent 2024

The Power of His Passion

*“Beneath Thy Cross abiding, forever would I rest,
In Thy dear love confiding, and with Thy presence blest.”*

(From the hymn “O Sacred Head Surrounded”)

The Problem of Suffering

Suffering is a mystery that touches each of our lives at one time or another. Sometimes it comes as physical illness or injury; sometimes as emotional, psychological, or relational struggles; on still other occasions, as spiritual trials and darkness. Most often, in fact, there is some combination of all these factors at work. Suffering is an inescapable fact of human existence, and no amount of medication, therapy, social programs, or even prayer can completely eliminate it from our lives. The best we can do, it seems to us, is to numb the pain and distract ourselves, refusing to face a harsh reality that has no apparent solution.

In the face of this grim reality, why on earth would we choose to fix our eyes on a Man nailed to a Cross, a Man dying in absolute agony, overwhelmed with anguish on every level of His being? Isn't our own suffering hard enough to bear, without having to consider the sufferings of Christ? Why is it that the Saints seem to find such joy and strength in contemplating this gruesome spectacle?



No Greater Love

The incredible answer lies in the fact of *Who* this Man is and *why* He is suffering.

WHO hangs upon the Cross? A Man, yes, but more than a man. This is the eternal Son of God, come down to live among us as one of us, sharing our every burden and sorrow. This is the Beloved of the Father, indeed, Love Incarnate.

WHY does He hang upon the Cross? For one reason and one reason only: LOVE. He suffers to prove His absolute, unconditional love for His Father – and for each one of us. He was under no obligation to save us from our sins; even if He were, it would have sufficed for Him to breathe a single prayer, shed a single tear for us. Christ did not die because He *had* to, but because He *chose* to. He wanted to show us that He holds back absolutely nothing for Himself. He pours out every drop of His Precious Blood for us – for me – for you.

A God Who Enters Into Our Darkness

So what does all this have to do with our own personal sufferings? Everything, in fact. By His Passion and Death, Jesus has entered into the deepest, darkest abysses of human suffering *so that He can meet us there*. No matter how far we seem to be falling, He has fallen farther and is waiting to catch us. The Good Shepherd cannot rest until He has gone to the utmost lengths to offer salvation to His straying sheep. Will we turn and see His pierced hand reaching out to us?

And there's more. Some wonder why, if the Messiah has truly come, there is still such atrocious suffering in the world. If any one of *us* had the power to save the world, we would probably begin by eliminating war, poverty, hunger, injustice, and so forth. In fact, God's answer to the "mystery of iniquity" is far more startling and profound. Jesus did not come to take away suffering on this earth – He came to *share* it.

And because God in the flesh has entered into our suffering and death, He has imbued that same pain with unimaginable dignity and efficacy. By God's almighty power, the curse has been transformed into a blessing! When we unite our sufferings to the Passion of Christ, they acquire incredible meaning and contribute to the salvation of the world. To carry the Cross with Jesus is a privilege!



Ponder His Passion

To help ourselves understand this infinite love of God, as well as the privilege He offers us in suffering with Him, *mediation on the Passion* is an extremely powerful tool. It's not hard – anyone can do it and discover the fruits of this special type of prayer. Why not make a resolution this Lent to try it out? Just 15 minutes a day of pondering the Passion of Christ can change your life.

Where to Begin?

If you're not sure how to get started with Passion meditation, here are some ideas ...

- ◇ Slowly read one of the Gospel accounts of the Passion. Whenever your heart is moved, pause and speak to the Lord about that particular passage.
- ◇ Pray the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary, asking Our Lady to accompany you as you stand by Jesus Suffering.
- ◇ Make the Stations of the Cross, either with a devotional booklet or just with the thoughts and prayers of your own heart.
- ◇ Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet, dedicating each decade to one of the Five Wounds of Christ.
- ◇ Make a Holy Hour in union with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, responding to His anguished plea: "Could you not spend one hour with Me?"

LET
CHRIST
CRUCIFIED
BE
ENOUGH
FOR
YOU,

*and with Him suffer
and take your rest.*



A Meditation:

My Wounds and the Wounds of Christ

Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Remind yourself of the presence of God, the infinitely loving Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now think of a time when you experienced some suffering – physical, emotional, or spiritual, great or small. Give that suffering a name: a headache, betrayal by a friend, feeling the absence of God, etc. Invite the Lord into that place of suffering, asking Him to be with you as you relive it.

Then ask Jesus to show you the mystery of His Passion that most closely connects with your particular suffering. Was it the crowning with thorns? The kiss of Judas? The desolation He felt upon the Cross?

Picture Our Lord in that mystery. What is He doing? Feeling? What does He say to you? Speak to Him as your heart moves you; perhaps offering Him words of comfort, or thanking Him for this suffering, or placing your own hurts at His feet to be united with His pain.

Rest in the knowledge of His love for you and willingness to suffer for you, with you. Draw strength from His Sacred Heart to carry your own cross in union with Him.

Monastery Happenings

Sr Maria Faustina's Perpetual Profession of Vows

On December 8th, 2023, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, our Sister Maria Faustina of the Agonizing Heart of Jesus and the Sorrowful Heart of Mary professed her Perpetual Vows. It was a joyous occasion, with many of Sister's family members and friends joining us to celebrate and give thanks for the gift of another perpetual bride of Jesus Crucified.

Bishop William Medley presided over the Profession Mass, and our chaplain, Fr Lou Caporiccio, CPM, preached a beautiful homily about the universal call to holiness and the special call of the consecrated religious.

In the evening, Fr Jeff Stegbauer (a friend of Sister Maria Faustina from her youth group days back in Mason, OH), presided over a service of Eucharistic Adoration and Solemn Vespers. It was a wonderful, prayerful way to end a very full day, and Father's homily about "Marian littleness" drew us all to confide more joyfully in the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary.

Vestition and Naming of Sr Isabel Maria

Just four days after Sr Maria Faustina's Profession, we had another special occasion to celebrate: the Vestition of our Postulant Holly! On December 12, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, in a private ceremony with the community, Holly received the holy habit of the Passion and her new religious name: Sister Isabel Maria of Jesus, My Eucharistic Spouse. *Here are some of Sr Isabel Maria's reflections on her name and title: "My patron is Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, but I am named Isabel, the Portuguese version of the name Elizabeth. Our dear Sister Mary Elizabeth already holds the English version of the name. I was delighted to have my Portuguese heritage included in my name, having already requested the name 'Maria' for Our Lady of Fatima, to whom I have a great devotion ... Jesus too calls me "my Eucharistic Spouse", and I am one with Him, a perpetual living sacrifice of praise to the Father. But this title is also definitely for His loving Presence. Jesus has always pursued me in the Eucharist, and He continues to by giving me this title. The Eucharist is the fullest expression of the utter humility of God, a hidden God who yearns to dwell within us."*



The presence of Maria Faustina's grandmother, **Joan Carmichael**, was a surprise and joy. Here she is seen with Sister and **Bishop William Medley**.

Below: Sister with her parents **Paul** and **Sherry Carmichael** and her brothers **Shane** and **Paul Carmichael III**.



A family photo! Back: **Sebastian**, **Rita** (aunt), **Joshua**, **Sr. Isabel Maria**, **Monica**, **Stephen**, **Sofie**, **Devin** (brother-in-law); Front: **Bill** (father), **Sharon** (mother), **Genevieve** (niece), and **Beth**



Photo courtesy: Elizabeth Wong Barnstead—Western KY Catholic

Photo courtesy: Elizabeth Wong Barnstead—Western KY Catholic

New Sacred Vestments

At the time of Mother John Mary's Silver Jubilee in 2022, Fr. Corey Bruns approached us about sponsoring some new vestments in honor of the occasion. Thanks to the generosity of Father and some of his parishioners at St. Joseph's in Bowling Green, we now have the first installment of our new vestment set made by the House of Hansen: a stunning gold-and-red cope and humeral veil! (see our chaplain, Fr. Lou Caporiccio, modeling the cope at right while Mother holds the humeral veil). We were delighted to have them in time for a "debut" at Benediction on the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion this year!

Celebrating Mother John Mary's Feastday

Since Mother's feastday falls during the Christmas Octave (December 27th), we usually hold our community celebration in her honor a few weeks later. This year, we kept the Christmas decorations up a few extra days after the Baptism of the Lord just for the occasion. It was solemnly declared a "fun sock day" — did the retreatants who joined us for prayer in chapel notice the sisters shod in colorful stripes, owls, shamrocks, and even Divine Mercy images?

Mother also delighted us with a surprise gift: a framed print of Our Lady of Holy Hope (an image special to Passionists) for each Sister to hang in her cell. After lunch, the younger Sisters presented Spiritual Direction By Mime! (see photo below) This skit, done in "silent movie" style (complete with background music), was originally written by Sisters Cecilia Maria and Frances Marie for their graduation from the Cenacle School of Spiritual Direction in October 2023.



Animals Near and Far

Below: This turtle visitor dubbed, "Raj", spent the night in our courtyard after some sisters found him during a walk. *At right:* Sr Mary Andrea hangs out with "King" Gizmo, our visiting cat originally from the Holy Land.





Maintenance Woes

During a mid-January cold snap, we had 2 sprinkler heads freeze and began to drip. Thankfully, both were discovered in time before we had an explosion and “geyser” from the sprinkler system. The cold weather also caused some problems with our geothermal heating/cooling system, resulting in heat pump woes for several rooms in the monastery, retreat house, and chapel. Thankfully, this issue will be rectified with the pending installation of 2 new high efficiency gas boilers. In fact, as part of our building and renovation project, we must revamp the geothermal system this year to connect the new wing to the current system.

Monastery Improvements and Upgrades

After literally years of waiting, the last phase of our roof replacement was completed in late 2023. The flat roof over the Retreat House arcade is now leak-proof, thanks to the expert work of Hedinger Roofing Company.

Over the past few years, we’ve also been gradually replacing the fluorescent lightbulbs around the monastery with more efficient and cost-effective LEDs. That monumental task was completed this year, including new bulbs in all of our chapel chandeliers. Big thanks are due to Knottsville Electric and Higdon Electric!

Last but not least, the monastery hallway floors got a “facelift” this February with the removal of old carpet and laying of new Kinetex flooring! This unique material is made from recycled plastic and is designed to stay nice-looking even in high-traffic areas. Several Sisters and volunteers helped cut costs by tearing out the old carpet.

Cherish the Flame Update

Work is moving right along on the Holy Family Wing — the bricklaying is nearly complete, the windows and doors are in place, the HVAC, plumbing, and sprinkler system “rough-in” are installed, and Retreat House improvements are happening. Now we are working on the stained glass window designs. At left our designer, Donna Baldacci, shows us her first draft. We are thrilled to work with her as she takes our vision for the windows and brings them to life.

Where in the World is Mother Catherine Marie?

Sisters enjoying community time in the shade of the cloister walkways with Mother Catherine Marie (bottom left) who returned to Lucca in August to continue her duties as Mother President.



New Wheels On the feast of Saint John the Apostle, we said goodbye to our faithful 14-year-old Chevy sedan. Sr. Miriam Esther was driving home from an appointment when another vehicle ran a red light, t-boning our vehicle and totaling it! Both drivers were unhurt, thanks be to God! With some welcome help from insurance, we have purchased a new-used Honda HRV, dubbed “Giovanna” in honor of St. John.



We Love Our Employees!

Last but not least, we wanted to give a shout-out to our five wonderful lay employees, who help us keep the monastery and retreat house running smoothly. You all mean the world to us! L-R: **Monica** (monastery cook), **Cecilia** (Retreat House), **Ronnie** (maintenance supervisor), **Dana** (Retreat House), and **Millie** (Retreat House).

Special thanks to all our volunteers, contract workers, and those who give discounts or don’t charge for labor!



holy Week Services

Palm Sunday

Morning Prayer at 7:20 a.m.

Mass at 8 a.m.

Evening Prayer at 4:45 p.m.

Holy Thursday

Morning Prayer at 7 a.m.

Office of Readings and Midmorning Prayer at 8:45 a.m.

Mass of the Lord's Supper at 7 p.m. followed by

Night Prayer with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemani

Good Friday

Morning Prayer at 7 a.m.

Office of Readings and Midmorning Prayer at 8:45 a.m.

Midday Prayer at 12 p.m.

Liturgy of the Passion of the Lord at 3 p.m.

Night Prayer with Our Mother of Sorrows around 7 p.m.

Holy Saturday

Morning Prayer at 7 a.m.

Office of Readings and Midmorning Prayer at 8:45 a.m.

Evening Prayer at 4:45 p.m.

Easter Vigil Mass at 8 p.m.

Easter Sunday:

Morning Prayer at 7:20 a.m.

Mass of the Resurrection of the Lord at 8 a.m.

Evening Prayer at 6 p.m.



Thank You! You Help Us Cherish Our Passionist Life

In closing, we wish to thank YOU for partnering in our mission. God daily provides for us through the hands and hearts of our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ. We couldn't do what we do without you! Your **PRAYERS** for our monastic community and for an increase of new members are the greatest gift.

Donations to our Cherish the Flame Campaign will help us raise the estimated \$700,000 we need to bring our construction and renovation work to completion. This goal includes the \$250k needed to re-vamp the geothermal HVAC. **Contributions to our General Fund** will help cover maintenance costs such as for our new car, the flat roof replacement, and Kinetex flooring, as well as the daily expenses which include food, lodging, and medical care of all here.

If you're looking for ways to give or to give more:

- ◆ Use the enclosed envelope; earmark your check for "Cherish the Flame" or "General Fund"
- ◆ Make a one-time gift or set up an automatic monthly donation through our website
- ◆ List the Passionist Nuns as a beneficiary on IRAs and other Qualified Retirement Plans
- ◆ Designate unneeded Life Insurance funds towards the Passionist Nuns, such as via Payable on Death (POD) and Transfer on Death (TOD) Accounts
- ◆ Make a Grant Recommendation for your Donor Advised Funds
- ◆ **Please remember us in your Lenten almsgiving!**

May God Bless and Reward You!

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Cherish CHRIST CRUCIFIED

"When you are alone in your room, take your crucifix, kiss its five wounds reverently, tell it to preach to you a little sermon, and then listen to the words of eternal life that it speaks to your heart; listen to the pleading of the thorns, the nails, the precious Blood. Oh, what an eloquent sermon!"

~ St. Paul of the Cross

As we near the Sacred Paschal Triduum, Holy Mother Church calls us to fix our eyes on the Cross of Christ. As Passionists, we are particularly "in our element" this time of year, and it is our duty and joy to share the riches of our beautiful charism with our families and friends. One way we are privileged to do this is through our Holy Week liturgies. We would love it if you can join us for any of them! (See page 6 of this newsletter for service times.)

May our Crucified and Risen Lord flood you and your loved ones with an abundance of His grace during this holiest of seasons. Know that you are in our hearts and prayers!

Mother John Mary, CP, and all the Community



An image and a first-class relic of St. Paul of the Cross, displayed in our monastery chapel for his feast day (October 20th)