

FORMATION AND CATECHESIS

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The Call to Holiness Passionist Saints, Blesseds and Venerables

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In the 300 years of its life, the Church has recognized the holiness of numerous brothers and sisters of the Passionist Family who have followed in the footsteps and teachings of St. Paul of the Cross. Currently there are 7 Saints, 34 Blesseds, and 24 Venerables-- unique and inimitable figures and stories of holiness, different in context and experience, men and women, religious and laity, all associated with the mystery of the Passion of Jesus that they lived, loved, and proclaimed to the world.

In this year that recalls the beginnings of the charism of St. Paul of the Cross, we cannot fail to highlight the figure of his brother, Venerable John Baptist of St. Michael the Archangel (1695-1765), his true "shadow", who shared with him much of his spiritual and missionary journey, offering Paul his continuous prayer, his apostolic ardour, his lucid and patient sharing and fraternal correction.

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Considering the gallery of Passionist saints beginning from the spiritual experience of the Danei brothers, we offer a quick description of these different figures, leaving the reader to discover their human and spiritual richness.

We identify a first group of “mature Passionists”, who throughout these 300 years offered their lives to the service of the Church and the Congregation:

- The bishops, St. Vincent Mary Strambi (1745-1824) and Blessed Eugene Bossilkov (1900-1952). Although they lived at vastly different times, they served their flock and defended the unity of the Church under the only pastor who is the Pope. Vincent Strambi paid the price with exile, under Napoleon, and Eugene Bossilkov, with his very life, under the Bulgarian Communist regime.
- Blessed Lorenzo Salvi (1782-1856) and Blessed Dominic Barberi (1792-1849), lived during the period of the Napoleonic suppression. Lorenzo Salvi was a missionary and preacher, well known for the spread of devotion to the Child Jesus; and Dominic Barberi was a formator, teacher, provincial superior and finally founder of the Passionist mission in England.
- Venerable Ignatius of St. Paul (1799-1864), born George Spencer, a member of the high English nobility, was a priest in the Anglican Church who converted to Catholicism, and was ordained a priest. With the arrival in England of Blessed Dominic Barberi, he entered the Passionist Congregation and devoted himself to preaching and charitable works on behalf of the poor and the marginalized.
- Two others who lived at the same time are Blessed Bernard Mary Silvestrelli (1831-1911), who for almost thirty years was Superior General and facilitated the expansion of the Congregation and, St. Charles Houben (1821-1893), originally from the Netherlands, was a missionary first in England and then in Ireland.
- Other religious have become famous for their service as formators and spiritual guides: Ven. Norberto Cassinelli (1829-1911) director of St. Gabriel of the Sorrowful Virgin, Ven. Germano Ruoppolo (1850-1909) spiritual director of St. Gemma Galgani, Ven. Nazareno Santolini (1859-1930), master of novices for almost thirty years, and Ven. Generoso Fontanarosa (1881-1966) who started the foundation in Sicily and was spiritual director of Ven. Lucia Mangano.

- Additional religious lived at the turn of the 20th century: the Ven. Fortunato De Gruttis (1826-1905) missionary, exorcist and confessor; Ven. Giuseppe Pesci (1853-1929) teacher, master of novices and provincial superior; Ven. Egidio Malacarne (1877-1953) missionary, teacher and for thirty years General Postulator of the Congregation, who promoted the causes of St. Vincent M. Strambi and St. Gemma; Ven. Francisco Gondra Muruaga (1910-1974) better known as Aita Patxi, involved as a Passionist and a Basque in the Spanish Civil War, was arrested and deported. He was an evangelizer among prisoners and offered himself as a substitute for those condemned to death. When he returned to the monastery he dedicated himself to the assistance of those who were suffering and abandoned.

To this group we must add our “religious Martyrs” of the 1930’s in Spain: first, St. Inocencio Canoura (1887-1934) was arrested and martyred along with the community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, to whom he was ministering and, in 1936, Blessed Nicéforo Díez Tejerina (1893-1936) and his 25 companions, Passionist Martyrs of Daimiel, most of whom were young students. Blessed Nicéforo, the Provincial Superior, prepared them to live that dark and tremendous moment as “citizens of Calvary”.



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We also have “Religious Brothers”, starting with Ven. Giacomo Gianiel (1714-1750), one of the earliest companions of St. Paul of the Cross, professed as a brother in 1743 and who spent 7 years in service to the Congregation; Blessed Isidore de Loor, who lived in Belgium (1881-1916) an example of obedience and dedication to community and faith despite his illness; Ven. Lorenzo Marcelli (1874-1953) who worked in Italy and Brazil, and was known for his ministry of evangelizing and seeking alms; Ven. Gerardo Sagarduy, of Basque origin, who lived for 60 years in the Generalate earning a reputation as the “porter saint” (1881-1962).

There is the group of our “Young Saints”, who are perhaps the best known and venerated. Passionists who died prematurely, but in the fullness of their vocation. Among them the best known is St. Gabriel of Sorrowful Virgin (1838-1862), who was a model of holiness for other young Passionists, such as Blessed Pio Campidelli (1868-1889), Blessed Grimoaldo Santamaria (1883-1902) and Ven. Galileo Nicolini (1882-1897), a young religious who died at the age of 15. Also in this category is Ven. Giovanni Bruni (1882-1905) who came to be a priest, but died shortly afterwards, at the age of 23, leaving a reputation for holiness.

In the gallery of Passionist saints, several female figures are also prominent. First is the Co-Foundress of the Passionist Cloistered Nuns, Ven. Maria Crocifissa Costantini (1713-1787) who under the guidance of St. Paul of the Cross founded the first cloistered Monastery in 1771; then, Venerable Maddalena Marcucci (1888-1960) and Leonarda Boidi (1908-1953), Passionist Nuns of the 20th century who contributed to the spread of this charism in the world; the last addition among the Venerable Nuns, is the young Maria Addolorata Luciani (1920-1954), who lived her brief experience as a consecrated woman while experiencing great suffering due to illness, arriving at a holy death.

There are also women who were architects of new female Passionist Institutes, such as Ven. Elisabeth Prout (1820-1864) who in England, under the guidance of Blessed Dominic, worked on behalf of the poor and exploited of the Industrial Revolution and founded the Sisters of the Cross and Passion; Ven. Dolores Medina (1860-1925), who lived in Mexico during the time of the anticlerical laws and was the foundress of the Daughters of the Passion of Jesus Christ and Our Lady of Sorrows; and Ven. Euphemia Gemma Giannini (1884-1971) spiritual heir of St. Gemma and foundress of the Sisters of St. Gemma. Representing the Passionist Sisters of St.

Paul of the Cross, founded by the Servant of God Maddalena Frescobaldi in 1815, is Ven. Antonietta Farani (1906-1963), Italian of origin and Brazilian by adoption, who ministered by among the poorest and crucified of her time.

Finally, there are several lay women who, in the Passionist charism, discovered the path to holiness: the first, in chronological order, is Ven. Lucia Burlini (1710-1789) spiritual daughter of St. Paul of the Cross and benefactress of the Congregation, followed by the much better known and revered St. Gemma Galgani (1878-1903), poor and abandoned in this life but precious and beloved for her mystical gifts and virtues. Her experience was echoed in the figure of Blessed Edvige Carboni (1880-1952), Passionist by adoption, who in the midst of service to family members and the poor, experienced extraordinary mystical gifts. Finally, to these we add the young martyr St. Maria Goretti (1890-1902), daughter of a poor family, in a social context of exploitation, in a region where the Passionists tried to bring a word of consolation and hope. She was the victim of blind violence that she transformed into flowers of forgiveness.

May the witness of these Saints, Blesseds and Venerable Passionists, together with many other exemplary models of Passionist life, renew in each of us fidelity and passion for our charismatic vocation.