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# Commemoration of the Passion, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and the Most Precious Blood.

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# Jubilaevum

This issue of the Formation & Catechesis Bulletin addresses the topic of Passionist feast days, in particular three that are very dear to us because they refer to our specific charism. The author of the first, the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion of Jesus Christ (today the Titular feast of the Congregation) was Fr. Thomas Struzzi. The Founder had originally chosen Fr. Candido Costa for the task, but he did not feel that he was capable of doing the work. When Fr. Thomas was elevated to the episcopate (1764), he also introduced the feast in the dioceses of Amelia and Todi where he ministered until his death. In the Congregation the feast began to be celebrated in 1776 during ordinary time and at the beginning of Lent because this was the time of the year of the celebration of Carnival. Therefore the Passionists would intensify their ministry of reparation for sins that were committed during this period and would renew

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the world by the devout recollection of the Passion itself. In this solemnity, the whole mystery of the Passion of Jesus is contemplated beginning in the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a liturgy full of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ who, dying on the cross for us, gave us his own divine life. It is also an invitation to worship Christ the Lord because by his Passion He redeemed the world. The purpose of the Solemn Commemoration of the Passion of Jesus Christ is to obtain from the Father the gift of always renewing this supreme proof of love, in order to participate in the glory of the Resurrection. In the Office of Readings, the Founder made this even clearer--*"Whoever wants to be holy loves to follow faithfully the divine example of Jesus Christ, and to be made the opprobrium of men and the outcast of the people, because he recognizes that he is guilty of high treason for having sinned. One who wants to be a saint loves to remain hidden to the eyes of the world, takes the sweet with the bitter and the bitter with the sweet. His food is to do the most holy will of God in everything. Just as this is done more in suffering than in joy, since one's own will is always united with it in joy, so the true servant of God loves suffering, and accepts it directly from the purest will of the Lord. I am omitting much that I could say, and I say only that these are the characteristics of one who wants to be holy."*

*Happy is that person who, clothed with Jesus Christ and totally penetrated by his holy wounds, is entirely immersed, and hidden in the immense sea of divine charity and there, detached from every created thing, rests in the bosom of the beloved Good! [...] I beg you, insofar as I know and can, to profit by that divine knowledge which the sovereign teacher Jesus Christ teaches you in the school of his holy passion while you meditate on it with faith and charity. In this divine school you must learn to be humble of heart, a lover of self-contempt and of suffering in silence and hope, and to be gentle, meek, docile and obedient."* The whole liturgy of this Solemnity-- the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours-- aims at enabling us to fathom the Passion of Jesus as the wonderful work of God's love. Thus, freed from sin, the Father may grant us salvation.

Next we study the Exaltation of the Holy Cross which in the East is equated with Easter and recalls the dedication in Jerusalem of the basilica of the *Martyrion* and the *Anastasis*, as well as the discovery of the Holy Cross. Therefore, to exalt the Cross as an instrument of death that became the source of life is a cause for joy. The date, 14 September, is associated with the year 335 A.D., when the relics of the Holy Cross were solemnly exhibited at the end of the consecration of the Constantinian basilicas. The combination of "death-life", with the addition of "defeat-victory", is also taken up in the Preface: *"For you placed the salvation of the human race on the wood of the Cross, so that, where death arose, life might again spring forth and the evil one, who conquered on a tree, might likewise on a tree be conquered."* The feast was celebrated since the time of the Founder as the Titular feast of the Congregation and still remains one of the most representative manifestations of Passionist spirituality. In fact, we Passionists are granted the privilege of always celebrating the First Vespers.



Again, the words of the Founder help us: *"Have you celebrated with solemnity the feast of the Triumph of the Holy Cross? You will answer 'yes', but do you know what I really mean? The feast of the cross is celebrated every moment in the inner temple of true lovers of the Crucified. How is it celebrated? I will explain as well as I can. It is celebrated spiritually in silent suffering, without the support of any creature whatever. Since feasts are celebrated with joy, lovers of the Crucified celebrate the feast of the cross with interior silence and suffering, but with an appearance of serenity and joy. Thus the feast is hidden from creatures and revealed only to the Supreme Good. There is a banquet at this feast because we are*



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*nourished by the Father's will, as our crucified Love was. What sweet nourishment it is! The dishes are seasoned in various ways, now with bodily or mental pain, again with the opposition, misrepresentation, and scorn of men. O how sweet to the palate of the soul which savors them in pure faith and holy love, in silence and hope!"*

The union with God takes place through the love that remains faithful despite trials and sufferings. Therefore, the purpose of celebrating the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross is to experience on earth the mystery of the love of God the Father who wanted to save us through the death on the cross of Christ his Son, so that we can enjoy the fruits of redemption in heaven.

The third feast is that of the Most Precious Blood of Jesus celebrated on July 1st. St. Vincent Mary Strambi (1745–1824), at the request of St. Gaspare del Bufalo, founder of the Missionaries of the Most Precious Blood, wrote a book about the month of July that is dedicated to the Blood of Jesus. The feast, that was already celebrated in some Congregations, was granted to the Passionists in 1773. Pius IX extended it to the whole Church (1849), Pius X placed it on July 1st (1914) and Pius XI, on the occasion of the Jubilee of Redemption (1934), elevated it to a solemnity. Paul VI (1969) associated it with the "Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ", while granting those Congregations dedicated to the Blood of Christ the right to continue celebrating it on July 1st.

The liturgy of the feast repeatedly recalls the link between Redemption and the Blood of Christ. Thus in the second reading of the Office the holy Passionist bishop Vincent Strambi specifies the characteristics of this Blood: *"In this blood, sinners find the will to undergo conversion and the just find strength to persevere. In virtue of this Divine Blood we receive the remission of sins, victory in temptations, the strength to overcome the infernal enemy, and an effective aid of grace to be constant in loving God until death. This blood feeds the zeal of apostles and sustains the courage of martyrs. It inspires penance in confessors of the faith and shields the purity of virgins. In fact, all the good that blesses any soul flows from this most precious Blood."*

Blood is the most expressive sign to communicate the highest degree of love as a gift of life for others. It is a clear and immediate sign. It is what Jesus chose when he totally offered himself for us during his Passion. It is the eloquence of this Blood that

brings us into relationship and reveals to us who we are, because by drinking the Blood of Jesus our own life is communicated to us.

Therefore the purpose of celebrating this feast is to meditate on the Blood of Christ shed on the cross so that we may experience the gratuitousness of our redemption and be enabled to further the work of the Father's mercy so as to receive the fruits of his salvation.

Rediscovering and deepening our appreciation of these three liturgical feasts and also all the others linked to our charism becomes significant for the renewal of our mission through our participation in the Passion of Jesus, strengthening our identity and sense of belonging. We remember the link between *lex credendi* (profession of faith), *lex celebrandi* (celebration of the Christian mystery), *lex vivendi* (life in Christ) and *lex orandi* (Christian prayer). What we pray is related to what we live, and what we live is the direct consequence of the liturgical celebration and expression of what we believe. For us Passionists, Jesus' invitation to follow Him in a particular way in order to arrive at communion with Him, is explicitly articulated in liturgies that are an expression of the charism of St. Paul of the Cross and the charism of the Passionist Congregation. Faithfully celebrating and living them enables us to effectively keep alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus in today's world. We are entrusted with this beautiful and demanding mission!