

## “MEMORIA PASSIONIS”

[To appreciate Carl's life and death we must see it in the context of the spirituality of the Passionist community and the special charism of St. Paul of the Cross. For in becoming a Passionist Carl had joined a religious community committed to the Memory of the Lord's Passion — the “Memoria Passionis.”]

St. Paul of the Cross, founder of the Passionists (1693-1775), was from his youth inspired by the Sufferings of the Saviour. On the first day of his retreat after receiving the habit as a hermit, he wrote that his “only desire is to be on the Cross with Jesus.” Within a year he took a vow to remember the Passion of Christ. When Benedict XIV approved Paul's Rule for the first time, Paul had inserted a chapter on the vow to promote the memory of or devotion to the Passion of Jesus.

Through the years Passionists have cherished this vow as the very heart of Paul's charism. Finally, the Renewal Chapter of 1968-1970 placed this vow in the first place among the vows a Passionist professes.

At workshops on Passionist spirituality and in written articles many began to clarify the distinction between “devotion” to the Passion and the “Memory of the Passion” or “Memoria Passionis” which is frequently used. When St. Paul used the word “devotion” he most likely had in mind St. Francis de Sales' concept of “devotion” as “loving commitment” to the Lord, not just a “pious practice.” The word

“memory” holds for us the biblical connotation of liturgical and mystical “remembrance.” “Do this in memory of me.” It speaks of the past event made present in memory, ritual, vital living. Passionists take a vow, not to promote another pious practice among Catholics, but to lead all peoples to a loving commitment to the Christ who died and rose again, to become living witnesses of the Crucified Christ.

Another aspect of the “Memory of the Passion” calls Passionists to contemplate Jesus Crucified and also the many “crucifieds” of today, such as the poor, the suffering, the sinner and the abandoned. We find them in our cities and villages, where they speak to us of the sufferings of Christ in today's world, in the first, second and third worlds. This twofold “contemplation” was presented to Passionists at the 1982 General Chapter as the necessary foundation for the renewal of the Congregation. It is presently enriching Passionists in many ways.

Father Stanislaus Breton has reminded us of the two “sensitivities” we can bring to this contemplation. We might find today's “crucifieds” suffering “a spiritual poverty,” “a lack of meaning.” Or we might focus on “their physical destitution” and their call to us “to find new ways, to change the situations.” The first response prompts Passionists in their ministry of preaching parish missions, or in retreat houses, etc. The second inspires those who are working in the inner cities, among the sick and dying, in directing “base communities” in Latin America, in the Philippines, etc. to find in such ministries the ways of effecting change in institutional structures.

“In our previous General Chapter (1982) the Congregation confessed in a spirit of faith its state of “exodus,” as pilgrims on their way to celebrate the paschal mystery in the death and in the resurrection of humanity itself. ‘Where do you wish us, Lord, to prepare the Passover supper with you’ was the question which attempted to synthesize our efforts to be faithful to our mission.

"The present General Chapter once again confesses our 'exodus' situation and our destiny as pilgrims, as we face the challenges of the world as the place of celebration of the Lord's Passover. The Congregation feels itself on the march, on an exodus. We know that our mission is to celebrate the Lord's Passover wherever his Passion is renewed." (Father Jose Augustin Orbegozo, General Superior).

For Father Carl the celebration of the Lord's Passover was in the Philippines on the island of Mindanao, in the mountains of the Bilaans. There he fulfilled in an ultimate manner the Passionist vow he had made almost fifty years before. There his "devotion" to the Passion and his "memory" of the Passion coalesced in the death at the hand of a gunman.

Undoubtedly as a youngster Father Carl practiced some of the then current forms of devotion to the Suffering Christ: crucifix, stations of the cross, etc. His first acquaintance with the Passionists came when he was in the seventh grade at Mary Lyons School. He was a server at the newly organized St. Ferdinand's Parish on Chicago's northwest side. It was the week of September 22 in 1929. Father Isidore Dwyer and Father Sylvester Cichanski began a mission that day in the temporary church on Marmora Avenue. Father Isidore, formerly a missionary in Argentina, was a powerful, dramatic preacher. Father Sylvester was a younger missionary, eloquent and moving, who gave some attention to the young server.

In the record book of missions and retreats Father Isidore wrote: "Church a temporary shack, no school, a new parish. Confessions 800(?). Great good seemed done. Rev. M. J. Heeney pastor." Neither missionary realized the impact the mission had upon Billy. Years later Carl mentioned this mission to his classmates. It introduced him to the work and spirit of the Passionist community.

A year later Father Edgar Ryan preached the Lenten course at St. Ferdinand's and spoke to Billy after the services. Carl

began to think about the priesthood as a Passionist missionary. He spoke to his older and invalid sister, Lucille about his vocation. She too had been touched by the Passionists at St. Ferdinand's. At once she advised her brother to become a Passionist.

At the Passionist Prep in Normandy Bill, little by little, was introduced to daily meditation upon the sufferings of Jesus. Most likely Bill soon had a copy of "The Passion Prayer Book," written by Father Harold Purcell, C.P. In it Bill learned how to meditate upon the Passion, to make the Stations of the Cross, to recall the memory of the Passion from time to time during the day.

For thirteen years Bill, who took the name of Carl in the novitiate, grew in the ways of Passion spirituality. He took the Fourth Vow to promote devotion to the Passion in the hearts of the faithful. Through the study of theology and scripture, through reading the spiritual works of Faber and later Abbot Marmion and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Carl prepared himself for the priesthood and ministry as a Passionist.

In 1945 having finished his studies and preparing for parish mission ministry he wrote a sermon called "The Passion Meditation." He began by explaining that we must live "on the principles that Christ laid down in His own Sacred Passion." We know these principles through meditation on the Sacred Passion—that is, by thinking of, reflecting on, pondering over this stupendous drama, and then weaving the results of our considerations into the pattern of our own daily lives." He put the theme of his meditation in these words: "The Passion is a preview of how our lives must be lived."

In 1948 Carl gave a talk to the Passionist community of Sierra Madre, California. He chose for his reflections the subject "Passionist Prayer." As he was beginning an active life of preaching and ministry he shared with his fellow Passionists his own insights into the life of prayer appropriate for a Pas-

sionist and its relationship to the active apostolate. He spoke of remembering the Passion of Jesus, of abiding in the presence of God throughout the day. He pointed out that this spirit of prayer "by a simple process of Divine Logic, is the source of and overflows into genuine zeal for souls." He added: "Where our spirit of prayer halts there also does our active efficiency." This conviction remained with him throughout his life, and perhaps explains why he rose early each morning even when on the mountains of Mindanao. He felt that "the culminating point in the life of the religious is the hour of union with God in prayer."

In 1960 he wrote a meditation on "Suffering" for religious. Evidently he used it many times, applying it to priests and laity, and updating it in accord with the Council documents. This meditation shows us how Carl reflected upon the sufferings of Christ.

One passage is quite enlightening in view of his own tragic death. Describing the agony in the garden Carl writes: "He willed at that moment to feel in every fiber of his being all his passion was going to cost . . . The full flood-tide of it bore him to the ground; so he was stretched out there and buried his forehead in the dust as though to erase it all, to forget it all. First off there came before him all the terrible suffering of the next day. Even now he could hear the muttered curses and the yell . . . He could taste the fall; he could feel the bite of the whip . . . He feared death as much as we do, much more than we do . . . Any person in the full possession of his powers coming near to death knows a convulsion and fear that is hardly describable. Our Lord in the garden of olives knew that and much more intensely, because with us there is something of a merciful numbness that comes. We can take just so much and no more . . . This is why men like Cardinal Mindzenty always lapse into unconsciousness . . . Our Lord was not like that."

Father Carl not only reflected on the Passion. It was not enough for him to preach the memory of the Passion. He also lived the Passion.

Carl found in the Passion "the preview of how our lives must be lived." He realized that his own daily life "must parallel His Passion" (Meditation; December 24, 1945). The discouragements he faced during his years of missionary work paralleled those of Jesus. His own temptations to turn from the Way of the Cross echoed Jesus' agonizing prayer that the chalice would pass him by. Carl's death on the mount of Bolul becomes the Memorial of Jesus' Death on Golgotha.

Yes, we are impressed by his death—the total giving of himself for his people, even as Jesus gave Himself. But we must not let the dramatic last hour overshadow the long years of physical, spiritual suffering he endured.

At the funeral at Dadiangas in Mindanao, Father Sebastian MacDonald, Carl's Provincial Superior, said in the homily: "Today we are doing more than mourning Father Carl. We are remembering. We recall his life. We see him above all as a missionary, a man who came from far away, after having proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in several different places across the world. Years ago he joined several other Passionists, some of whom are here with us today, as he started his missionary career. Eventually forced from China, he went to Japan, where he served as a missionary for more than twenty years, fully dedicated to advance the Kingdom of God.

"In 1974, he came here to the Philippines, thanks to the gracious invitation extended him by what is now the Vice-Province of the Philippines, and in your company, he expended the last years of his life. One person to whom your attention should be called this morning, and who is also here with us in church, has shared all three missionary experiences with Father Carl . . . Father Paul Placek. Father Paul entered China with Father Carl. Father Paul joined Father Carl in Japan. Father Paul has worked with Father Carl in the Philippines. More than any of us here today, this missionary shares the memory of that missionary who lived life to the fullest.

“The fullness to which he lived his life peaked this year, 1988, because it is the golden anniversary of Father Carl’s profession, incorporation and integration into the Passionist community, which occurred fifty years ago in 1938. This was the year he was to share this fullness of Passionist living with his brethren. Indeed a celebration was planned this very month.

“He gave his all as a missionary, and this we remember. This “all” included unbelievable tests of trials and endurance. He was approaching seventy-one years of age. Was he an old man? Chronologically we would think so in these islands abounding with such a young population. But who of us could keep up with him, could measure step for step and pace for pace, the paths he trod. He was a vigorous man, an ageless man. All of the last few years of his life he was and did for his beloved Bilaan people. Father Carl’s life, as we recollect it now, was a daily imprint on a page of the book of life that corresponded to that page we’ve heard from today’s gospel of Matthew, who describes the man that finds himself close to God, because of the way he treats people; the hungry, the naked, the thirsty, the sick, the imprisoned, the homeless. That is what we remember. St. Matthew provides us a service this morning as he so beautifully lays out a page in the life of Father Carl. This resonates with our memory of the man. We shall never forget it, no more than the early church ever forgot the memory of Jesus, Who, as the readings mention today, went about doing good.

“So we mourn a loss . . . we remember a life . . . and we affirm that life is still available to those of us who shared something in common with Father Carl. We share the life of Jesus Christ Himself, and that life goes on. This ceremony will soon be over. The grave site nearby will be filled and we will all return home. I go back to Chicago. Life goes on, but it is not depleted or deprived. Rather, it is enriched because of that man, that priest, that Passionist religious, lived it as he did, and associated us with himself. His proj-

ects, and he had many of them, are not going to grind to a halt. No. Thanks to all of you here today, his life’s work is going to grow and develop because you are now filled with his faith and spirit, and your lives have been emboldened with what he left you. He gave you food from the sacraments and a healthy sense of forgiveness and reconciliation. He united you in marriage and he buried your dead. Through his teaching, he passed on the truth of the gospel, and in his sermons, he furnished you with hope and a vision. The lives of us all have been enriched. Far from being deprived, we are full. His death, like Jesus’ death, was a saving deed. We call the passing of Jesus not a waste, nor a loss, but a redemptive action. It achieved something. He gave His life that we might live.

“And so, let this morning’s service be like a commissioning event that recalls what took place in the early church just before Jesus departed from His disciples. He mandated them to go forth, out into the whole world, and tell everyone the good news that He had spoken to them.

“You must do the same. You are to go forth from this church, not in bitterness, not in anger or a spirit of revenge, but in love, to spread the same kind of good news that Father Carl was dedicated to . . . that God loved us, that God will help us even to the point of saving us if only we make ourselves open to His saving action.”

Father Jose Agustin Orbegozo, General Superior, has referred to Father Carl several times. For example, in his very first letter after his election as General Superior he mentioned how much Carl’s death meant to the General Chapter. Here are his words: “Today the religious life as a prolongation of the tension of martyrdom of the early days is a theme which holds great interest. On the one hand, Vatican II itself emphasized the value of martyrdom as ‘an exceptional gift and the highest proof of love’ (LG 42), and modern theology has returned to reflect on this theme. On the other, the increasing number of martyrs in the world has made this question a tragic reality. We ourselves are

still shocked at the assassination of Father Carl Schmitz in the Philippines.

“That the religious life as a prolongation of martyrdom is not a beautiful metaphor, but a real possibility, and a demand stemming from the nature of religious life itself: the witness religious give can reach this supreme proof of charity (cf. Jn 15:13). It’s the highest level of love. It is evident that Jesus refers to his love, which will bring him to his death in a few hours. Those who follow must love in this manner: ‘Let us love one another since love comes from God and everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God.’ ” (1 Jn 4:7)

In his final Christmas letter of 1987, Carl summed up his life. His words serve as a conclusion to the story of Father Carl, Passionist.

“On July 17 of next year, 1988, my classmates and I will celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Profession as Passionist religious. That is certainly a big mile-stone and a tremendous Blessing of God, through the example and intercession of our Holy Founder, St. Paul of the Cross. We used to think that those who reached that plateau were really ‘over-the-hill.’ Ha! On April 26th we will be priests for 44 years. All seven of us, Thanks be to God, are still alive and as active as possible in His Vineyard. Among the very many Blessings of a quite variegated priestly-religious life are: never a moment’s doubt as to my identity as a priest-religious; preaching experience in the U.S.; six months in China in 1948. Three happy years in Alabama among our Black brothers and sisters; and thirty-five years overseas, in Japan (20<sup>1/2</sup>), and here in the Philippines (14<sup>1/2</sup>). Life on the missions adds up to around forty years which, being prejudiced as I am, I consider the ‘gravy.’ Please join me in Thanking God and His/our Mother Mary for these 50/44 years, His countless Graces; and also sorrow for the many times I failed to Be and to Do what He wanted; plus the petition for many more active years as a Passionist religious priest and missionary, God so Willing.”

## EPILOGUE

(“Most of you know that my mother and Father Carl corresponded regularly through all the years that they have been apart. As a farewell, Mom has written Father Carl her last letter to express her innermost thoughts.” . . . Jerry Crimmins, Marian Crimmins’ son, who read this at the end of the Memorial Mass for Father Carl.)

Dear Father Carl,

Through fifty-six years we have written letters to one another sharing the days’ happenings, our joys and sorrows. Through the years I have treasured the stories of your beloved people in China, Alabama, Japan and the Philippines.

Our goodbyes over the years were too numerous, for you were so elusive; elusive as a beautiful bird. As soon as we seemed to corral you to enjoy your company, you would be off again to continue your work. Another goodbye.

We began our goodbyes at fourteen years of age when you went into the Passionist Seminary in Normandy, Missouri. Mom always said that God called our dear sister Lucille home, and sent you your vocation. We were so proud of you. I remember how happy John and I were to have you as the Sub-Deacon at our wedding; the rules were strict then, but the Order granted you that privilege.

Soon after your beautiful Ordination and First Mass you once again took flight—this time to China with Cardinal

Stritch's blessings. Because of the Communists, life-threatening dangers, and the difficulty with the language at your young age, you were returned to us—but not for long. One more goodbye!

It was on to Alabama to work with your beloved black people. How you loved them, especially George, your pal and companion. Your parishioners would often say: "Father Carl, you should not ride around with, and befriend George, he is black and you are white; people around here will not like that." But you had no fear. You respected and loved all people, especially the minorities. Then, one day, as you and your teenage boys were building a social clubhouse board-by-board, a letter appeared. You were one of the first two Passionist priests assigned to Japan. Another goodbye. Although your heart was heavy at having to leave your people in Alabama, you were eager to take on the evangelical challenge of Japan.

Twenty-one years in Japan; building monasteries, retreat houses and being a pastor. You loved the Japanese and spoke the language as well as a native. I remember your frustration at trying to work through the Japanese red tape. At times it wore your spirit down, but not for too long; for you were ever the optimist and would never give up.

During your tours in Alabama and Japan you always found time to support and encourage John and me as the number of children in the Crimmins' household kept increasing. You would often remark: "Another child of God is born into the world." We were very fortunate that you were able to baptize your nephew, Jim, and thirty-seven years later your grandnieces, Lauren and Kathleen.

Just when it seemed you would live out ministry in Japan, you were off to the Philippines. During a trip to the Philippines you saw the needs of the people on the island of Mindanao. Their suffering and affliction beckoned to you; a call you could not refuse. I recall the sadness of the Japanese people when they learned you were leaving. Especially hard

hit was a young priest who so loved working with you; and the Sisters whom you counseled and advised. Each Sister had a personal story, close to her heart, of how you had helped guide and comfort her in a time of need. They learned what I already knew; there was no holding on to you. As you were leaving Japan one of the older Passionist priests had tears in his eyes. The priest said to John and me: "He'll be back, I know it." But I knew that would never happen.

Your visits home every four years did so much for Mom and Dad. As they grew older, how I wondered at the end of each visit if they would ever see you again. Mom could never understand why you were always so anxious to leave us and get back to your people. Although you could not be present when Mom and Dad died, we both took comfort knowing they went to their eternal reward. Now, I take comfort in knowing you, Mom and Dad and our sister, Lucille, are all together.

You began your work in the Philippines as a pastor in the City of Dadiangas. But one day as you traveled up into the mountains you saw the needs of the Bilaans, a minority, tribal people. It was there, you decided, you could do the most good. You soon became a Bilaan and battled their poverty, diseases, malnutrition, lack of education and hygiene and the high death rate, particularly among babies.

You built a small school, a clinic, a chapel, etc. How your heart ached as the parents carried their ill babies over the mountains for miles to receive your help; so many times it was too late.

How you fought for and defended your people. When they were accused of wrong doing you would investigate and gather all the facts. If the accused were innocent you went to the mat for them. If they were guilty you were the first to acknowledge it and seek a just punishment. Justice for your Bilaan people, however, in any form, was very hard to come by.