



# THE GENERAL FORMATION PLAN (GFP) 2023

Catechesis

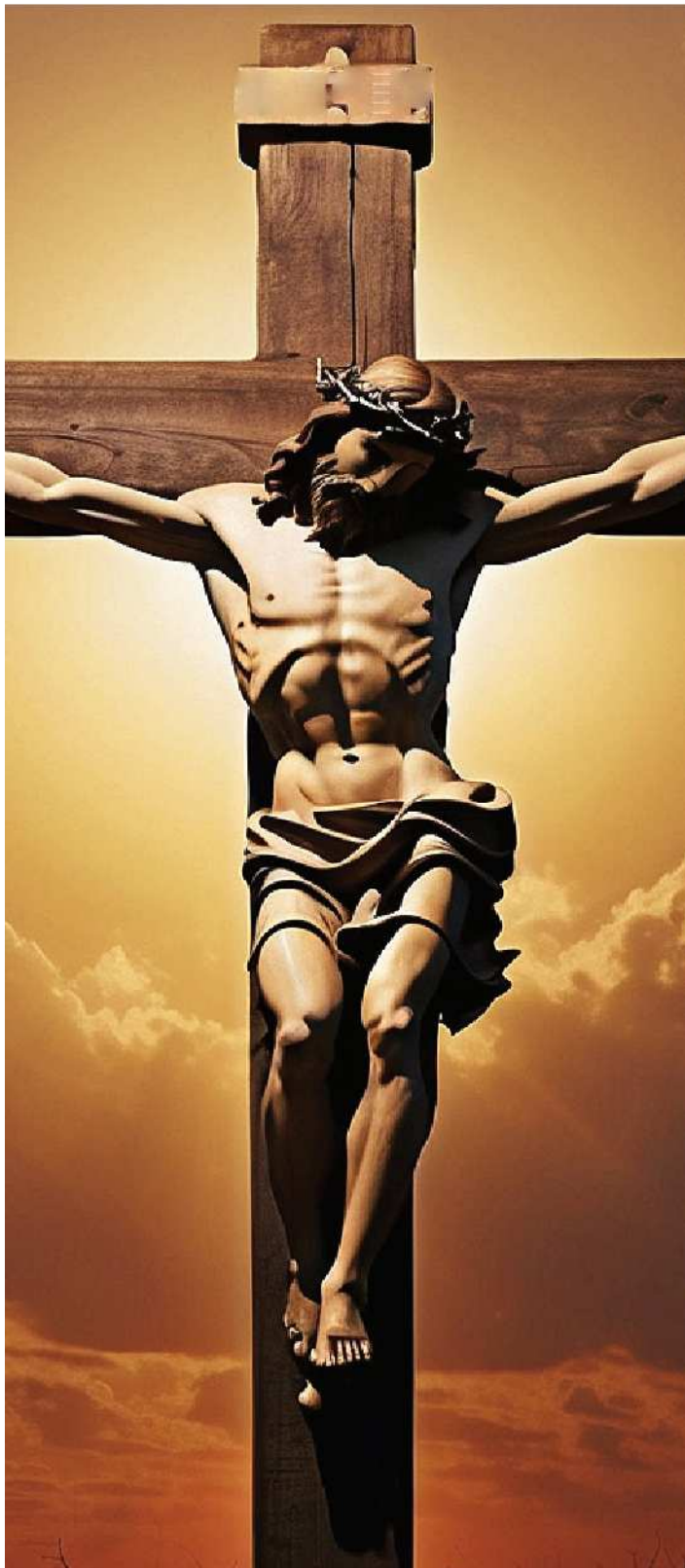
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# I, PETER, AND THE CROSS

## Formation for the Passion of Christ, from the Passion of Christ

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### Introduction

The life of Jesus was a journey of ongoing formation in which he learned to assume his Paschal Mystery of Passion, Death and Resurrection. In this journey, Jesus was, at the same time, in formation and a formator. He was in formation, because, as the letter to the Hebrews reminds us: “... *In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.*” (Heb. 5:7-10).

But he was also a formator, since he taught his disciples to accept the scandal of his Passion and Death, which would culminate in the Resurrection, as we can see in the section concerning Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51-19:28) which includes the predictions of the Passion and concludes with the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

In this second catechesis on the General Program of Passionist Formation (2023), we find ourselves before the event of the Passion of Jesus of Nazareth, the source, principle and criterion of the Passionist charism in the Church and of the formation process.

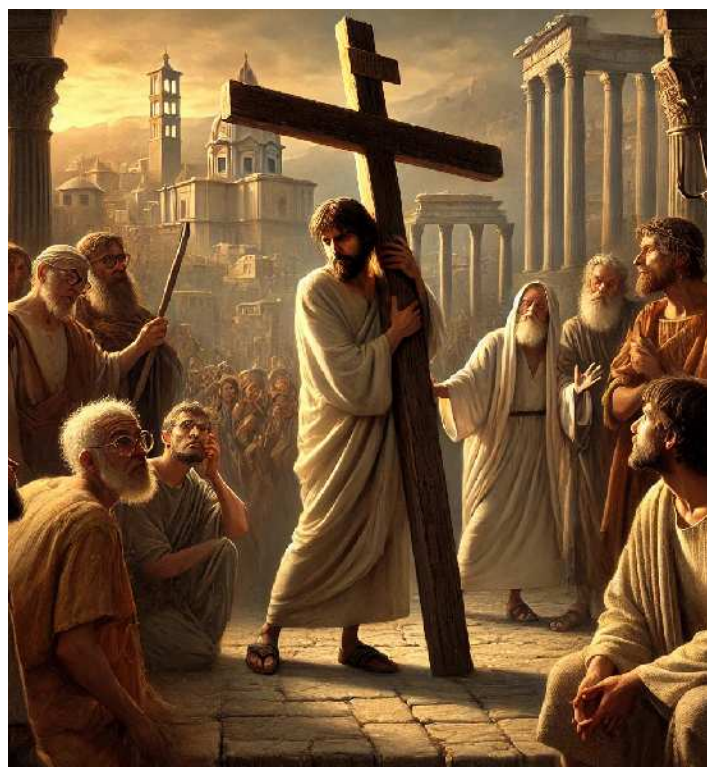
We want to follow and study the formative itinerary of the Apostle Peter. It is an arduous path of continuous formation, where the frankness, patience and mercy of Jesus are the true means of pedagogy.

Therefore, the scope of this catechesis, accompanying Peter's formative journey, guided by Jesus, covers five moments: Peter's resistance to the Cross of Christ; Peter's self-sufficiency and ours; Peter's pride and ours; Peter's drama and ours: I am a sinner saved by Jesus; and to be true, a love does not have to be perfect! At the end of each section I will provide some questions for personal reflection and meditation.

## Resistance to the Cross of Christ

It is not easy; it has never been easy to accept the Cross of Christ. From the beginning of Christianity, the Cross of Christ has appeared as a stumbling block, both to the disciples and to the secular culture. How can salvation come through an ignominious death on a cross? How can the Savior die as a cursed man? Yet, "...The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1Cor.1:18).

This is why it is urgent to face once again the scandal of the cross of Christ, because "to believe in Easter is not true faith: "you look too beautiful at Easter! True faith is on Good Friday" (David Maria Turollo). Indeed, "if we want to know who God is, we must kneel at the foot of the cross" (Jürgen Moltmann).



We will face the scandal of the Cross of Christ, seeking its true meaning, guided by the Apostle Peter. "Indeed, in Peter we read our reaction to the cross" (Carlo Maria Martini). His difficulties in accepting and understanding the cross of Jesus are also ours. His self-sufficiency and pride also reside in us. I hope that, like him, in the end, we too will accept the merciful gaze of the Crucified One, convert to the cross and, through the cross, declare to him with sincerity, realism and generosity our weak but true love.

**- What difficulties do you encounter in understanding and accepting the Cross?**

## Our self-sufficiency and Peter's self-sufficiency

Shortly after the first prediction of the Passion of Jesus, we discover Peter's resistance to the cross of Christ and his efforts to prevent the path of Jesus from passing through the cross (cf. Mk 8:31-33). Peter is unable to accept that God loves him freely and is doing something for him. He thinks more of what he can do for God, rather than of what God can do for him. "Peter is very generous, he wants to be the one who is going to die [...]. He was never able to accept that Jesus is more generous than he was, that he is at his service, and that he has to let himself be guided. Peter always interpreted everything from a perspective of self-sufficiency".

In this type of behavior we have "the total inversion of the Gospel-- it is not Jesus who saves us, but we who save him and the Church. It is no longer the gospel of divine initiative; it is the gospel of our courage and our action on behalf of God." (Carlo María Martini).

**"How can salvation come through an ignominious death on a cross?"**

Even today this temptation/difficulty characterizes the lives of many disciples. There are so many people who find it difficult to understand that it is as divine to love as it is to let oneself be loved. Truly, "if the source of love resides in the Father, the receptivity of love resides in the Son." (Bruno Forte).

**- Is it easier for you to love than to be loved?  
- Is it because only those who are, or feel, loved can truly love?**

### **Peter's pride and our pride**

Pride was also an obstacle to acceptance of the Lord's Cross. At the Last Supper, and in the face of Jesus' warning about the possibility of betrayal (cf. Mk 14:17-21), Peter does not admit that his love might be weak and that he could

good, holy and righteous. On the contrary, he offered his life on the cross because we are sinners and in need of his grace (Rom.5:6-8).

**- Do I have a true understanding of my qualities and weaknesses or do I prefer to hide behind the mask of pride?**

### **Peter's drama and our drama—I am a sinner saved by Jesus!**

Self-sufficient and proud, generous and impeccable, this is how Peter arrives at the night of the Passion when the truth that this Apostle did not want to accept will be revealed-- I am a sinner saved by Jesus! There are two events that, on the night of the Passion, lead Peter to discover the truth about himself-- his dream in



betray him. "Peter, instead of becoming aware of his poverty and fragility, finds in Jesus' warning a motive for self-sufficiency and presumption." (Carlo Maria Martini). His self-image is deformed by pride. It is pride that leads him to consider himself better than others and to lower his guard in defending himself against temptations.

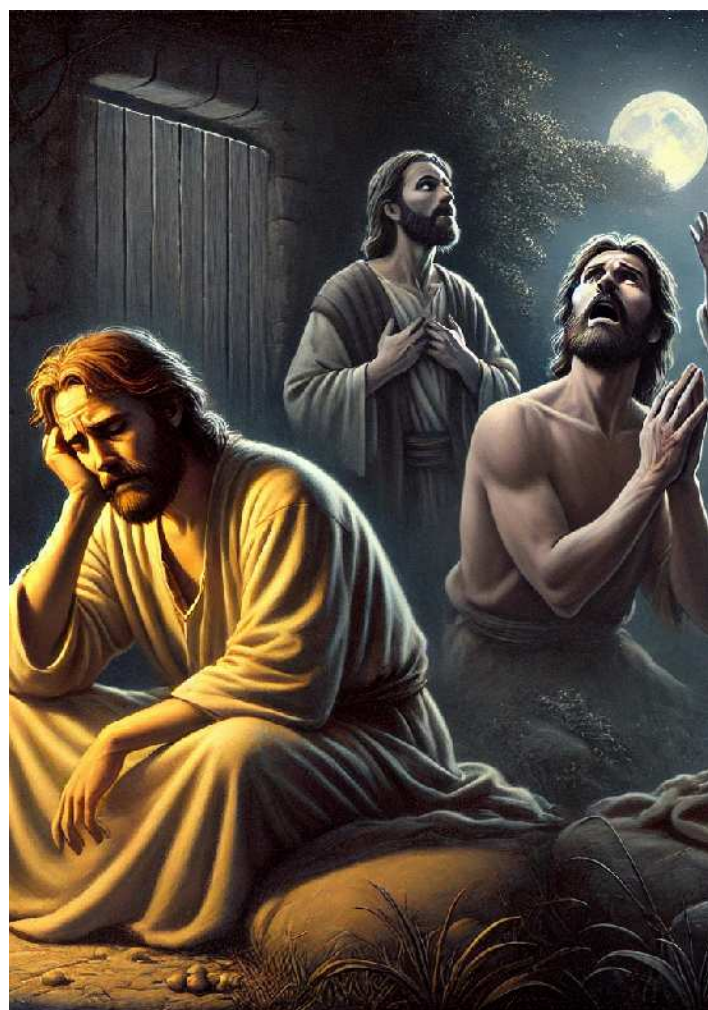
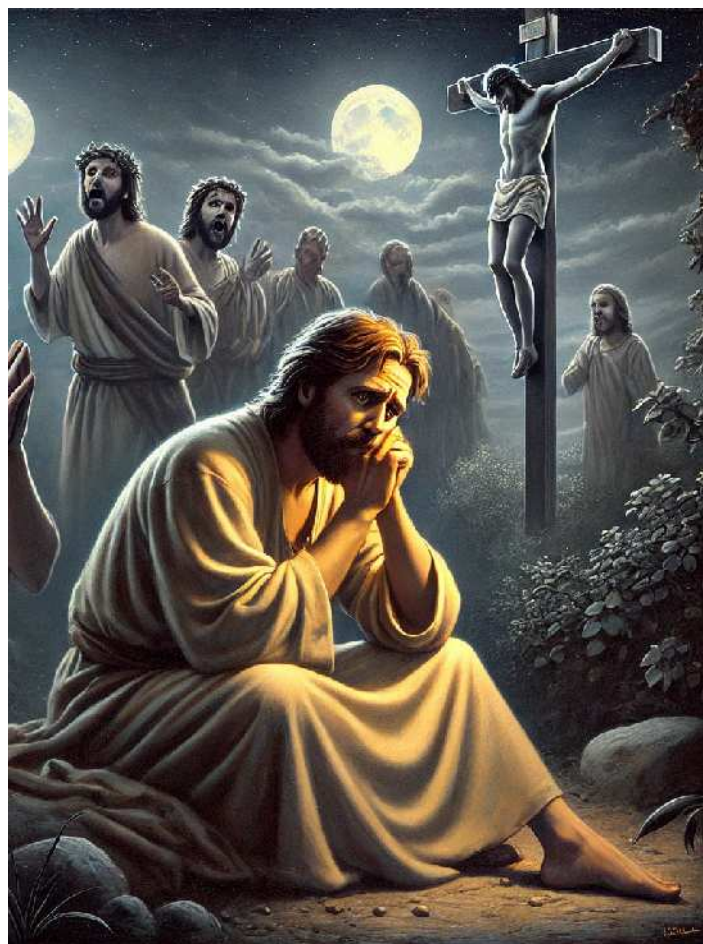
This is also one of the characteristics very evident in so many disciples today. "I have no sins of that kind!"; "I am better than others!" It is the delusion of the proud who make God a liar and exclude themselves from the salvation accomplished by Christ (1 John 1:8-10). Christ did not offer his life on the cross because we are

the Garden of Olives, and the three denials, in the courtyard of the High Priest.

The Peter who said that, even if everyone abandoned Jesus, he would not abandon him, is the Peter who is not capable of keeping vigil for one hour with Jesus (cf. Mk 14:37-38). The Peter who promised to go to the point of death for Jesus was the Peter who denied Jesus three times (cf. Mk 14:66-72). In the hour of tribulation, of trial, of the cross, all masks fall. I am not the savior of the world! I am frail, weak, cowardly and sinful!

We might think that the discovery of this terrible truth could only lead to despair. Yet this is the right soil for the cross of Christ to take root and blossom in a paschal way. In fact, the evangelist Luke tells us that after Peter hit rock bottom, "Just as he was saying this, the cock crowed, and the Lord turned and looked at Peter; and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.' He went out and began to weep bitterly." (Lk. 22: 60-62).

The crowing of the rooster was not enough to awaken Peter. The cold and accusatory denunciation of sin is of no use; it only leads to the despair that characterizes the feeling of guilt. Peter discovered the truth about himself, his sin, in the light of Jesus' merciful gaze, and this made all the difference. Truly, the merciful gaze of Jesus is prophetic, wound-healing and future-creating. "What is Jesus' gaze like? His gaze is prophetic and poetic [creative]. "He does not look with feigned condescension on those who



pretend to ignore their wounds, their existence; but upon those who know how to accept them and work with them; a broken vessel that returns to the potter's wheel. Then we hand over to him with confidence what we have. Don't hide your weaknesses, build on them! The worst thing you have could be the best thing you have. From your wounds you can become a healer of the wounds of others." (Ermes Ronchi).

In that exchange of glances between Jesus and Peter, the Apostle could think the following: "He died for me, I who am a worm and a coward (this is the truth!). I wanted to be the one who knew who he was, and now He died for a poor man like me, reduced to not knowing who I am. You defeated me Lord, you are better than I am. I thought I would make it, that I would do something for you, but you baffled me with your goodness, you are going to die for me, something I am ashamed of." (Carlo María Martini).

It is at this moment that Peter arrived where every Christian life must begin: to accept the first and gratuitous love of Jesus for me. It is only at this moment that Peter truly lets himself

be loved and he accepted the salvation offered by Jesus. "Where is salvation? When I betray him, he forgives me and loves me, and converts me again. Out of his open wound comes neither anger nor bitterness; but it is a wound from which blood and water flow (John 19:34). Blood that is love; water that is innocence" (Ermes Ronchi).

How difficult it is to let oneself be loved! How difficult it is to let oneself be loved without any merit! How difficult it is to accept that Jesus loves me! It was for me, for my sins, because he loves me and loves me infinitely, that Jesus went to the cross

- Have I already accepted this merciful love of Jesus in my life?
- Is my self-sufficiency and pride rendering God's grace useless?
- Do I consider the moments of sin and reconciliation as (trans)formative moments?

### **For love to be true, it does not need to be perfect!**

However, Peter's journey does not end here; on the contrary, this is where it begins anew, because "the whole law is preceded by 'you are loved' and followed by 'you will love'" (Paul Beauchamp). Proof of this truth is the dialogue between Jesus and Peter at Lake Tiberias, after the resurrection (John 21:15-19). If Peter denied Jesus three times, on the night of his Passion, three times, at the hopeful dawn of the resurrection he professes his fragile but true love. It is wonderful to see Peter's spiritual evolution-- from proud and self-sufficient to humble and sincere!

Jesus' question to Peter is the question of love. "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Jesus does not use just any term to question Peter. Jesus employs the verb *agape*, that is, Jesus asks Peter if he loves him with a divine and deep love. Peter answered this question as follows: "Yes, Lord, you know that I am truly your friend," that is, Peter responds with a love of simple friendship (*phileo*).

This difference in verbs shows that Peter already knows himself well and that he is no longer proud. We do not have here the proud

answer that Peter gave to Jesus at the last supper. Peter's answer shows his awareness of his weakness and his failure, but also his willingness, in his weakness, to love Jesus to the end. Will Jesus be happy with Peter's love of simple friendship? Yes, he is happy.

In fact, in the third question Jesus no longer uses the verb of divine and profound love, but the verb of friendship. As Pope Francis reminds us, "the fact that love is imperfect does not mean that it is false or that it is not real. It is real, but limited and earthly" (The Joy of Love, 113). "It is not perfection that He seeks in me, but authenticity. I will not exhaust myself to become perfect, but to be true and not hypocritical." (Ermes Ronchi).

It is to this weak Peter that Jesus entrusts his flock and invites him to follow him. For God, more important than the past is the future. "The possible good of tomorrow counts more than the evil of yesterday. [...] Go, get out of your past, look for the new [...] the good that is possible tomorrow counts more than today's sin. He is never interested in the past, because he is the God of the future" (E. Ronchi).

"Lord, you tell me that it was for me that you went to the cross! Today I tell you that it is for you that I cast my nets again. Today, sustained



by your love revealed on the cross, I begin again, because "to live is the infinite patience to begin again!" (E. Ronchi). With you I am what I would never be! In fact, "you are to me what spring is to flowers, what the wind is to a kite. You came and made life shine. It is impossible to love you and not try to resemble you, be transformed into you like a seed into a flower." (G. Centrore).

**- Meditate on this dialogue between Jesus and Peter:**

**"Jesus asked Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?'  
Peter answered, 'Yes, Lord, you know that I am truly your friend.'  
He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.'  
(John 21:15)  
And what would you answer?"**

**Conclusion:  
"Follow me"**

We conclude this catechesis, not as one who reaches the goal, but as one who sets out on the way. After the triple confession of love, Peter did not reach the goal of his formative journey, he simply began it anew and as soon as he began again he stumbled again.

This is what the Gospel of St. John narrates-- "Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following him, the one who had also reclined upon his chest during the supper and had said, "Master, who is the one who will betray you?" When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus said to him, "What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours? You follow me." (Jn.21:20-22).

Formation is a never-ending task. In fact, in the journey of following Jesus Crucified, we are a Church always called to renewal, a Congregation always invited to reform and religious always in need of conversion.

Let us not be discouraged! Let us follow Jesus Crucified and we will see our lives in a process of (trans)formation! ✝



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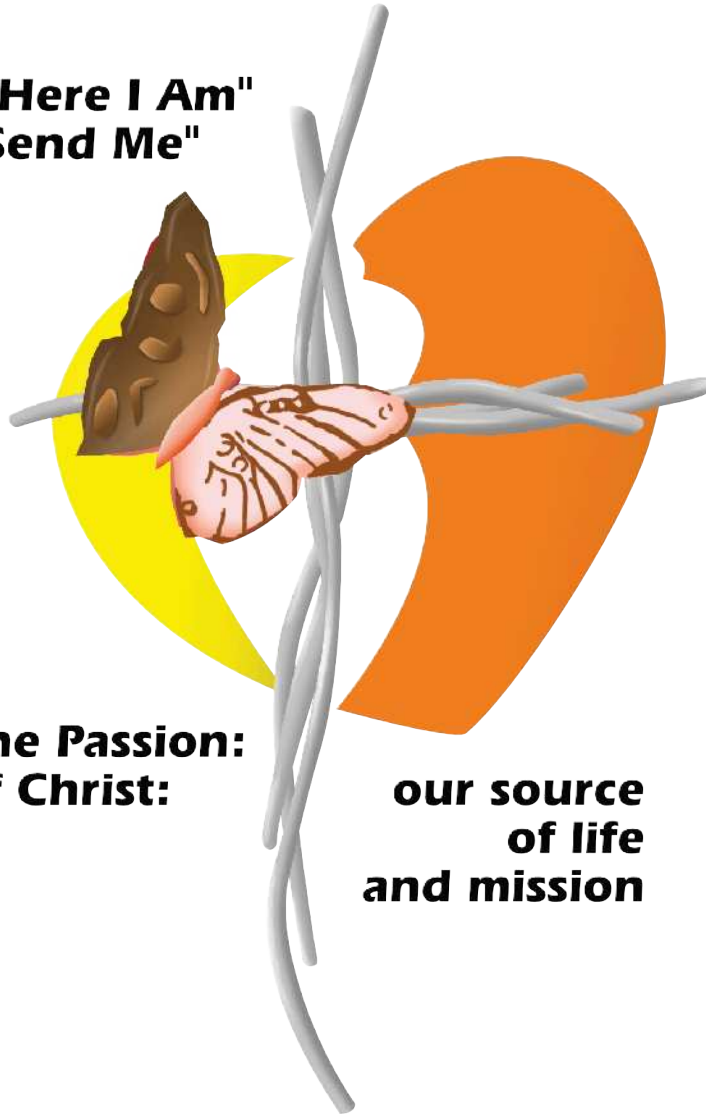
was born in Santa Maria da Feira (Portugal) on December 21, 1985. He made his first religious profession as a Passionist in the former FAT Province on September 17, 2006, and was ordained a priest on September 18, 2011.

During his first years of priestly ministry he was director of the Postulancy (2018-2021) and Spiritual Director of the Diocesan Seminary of Viana do Castelo (2014-2021).

He is currently in Rome pursuing his doctorate in Dogmatic Theology.



**"Here I Am"  
Send Me"**



**The Passion:  
of Christ:**

**our source  
of life  
and mission**

# **48<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CHAPTER**