



Congregazione della Passione di Gesù Cristo

IL SUPERIORE GENERALE

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My dear brothers,

Sisters and friends of the Passionist Family,

My recent visit (25-29 November 2024) to the community of Kortrijk (Belgium), which is under the direct jurisdiction of the General Government, was an opportunity for me to meet and get to know the religious who are present there, including their history and uniqueness. It was also an opportunity to recall the figure of Blessed Isidore De Loor, who lived there during the last years of his life.

By means of this letter, I wish to briefly recall the human and spiritual legacy of Blessed Isidore, the witness of his life, in order to illuminate our present reality as religious and as a Congregation.

There are four Passionists living in the house in Kortrijk, plus a fifth who resides in a retirement home nearby. They are all advanced in age and no longer very active, but they continue, according to their possibilities, to provide pastoral care in the church that includes the chapel with the tomb of Blessed Isidore.

Since the time of Blessed Isidore, the life of the Passionist community has changed radically, surviving the two World Wars, the post-war blossoming of vocations, the era of the Second Vatican Council with its subsequent crises of adaptation, the social changes of the 1970s and then, more recently, the cultural, social and ecclesial transformations associated with globalization, migration and the digital age.

The images of the vast crowds that, in 1952, accompanied the transfer of Blessed Isidore's mortal remains to the monastery church are a far cry from what can be seen today in the increasingly modern, intercultural, interreligious town of Kortrijk, with reduced participation in ecclesial life and a widespread secular mentality. Despite this, the tomb of Blessed Isidore continues to be a place of devotion and prayer, where every day, various people come to seek a moment of prayer and encounter with the Lord, entrusting themselves to the intercession of our Brother. Many votive paintings of thanksgiving decorate his chapel, a sign of the requests that many faithful continue to lay at the foot of his tomb, obtaining his mediation and intercession.

Today, we wonder about the secret of this continuing attraction of Blessed Isidore given the great amount of time that has passed since he lived and that was linked to an era and a society that no longer exists, and with a style of life that unfolded in the silence and seclusion of the retreats where he resided.

We believe the answer can be found in the authenticity with which Brother Isidore followed the Passionist vocation and the style of faith and obedience which he lived with enduring peace and abandonment.

In his letters, we repeatedly find words of serenity and joy connected with his fidelity to Passionist life:

“How can one not feel totally happy and content here when one feels disposed to this life, and obtains God's grace for it?” (Letter of 20 May 1907).

“What happiness to feel free of everything in order to be able to attach one's heart only to the Lord who said, whoever leaves everything for me, I will reward a hundredfold in heaven. It is solely because this is God's will that I have become a religious and will die, with God's help, as a religious.” (Letter, July 1909).

“No, my dearest ones, no one can understand how happy one is in simple and solitary religious life where, unknown or very often despised by the people of the world, one lives for God and one's Congregation and where one meticulously fulfills one's duties.... Yes, religious life is a treasure when one truly lives it with good intentions; one has to thank God for it every day of our lives.” (Letter of 9 November 1911).

Blessed Isidore was very clear about the spiritual and apostolic value of his domestic work, work he already did in part when he was in his family, but in the monastery he wanted to live it "as a Passionist" contributing to “keeping alive the memory of the Passion of Jesus.”

He wrote the following to family members from the monastery in Ere in September 1909:

“I am always healthy and content. Now I find myself farming again like at home, and although the farm is very modest, there is really no shortage of work. Here the land is harder to work than at your place. The days are not too long, and besides there is plenty of other work to be done. Our three cows now give so much milk that we sometimes have to milk them twice a day. The servant has his hands full with the cattle, milk and other things. I also have to bake bread and take care of innumerable rabbits and over 100 chickens. You can see that I don't have to look for additional work, but when one is healthy one works willingly. Besides, doing all this for the glory of God I also collaborated in the conversion of sinners and the propagation of devotion to the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and the sorrows of Mary. This is because, while our priests go to preach, here in the retreat we pray and work for the sustenance and stability of our community.”

At the time of Blessed Isidore, there was a substantial number of religious Brothers, whereas today this vocation attracts far fewer young people, and despite the diversity among different cultural and geographical backgrounds, their number does not exceed 10 percent of the members of our Congregation.

The reasons for this are related to the great changes in the Congregation and in today's society, which urge us to redefine our Passionist vocation and our religious consecration in order to continue “*proclaiming the Gospel of the Passion by our life and apostolate.*” (CP Constitutions, 2).

This situation was also studied by the recent General Chapter, which expressly approved a Recommendation that I quote as follows:

The figure of the Religious Brother in the Congregation

The 48^o General Chapter recommends that the figure of the Religious Brother in the Congregation continue to be enhanced and given importance.

The Secretariate for Formation and the vocation and formation teams of the Configurations and Provinces/Vice-provinces will review the General Program of Passionist Formation in the following way:

- *to keep it clear that our first vocation is religious consecration; the General Plan of Formation does not distinguish between brother and cleric*

- *to preserve the desire of the Founder in this regard*
- *to enhance our different ministries as Passionists*
- *to ensure that in vocational ministry the vocation of the Religious Brother is presented as part of 'The Passionists' (avoiding the use of the title 'Passionist Fathers')*
- *to offer our brothers a more qualified formation, preparing them to fulfil all the tasks of specific vocations*
- *to ensure that our brothers are active participants in the formation process and in the areas of our mission*

An annex to the General Program of Passionist Formation on this topic will be presented to the Synod of 2027.

This desire to revive the figure and presence of the religious Brothers should be expressed first and foremost through our prayer and fidelity to Passionist Life in its basic dimensions which are contemplation, the common life and the apostolate. We know that we do not have the power to create new vocations, just as we also cannot simply gather candidates just to have new personnel in our communities, but we must live and witness to the strength and beauty of our mission, invoking from the Lord the gift of candidates eager to serve Him in our Congregation.

The life of Blessed Isidore can offer us some lessons on "vocational dynamics" and religious life:

- "A religious vocation is a gift of the Church": it was not Isidore who chose the Passionists, but he was directed to us by a Redemptorist missionary. > *We are called to pray for and promote all the various vocations to Christian life from an ecclesial perspective, knowing that this is how the Church grows.*
- "A religious vocation requires continuous learning": In his letters, Brother Isidore often tells of the new services or activities he was learning in the community, showing openness and interest, despite his limitations. > *For us, too, it is necessary to continue learning and investing in the formation of religious, so that they can express their talents in the service of the Church, in joyful fidelity to the call.*
- "A religious vocation is an intercultural laboratory": From his first day in the retreat, Brother Isidore experienced linguistic and cultural diversity, having to come to terms with the French language, which he did not know at all. > *Our communities in the world today are increasingly intercultural, and for this reason it is necessary to value different expressions, by listening to each other, and learning from different histories and cultures.*
- "A religious vocation entails participating in the one mission": Brother Isidore lived much of his community service in silence and solitude, but he never succumbed to an individualistic or exclusionary logic. > *In our communities we need to raise awareness that each religious, priest or Brother, works and lives for the Congregation, expressing mutual gratitude, and personal commitment to be and work as one family.*
- "A religious vocation entails compassion and intercession for the world": In several passages of his letters to family members, Brother Isidore writes about his relationship with the people he met, either by going to collect alms, or by welcoming

them in the monastery's porter's lodge, highlighting how these encounters were always occasions for spiritual conversation, sharing their lives and suffering. This was occurring through someone who was not a priest and missionary, and perhaps not even very well educated. However he was very capable of listening and showing compassion. > *In our houses and communities, as well as in our services and ministries we need to devote more and more space and time for people and their need to be welcomed, listened to, enlightened by faith and comforted by prayer.*

- “A religious vocation sustains an open and positive outlook”: the Passionist life of Brother Isidore was conditioned by the illness that gradually undermined him, but despite his sufferings, he always maintained a positive spirit open to the future. When his state of health was already clearly deteriorating, he manifested joy and he participated in the opening of the seminary in the community of Kortrijk, inviting his family members to identify some "good boys" to whom he could propose Passionist life. > *Looking at the future of our Congregation there are signs of uncertainty and concern, but the fidelity of the One who called us helps us not to enclose ourselves in an individualistic vision, and to maintain intergenerational solidarity.*

Blessed Isidore was a concrete, strong and hard-working man who matured in his devotion to the Passion of Christ and Our Lady of Sorrows, decidedly open to the Good that is God, becoming a fulfilled and happy person, able to leave signs of peace and hope everywhere.

Let us invoke his intercession for our Congregation, and in particular, for all our religious Brothers, so that, like Blessed Isidore, they may enjoy the same spirit of strength and consolation, in order to live their Passionist Life with enthusiasm and joy and endure with hope even moments of fragility and illness.

To him we also entrust the religious of the community of Kortrijk, in their reality of fragility and weakness, praying for enlightenment in order to give a future to this significant Passionist presence.

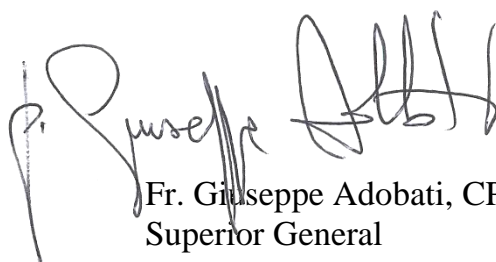
Thanking the Lord for the gift of religious Brothers to the Congregation and for what they do in our communities, we present to Him our prayer that we may be blessed with the gift of new and holy Passionist vocations.

I wish you all a fruitful Advent season, in the company of Mary Mother of Holy Hope, as we await the birth of the Divine Redeemer.

Retreat of Sts. John and Paul, Rome

1 December 2024

First Sunday of Advent



Fr. Giuseppe Adobati, CP
Superior General