

# Jesus & Paul – Lenten Tridium 2009

*“Be Passionate Lovers of Christ & of Christ in Everyone”*

*“Be the Aroma of Christ Everywhere You Go”*

*“Be United to Both Christ Crucified & Risen in Everything”*

Sts Peter & Paul Church ushered in the Holy Season of Lent with its annual Lenten Tridium held from 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> February 2009 immediately following Ash Wednesday. In line with the Holy Year of St Paul (2008-2009), the theme of “Jesus & Paul” was preached throughout the Tridium. Redemptorist Rev. Fr. Gino Henriques was the main celebrant & preacher. The Tridium was jointly organized by the Discalced Carmelite Friars & the Society of the Infant Jesus.

Over the three days, Fr. Gino seamlessly weaved together three pertinent aspects of the relationship between Jesus and Paul in regard to (Day 1) St Paul on Conversion: New Creation and Transformation; (Day 2) St Paul on Christian Calling: Proclamation of the Good News; (Day 3) St Paul on Tribulations: Power through God’s Love.

Fr. Gino challenged everyone to emulate the “passion” of St Paul. St Paul, after his conversion, became a new man who was intensely and uncontrollably passionate in his love for Christ and the early Christians. This was clearly manifested through his fearless preaching of Christ Crucified, his tireless ministry to the early church throughout the Gentiles’ world, and his glorious martyrdom in Rome. Following the example of St Paul, we as true Christians must be renewed daily as people of “passion” – passionate in our love for Jesus and in our love for Jesus present in everyone. This “passion” cannot come from us, but only from the Spirit of God.

Being passionate does not mean that we necessarily need to undertake Earth shattering tasks, it can be done quietly and gently as well. Fr. Gino shared the story of his late friend, also named Paul, who after his Baptism when he was in his 60’s was like an effervescence bottle overflowing with zest and zeal to share his new found faith with everyone he meets. He always had with him prayer cards, holy pictures, and simple words of faith from his own conversion which he was ever ready to share gently, but passionately, with any and everyone who he came into contact with. Fr. Gino humored that when Paul was called home to the Lord, he probably continued his evangelization zeal in Heaven only to soon realize that everyone there has already been evangelized.

Fr. Gino emphasized that “passion” and the proclamation of our faith are inseparable. Don’t hide your Christian faith, we must be Jesus and become Jesus, only then can we go forth to proclaim Christ at every impulse and opportunity we have. If we lack this impulse, we also lack the “passion”. That is, we don’t yet have enough of Jesus in us. St Paul tells us that we are to be the “Aroma of Christ” – Aroma by its very nature spreads and it cannot be contained or confined. Likewise, as true Christians, our very presence must bring comfort to the people we meet because they can see and experience the “Aroma of Jesus” in us. Fr. Gino further urged everyone to pray and to live the prayer which Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her Missionaries of Charity pray & live daily, “Dear Jesus, help me to spread the fragrance of Your Love everywhere I go and to preach You without preaching, not by words, but by examples.”

Sufferings, trials, and tribulations are also inevitable companions in our journey as passionate Christians proclaiming the “Aroma of Christ”. When St Paul fell from his horse at his conversion, he not only encountered the Risen Lord, but equally, the Crucified Lord. Fr. Gino explained that though Christ is truly risen in glory, the crucifixion and the sufferings of Jesus continue on in the church and in the world today. Each time we sin, we nail Jesus to the cross. Like St Paul, we must die daily to our sins so that we may rise daily to new life in Christ. How Christ can continue to suffer even though He is in glory is indeed a mystery that is alive in you and me. Suffering and death are outcomes of sins. However, your suffering will not be wasted if it is united to the Cross of Christ. Suffering without Jesus is “evil” by its nature, but united with Jesus, it will become a grace that will sanctify and purify you. Indeed, your suffering united with the suffering of Jesus becomes “redemptive”.

To further illustrate, Fr. Gino noted the example of the more than fifty Holy Martyrs depicted in the ancient churches in Greece where they were made to stand barefooted on ice so that they would die through getting frozen to death – what sheer agony and an incredibly protracted way to die! In fact, when two of the martyrs gave up halfway, two of the soldiers who were martyring them took off their shoes to “replace” them and joined in the martyrdom for they experienced the “Aroma of Christ” in the martyrs and wanted too to believe in and to experience this Christ, for whom these martyrs loved with their lives. The strength of all Martyrs to willingly die because of their love for Christ, comes not from themselves, but from the Holy Spirit. Through our Baptism and Confirmation, the Holy Spirit dwells within us. Hence, we too can draw on this strength of the Spirit of God to conquer all our trials and tribulations.

Fr. Gino went on to cite examples of several people he knew who joyfully carried their sufferings to their graves – a social worker who despite her serious illness was always happy to attend to the needs of others as Jesus is truly alive in her heart; a woman with acute Osteoarthritis for 28 years who was always at peace and never a word of complain; a terminally ill cancer patient who willingly bore his cross with Jesus for he felt that his cross was so small compared to the Cross of Jesus. Truly, there are countless such examples of those who have triumph over the “evilness” of their sufferings by uniting them to the Cross of Christ. St Paul tells us that it is when we are weak that we are strong. Fr. Gino encouraged everyone to pray to experience the crucified Lord daily and no suffering will ever be greater and deeper than the Love of Jesus. The Spirit of God is much stronger than any suffering we have.

The “good news” proclaimed at the Triduum spread rapidly as evident by the exponential increase in the crowds over the three days; indeed, on the final day, the church was overflowing with people despite the rain. Some were healed of their physical ailments, but many went forth from the Triduum, inspired, to varying degrees, to be the passionate Aroma of Christ, both in their times of sufferings with the Crucified Lord and in their moments of joy and glory with the Risen Lord. “...it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...” (Galatians 2:20).