



*Il Superiore Generale
dei Passionisti*

CIRCULAR LETTER
on the occasion of the
150th Anniversary of the birth
of BLESSED PIO CAMPIDELLI, Passionist

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends in the Passionist Family,

***“We must risk,
because love knows how to risk;
without risk, a young person ages,
and the Church ages too.”***

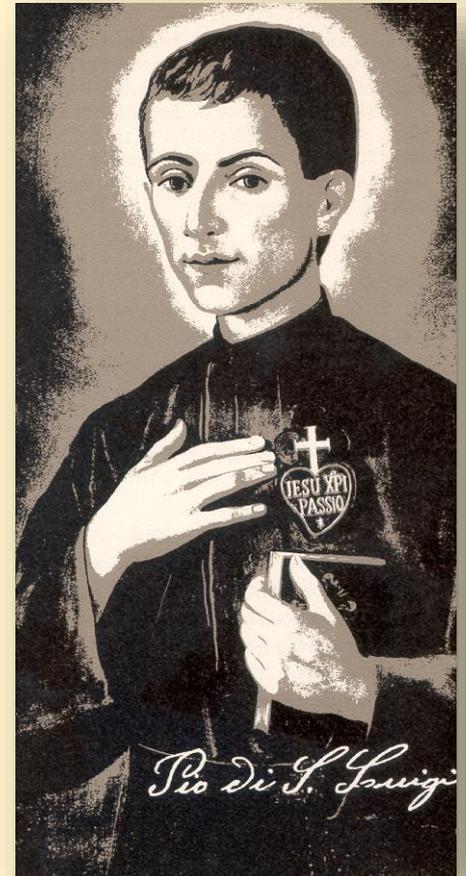
These are words that Pope Francis spoke to hundreds of young people from many different cultural and religious realities who gathered in Rome at the *Mater Ecclesiae* College on March 19, 2018 for the pre-Synodal meeting in preparation for the Bishops’ General Assembly in October on Youth.

In a very real way, the words of Pope Francis to these young people, echo the words of our young Passionist confrere **Blessed Pio Campidelli** who, at the end of his short life, said:

“I lay down my life for the Church, for the Pope, for the Congregation, for sinners and for my dear Romagna.”

Having died as a student shortly before his ordination to the priesthood, there is not much existing in terms of the writings of Blessed Pio. However, these words expressing the desire of the young Pio speak valiantly of risk — *laying down one’s life*. It is about self-giving, generosity and courage founded on a hopeful trust in God. At the basis of this readiness to sacrifice one’s life for others is LOVE - without fear. As Pope Francis said to the young people: “...love knows how to risk.”

This year the Passionist Congregation celebrates the 150th anniversary of the birth of Blessed Pio of St Aloysius who was born Luigi Campidelli on 29 April 1868. At the young age of fourteen, he took a big risk to satisfy the burning desire he felt to enter religious life within the Passionist Congregation and began his novitiate at the Retreat of Casale (Italy) in 1882. Seven years later, he courageously accepted his illness and died of tuberculosis on 2 November 1889 - a short life of simplicity and spiritual surrender coming to an end at the tender age of twenty-one.



The world around Blessed Pio was one of political unrest. Italy, as a unified country was a very new reality. It was only in 1861 that the Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed. However, foreign powers continued to dominate the Italian peninsula during this time. In 1870, the Pontifical State was attacked and Rome was invaded. The names and places of unrest may have changed since the time of Pio, however violence and unrest in the world today continues, resulting in internal and external threats that also affects the Church.

One might ask: *what difference could the decision of a fourteen-year-old boy to enter religious life have possibly made in his country and in the Church, including the Passionist Congregation of the 19th century?* From a limited human perspective, his decision had little or no impact at all. However, in the context of the Paschal Mystery, his life would be a part of the on-going Passion of Christ, attracting the attention of the universal Church.

In his homily at the beatification of Pio in 1985, Pope John Paul II stated:

“Pio discovered the fundamental value of his religious life in the gift of himself. This essential feature of his interior life was particularly evident at the moment of his death, when, ‘with full knowledge of his approaching death, he offered sacrifice of his life even more completely to fulfill the will of God’... Only at that moment could we see the unique dimension of his virtue, that reveals the quality of his entire spiritual experience.”

By offering the “gift of himself”, by “laying down his life in love for others”, Pio united himself with the Passion of Jesus, who freely offered his life on Calvary for the redemption of humanity. That day in Jerusalem most of the city’s inhabitants were unaware of what God was accomplishing outside their city walls. In the case of Pio Campidelli, few people beyond the Passionist community were aware that this young man even existed. Yet Pio, like Jesus, offered his life completely and risked it in the crucible of illness, thinking not of himself in his suffering, but sacrificing his life for others in generosity, so that the love of God could be a greater reality in the world and the Church of his time.

This event which we are commemorating is an opportunity for us to review and renew our Passionist vocation. On the occasion of this anniversary of the birth of our brother, Pio, let us all who have committed our lives in imitation of Jesus Crucified heed the words of Pope Francis (stated at the beginning of this letter) who urges young people to be bold and not to fear, to take risks in love and not to cling to our own comfort, to give selflessly and not to count the cost, so that



new life and healing love may flow from the Heart of God through the Passion of Jesus into the heart of the world — a world which has grown indifferent to the cries of the today's 'crucified' and which has lost respect for the dignity of the human person and God's good creation.

Blessed Pio is an example to all of one who put into practice the evangelical call to discipleship: *"If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me...anyone who loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it."* (Mk.8:34). His example is reflected in the following words of Pope Francis as expressed in Evangeli Gaudium #274:

"If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realize that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God's handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image, and he or she reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!"

May Blessed Pio inspire us in the Passionist Family to be generous in offering the energy of our life for Christ, for his Church and for our beloved Passionist Congregation. May his prayers sustain us in our community life and in our apostolates so that we may walk together united in our charism of the *"Memoria Passionis"* and courageously proclaim throughout the world that in the Passion of Jesus we come to know *"the greatest and most overwhelming work of God's love."*

"May the Passion of Jesus be always in our hearts."

Fraternally,

Fr Joachim Rego CP
Superior General

SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Roma
29 April 2018