

St. Paul of the Cross

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1694–1775 • Italy

The two boys spluttered and struggled in the river. Fear clutched Paul's heart—he and his brother John Baptist had fallen in, and now they were drowning! Out of nowhere, the most beautiful woman appeared. She extended her hand to them and pulled the two boys out of the river. Paul knew that the woman was the Blessed Virgin Mary and that she was watching over him. From his childhood, Paul dedicated himself to prayer and the service of Jesus and Mary.

One day, after receiving Holy Communion, Paul had a vision of himself wrapped in a black tunic. On his breast was a badge shaped like a white heart with a cross on top. Inside of the heart were three nails, in memory of the nails in Jesus' hands and feet, and the words, "The Passion of Jesus Christ." The Blessed Virgin appeared and handed him the tunic, and from then on, Paul was filled with the desire to found a religious order dedicated to Jesus' Passion, His suffering and death on the Cross. Paul became a priest and founded the Passionists, who wore the white heart from his vision on their tunics. His brother John Baptist also entered the order, and the two brothers lived the life of prayer and sacrifice of the Passionist brothers.

Paul of the Cross's life was marked by miracles. Once, when he was preaching to a large crowd in the square, sudden storm clouds gathered, and a torrent of rain burst upon the people. Paul raised his crucifix and said a blessing. The sky cleared, and the square completely dried! The people rejoiced in God's miracle!

Another time, Paul needed to send a very important letter by messenger on horseback. The rider said he could not take the letter because the waters of the river en route to his destination were too high to cross. But Paul told the rider not to fear and to carry his letter. The rider trusted Paul because he knew of his holiness. When the rider came to the river, he fearlessly spurred his horse onto the water. The horse's hooves dashed across the top of the water without sinking! The people on the riverbanks saw this and marveled at the miracle.

Paul of the Cross remained the leader of his order, the Passionists, until he died a holy death. St. Paul of the Cross, help me to think of Jesus' suffering and death on the Cross!