

Don't Miss 'St. Paul of the Cross,' EWTN's Newest Docudrama

By Michelle Laque Johnson

Much of the world views the cross only as a means of torture. However, for Paolo Francesco Danei – who would one day be known as Paul of the Cross, founder of the Congregation of the Passion of Jesus Christ (Passionists for short) – the commitment to the Passion of Christ and to the sorrows of His Mother offered everyone a means of salvation that could transform the world.

“St. Paul of the Cross had a special gift, which was to make people love the Cross of Christ,” says Writer, Director, Producer Elisabetta Valgiusti, whose new docu-drama for EWTN entitled “St. Paul of the Cross” airs 10 p.m. ET, Saturday, Oct. 20. “During his youth, he made his first vow, which was to help everyone he met understand the importance of what Jesus did for them during his Passion.”

In fact, during his lifetime, Paul gave at least 250 missions on the glory of the cross to people in cities and villages across Italy, most notably to those in the villages located around marshes in the Tuscany area. The marshes were an area where only the very poor lived because of the great risk of contracting malaria. However, due to the impact of his forceful style of speaking, Paul was also called by a number of Popes to preach at various liturgical celebrations in Rome.

Unlike some learned people, who talk above people's heads, Valgiusti says Paul “talked like one of us.” That is evident in the 12,000 letters Paul wrote to people at all levels of society, most especially the laity. (To date, 2,000 of these letters have been published and edited.) So it's no surprise that the people, many of whom were poor and suffering, loved both the priest and his message.

“As a spiritual director, St. Paul suggested receiving holy Communion daily,” Valgiusti said. “That was an innovative idea at this time.” It was also extremely rare for the founder of a religious order to be given the opportunity to see it approved in his lifetime, but that was one of the many graces the Lord bestowed upon this holy man.

Paul was born on Jan. 3, 1694 in Ovada, Italy. His father was a simple tradesman. As a young boy, Paolo traveled the region selling his father's goods. This undoubtedly contributed to his ability to relate to the common man.

Paul knew from a very early age that the Lord was calling him to found an order. He was only in his 20s when he first went to Rome in an attempt to obtain approval for a new order. The guards at the Apostolic See initially rebuffed him, probably because they thought him too young and audacious to ask that the Pope grant him an audience to such a lofty enterprise.

However, the young man would eventually succeed in founding 12 Passionist monasteries. In addition, Paul founded a women's order, with Mother Mary Crucified of Jesus, known as the Passionist nuns. You can see many of the places in which Paul lived and worked in this EWTN docudrama, which was filmed in Italy.

Valgiusti says this remarkable man had a relationship with four popes, two of whom considered him a saint even in his own lifetime.

Paul died on Oct. 19, 1775 at the age of 81, and was canonized by Pope Pius IX in 1867. His feast day is celebrated on October 19 in Europe and on October 20 in the United States.

Find out much more about the life of this remarkable man when “St. Paul of the Cross” airs at 10 p.m. ET, this Saturday, Oct. 20 – exclusively on EWTN.

Note: EWTN viewers will recall Elisabetta Valgiusti’s previous docudramas on St. Catherine of Siena and St. Benedict of Nursia, as well as a series of documentaries about Christians in Middle East. For more information, please go to www.savethemonasteries.com.