

The Forge

in our daily life

SPIRITUS DOMINI

Ordinary Time IV

7 IN A MISSIONARY
CONGREGATION

SPIRITUS DOMINI - 2014

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he arrow forged on the anvil is not saved in a

museum. Its destiny is to be launched, although nicked with the passage of time. We are called to be missionary arrows: "The ministry of the Word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling to the People of God. For we have been sent to proclaim the Lord's life, death, and resurrection, until he comes, so that all who believe in him may be saved. (CC 46).

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To help individuals, communities, Provinces and Delegations to be consciously aware of their present reality, rekindling their experience of Fire and missionary zeal following the methodology of the Forge.



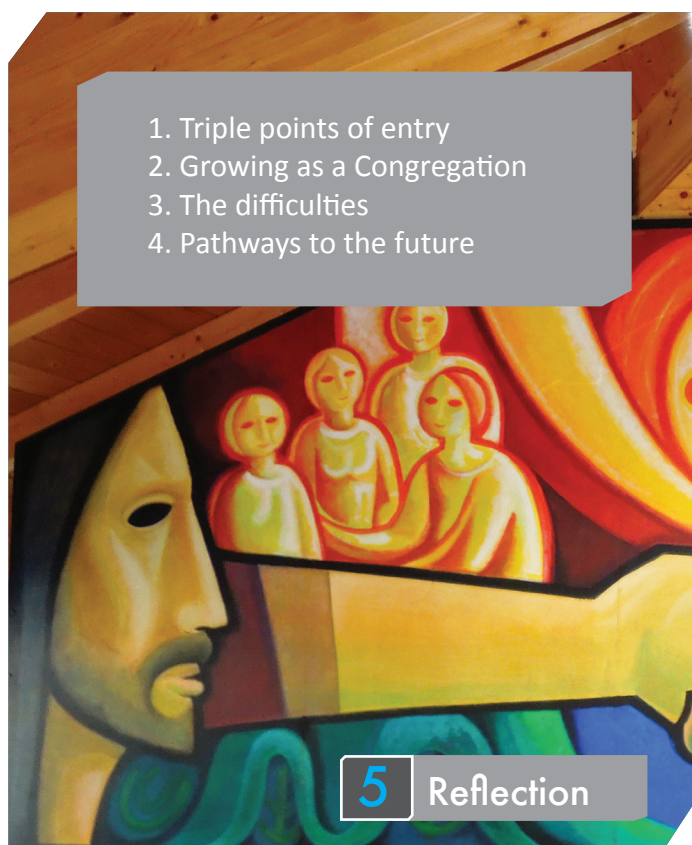
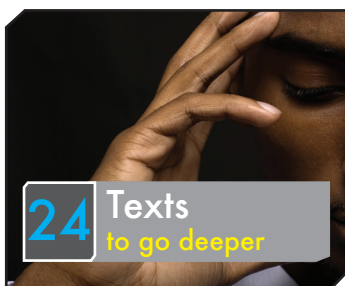
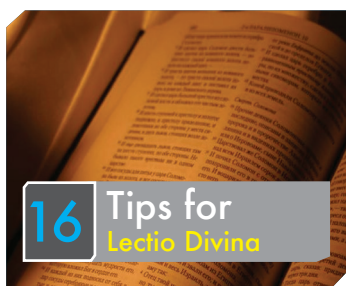
OBJECTIVES

- To pass from passive attitudes to creative attitudes.
 - To believe in the experience of the Spirit who anoints us to be ministers of the Word in the prophetic mission of the Church.
 - To deepen in the Cordimarian dimension of our missionary spirituality.
 - To personalize the significance of our belonging to the Congregation today and to value its charismatic diversity and universal mission.
 - To recapture the experience lived throughout the Forge Project to continue progressing in the missionary life.

BOOKLETS

1. The Spirit of the Lord is Upon Us (Advent-Christmas)
2. We Have Been Anointed to Evangelize (Ordinary Time I)
3. In the "Today" of the World and the Church (Lent)
4. As Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Easter)
5. Servants of the Word in the Church (Ordinary Time II)
6. In the Style of Claret (Ordinary Time III)
7. In the Missionary Congregation (Ordinary Time IV)
8. Open to the Whole World (Ordinary Time V)
9. Progressing in the Missionary Life (Ordinary Time VI)

contents



1. Introduction

Less than two months ago we celebrated the 165th anniversary of the founding of the Congregation. With the thematic stage "Spiritus Domini" we are returning to an aspect of our Claretian identity that we have addressed from various angles in other stages of the Forge. For us, the experience of the Spirit that anoints us is not a private event: **we have been called "as a Congregation"**.

The Congregation of the Claretian Missionaries came about as a result of a generous response to the call from God. Six priests of the diocese of Vic left their families to form another type of family, their homes to live in a new home, their parishes to go to different parts of the world, in this environment they moved so that they could broaden their horizon. In short, they left everything to follow, love and serve Jesus Christ, sharing life and mission as the apostles, in an apostolic and missionary community, totally dedicated to the proclamation of the Gospel and in the service of the Church.

In this response from the first group of Sons of the Heart of Mary began the germination for each Claretian community. The humility of this fledgling group contrasts with the greatness of their commitment. It was not easy to become a Congregation; it is not enough to gather in some holy spiritual exercises and then coming to live together and trying to follow a united vision. The path was arduous. In any case, from the beginning they shared a great ideal and harbored the desire to become a consolidated apostolic body. The life and daily work was like a school, where day by day they would create a meeting point between the personal call and the common project, among the possibilities and the efforts in common, between a pastoral ministry of maintenance and that of a prophetic evangelization.



2. Reflection

The result is known by all: with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, consciousness of being anointed and sent - and to be summoned to form a missionary congregation - which did initially, exceed the Diocesan boundaries and were able to overcome difficult challenges; Secondly, they would be called to weave a dense network of relationships and have to acquire their own personality; after, they would accept commitments throughout the world, some of which would be extremely difficult; much later, they would move forward without fear toward the universalization of thinking and structures; until they would reach a promising presence, where daily they would identify faces and different sensitivities, where discernment becomes a common task, where the horizon of the universal mission is not lost from view of the fact to be an evangelizing family which is a living gift of the spirit.

In this **Booklet 7**, we are going to look at the dynamics through which the Holy Spirit makes us congregational and makes us become one community day after day. Today we are a very plural and extended group. Each individual is invited to revive the vocational gift that makes him an active member of this apostolic body. All together we are moving on the shoulders of giants and we already have a long journey; even so, the challenge of forming a missionary family is still present. These pages are intended to help us revive in our lives this congregational awareness.

The starting point will be our origins; we'll talk about it after our history charged with achievements and moments of failures; we will touch finally on our reality that continues to be a response to the call of God to be a missionary congregation here and now.

2.1. Triple points of entry

1) The gift of the Spirit: the icon in the upper room

A large fresco of Pentecost presides over the apse of the chapel in the General Curia; which represents the moment in when the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room, receiving the Holy Spirit. In the center of the mural is Mary who is persevered in unanimous prayer with the believers (cf. Acts 1:14). The book of Acts (cf. 2:1-41) state that, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the followers of Jesus overcame fear, opening their heart to the Word and were enabled to go into all the world preaching the Gospel, beginning in Jerusalem. Then, the text speaks to us of the life of this new community: prayer, breaking of the bread, all property is shared and the fraternal welcome of new members (Acts 2:42-47).

What was the precise reason that this mural was painted in the chapel of our General Curia? It is easy to identify in this description of the first Christian community the purpose of Claret in founding a missionary congregation. An exchange of letters between our Founder and Fr. Clotet in 1861 attests to the faith and importance that the Saint gave to the episode of Pentecost. Claret applies to the Congregation this nuclear occurrence of the primitive Church. It is to contemplate the first missionaries as disciples of Christ gathered in the Upper Room, preparing with Mary to receive the gift of the Spirit; in few words: forming apostolically in the Forge of their heart. Mary is the Mother and Teacher of the apostolic community. She stands up and takes the first step by inviting members of the group to also stand up: she encourages the disciples in evangelization. She puts them in direct relationship and cordially to those in need of the divine Word.

Our name is not a devotional statement, but the profound expression of our identity; a spiritual brand that makes us aware of the gift received from the Spirit, with Mary and in community, overcoming the fears and putting us at the service of the Kingdom.

2) To do with others

In recent years we have repeated this phrase of the Founder applying it to the Shared Mission. However, the expression in its origin is related to the first members of the Congregation of missionaries. The Founder, disturbed by his episcopal appointment, requests the Nuncio to reconsider the decision of sending him to Cuba because after founding a Congregation of missionaries, he was at the point of fulfilling his desire to do with others what he could not do alone.

Let's briefly review the process of the Saint. Claret begins his task of apostolic missionary alone, in solitude he travels many roads in Catalonia and the Canary Islands; going from one side to the other, he imitates Jesus, wanting to proclaim His Kingdom, coming into contact with all sorts of people, thus feeling the need to get closer to those who are simple so as to put them in touch with the Word of God;

he is truly concerned about his salvation and that of his neighbor. He works unceasingly and in the midst of the evangelizing activity thus experiencing a double conversion: a conversion of collaboration and a conversion for the community:

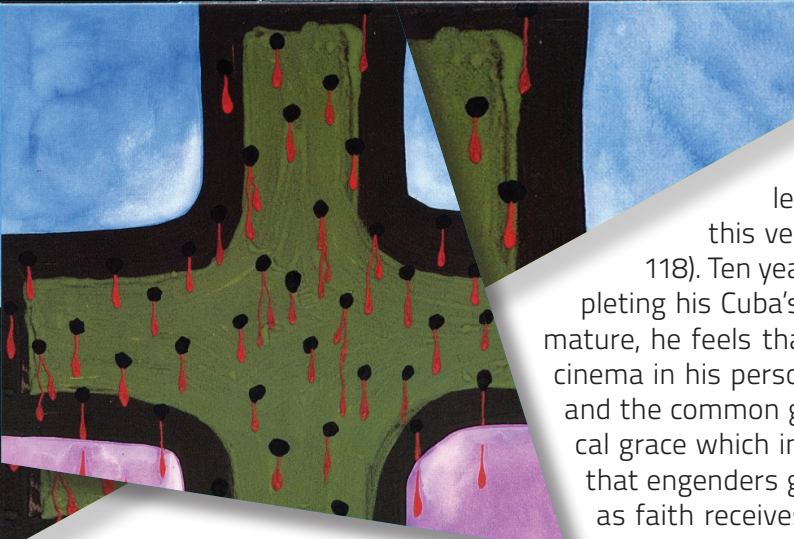
Conversion towards collaboration: How did he work as a collaborator with the Bishop of Vic; Claret lived his apostolic task with a clear awareness of participating in the Church's mission, but in principle he did not feel a need to express in his manner the act of collaboration. How and why the change?: in contact with reality, the impossibility of reaching everywhere, the progressive awareness of the diversity of the pastoral shortcomings, the desire of qualify ones task... this made him realize the importance of joining forces, the urgency to seek partners and the opportunity to promote more ambitious enterprises by other priests. Little by little, the collaboration in the mission leaves an attitude of being alone and puts one in communion with the whole Church, thus to realize the concrete projects undertaken by a group of evangelizers.

Conversion for the community: Claret takes into conscious, in the momento given, that to follow Christ the evangelizer is not complete if he does not visibly include the method of evangelization from Jesus: He called them to accompany him and to go out to preach (Mk 3:14). To accompany the Lord Jesus implies the common life, as the place where it becomes a visible action of God (Digitus Dei est hic. Aut 609). Today we say that the community of evangelizers in themselves is an instrument of an evangelizing, in a significant space and testimony. In his description of the group of Cuba, Claret noted the same thing: "Our house was like a beehive (...) Everyone was always happy and cheerful. The outsiders were astonished at what they saw and they praised God". (Aut 608). The pastoral work of each one is born within the community and converges in it; all together they evangelize beyond one's individual tasks.

In the coming together of these two conversions where there is an obvious path of me for us; and therein is situated the origin of our missionary Congregation: as a place of life (community of brothers) and the center for mission (collaborators in the proclamation of the Word). The Congregation, as was pointed out by the Chapter of 1979, is the embodiment and existential realization of the foundational charism of Claret; and so the first group at Vic proposes and follows "strictly a life perfectly common, all working in the sacred ministry" (cf. Aut 491).

3) "The Lord said to me and to all these my companions" (Aut 687)

To do with others is essential but not sufficient. Claret goes further beyond: until you get to be one with the others. True Congregational communion is not to make everything more or less the same thing, but to live the dynamics of being united with members in a profound union as the same body. Claret also acquired this awareness. To realize this fact, it is worth remembering No. 687 of his autobiography that has already been cited in previous booklets. In this text the Saint tells a deeply spiritual experience which included in the chapter entitled "The remarkable things that have given me to know God and the Blessed Virgin Mary". So says the Founder: "The Lord said to me to me and to all of my companion missionaries: it is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father and your Mother that will speak through you (Mt 10:20). So this reason each one of us can say: the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he



has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearts (Lk 4:18)."

When we talk about the call to go to preach, leaving the parish of Sallent (in 1839), Claret had applied this verse of the Prophet Isaiah as an individual title (cf. Aut 118). Ten years after founding the Congregation in 1859, after completing his Cuba's experience, much more humanly and ecclesiastically mature, he feels that this spiritual gift has made him become not like a cinema in his persona, but as all the gifts of the Spirit is for the building and the common good. God speaks to the whole group! It is a theological grace which involves not only doing, but also ones being. It is a gift that engenders giving birth, making things in a certain way; a gift that as faith receives, feeds, purifies, it tests, strengthens, celebrates and communicates in the missionary Congregation. It is the gift of being Christ is with the Father so that the world may believe.

one (cf. Jn 17:21), as

The conscience of sharing the same charisma - of having received a grace that the being touches - the Congregation gathers and commits itself to a new project. A real missionary does not live through a relation with the mission in an individual way, intimate or recluse. To be called to the mission demands first to give permission for the Spirit to speak in and for each one of us; and later to join with the brothers, to live the attitudes of service, solidarity, closeness, pardon and reciprocity; always announcing the Gospel in holiness and justice (cf. Lk 2:75).

Exercise 1: You will be a Congregation...

For work and personal reflection

Ten invitations to the Congregation to revive the Grace of Pentecost

(Paraphrased text of Cardinal Martini)

1. You will be a missionary Congregation full of faith, nourished by the faith of the whole Church, and you will give your heart and your whole life unconditionally to the living God who has spoken to us in Jesus Christ. You will cultivate uprightness of intention and you will be glad in the affliction and predisposed to mercy for those who are far and near.
2. You will surrender to the Word of God in your interior prayer and in the communion with the whole Church, in order to be a community rich in spiritual knowledge, capable of proposing ways of synthesis in the middle of the fragmentation and confusion of our time.
3. You will be a Congregation capable of growing in the science of faith and being nourished from sound teachers, that are a voice of the symphony of truth that illuminates and saves, as is present in the variety and wealth of testimonies produced in the communion of the whole Church and throughout the history of our missionary brothers from the past and today.
4. You will be a Congregation accepting of the gift of council, respectful of one's personal journey of spiritual development and willing to help each person to live in freedom of his own vocation under the action of the Consoler and under the guidance of people who are spiritually wise and inwardly free. You will be in the Congregation a missionary who daily asks for the gift of discernment, who listens to God and to his brothers.
5. You will be a Congregation living in hope, always able to bear witness to the generosity of the promises of God, which frees us of captivity from the evils and the fear of death making us look forward with confidence, with distancing from earthly goods and the money and with a stronger certainty than any failure, persecution or defeat.
6. You will be a Congregation that lives under the gaze of God, willing to please in Him in every way and therefore, vigilant and active in the fear of His holy name, free of calculations and valuations that are merely mundane. A congregation united around the same Spirit and a common ideal.
7. You will be a Congregation strong in hope, perseverant in the path that God has mapped out, and what the Church has confirmed in you. You will be free, brave, and courageous in fidelity and witness although the price may be excessive. Liberating for all your members and for those who are related with you in the gift of true freedom which is the one that comes from the Lord.
8. You will be a Congregation alive and active in apostolic charity, open, capable of concrete gestures of reconciliation, welcoming and generous with all the brothers and sisters in the faith, even if they are distinct from it; also willing to make room for another, whoever and wherever they come from, to welcome him with respect and love and provide the free gift that God has made you. Forgive them richly and with joy and you will work with all your strength for the pacification of the hearts.
9. You will be a Congregation rich in mercy, in love with God and willing to respond to your love with a humble love, but filled with tenderness, passionate and willing to accompany others in your moments of sorrows and joys.
10. You will be a Congregation rich in spiritual wisdom, able to measure it and live it under the primacy of love that comes from God and makes us sharers in his life. Opening your way to God and his infinite love, so to opening yourself to paths in this world.

2.2. Growing as a Congregation

In this second stage, we evoke three moments in our history. These three references are not contained, nor exhaust all trajectories to be a Congregation. They are only three concepts expressed in a complementary manner to be a mission congregation over time. Each model is located in a different time and able to respond to it. Today forms part of our heritage and in one way or another, are points of reference when it comes to understand who we are as a Congregation.

1) The community of salvation

“The Lord added to the group of believers those who would be saved” (Acts 2,47)

The theme of salvation had a great impact in the Apostolic and personal life of Father Claret. He wasn't the only one moving in these coordinates. Since the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the different Christian confessions presented themselves as exclusive communities of salvation, making their faithful dependent for their eternal fate in belonging to a particular group. Even today, Pentecostal churches insist strongly on this aspect.

The Founder describes graphic stories about his childhood anxiety and dizziness that produced him to think about a future of endless punishment (forever, forever, forever... Aut 8). But Claret does not pose the problem of eternity on an individual basis, but feels motivated - from a compassionate heart - to work so that all people would know, love, serve and praise God: in a word, so that they may be saved. In founding the Congregation, he thinks without a doubt in creating a group of missionaries who will be saved (sanctified) and, by exercising the apostolic charity (looking for the glory of God), work for the salvation of their fellow human beings (cf. CC 2). The same concern was expressed by Fr. Xifré in his work “Spirit of the Congregation”, in a clear statement of the nature of the Congregation as a community elected by God to be missionaries, i.e. “valid instruments of the Divine Word that God gave to save men”.

The tradition in this aspect is firm: to be a missionary Congregation they are to be holy, to live God's plan of salvation, with a compassionate heart, communicating through the divine Word. Our first brothers felt that the religious observance (the perfect common life) was introduced in this dynamic and ensured the fruit of our apostolic mission. Today our proclamation of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ is inspired by the words of the Gospel of John: “I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly” (Jn 10:10); and when we want to become dynamic inwardly so as, to renew our life, we believe that men and women will seek the love of God that is

burning in their hearts. We have changed language; still driven by the same desire.

2) The apostolic body

“We have received the same spirit, in order to form one body” (1 Cor. 12: 13)

In 1924, the Father General, Nicolas Garcia, addressed all members of the Congregation in a circular entitled “Corporate Spirit”. In our charismatic family this aspect had already been underlined by the Mother Antonia París, who often expressed the desire to form a great apostolic body. In his letter, Fr. Nicolas was premised on a sociological observation: a group prospers if its members are motivated by the same spirit of body and lapses if the individuals are motivated only by self-interest or convenience.

The sense of body is based on the identification of the Pauline Church with the Body of Christ, united by the same Spirit. Being the Church is to be of Christ and that means to form a single body. How does this apply to the Congregation? The first response is clear: the spirit of the body, the vital principle, is generated in a missionary Congregation by fanning the awareness of having received the same Gift of God, and develops in the faithful the practice of following Christ.

Starting from here, to be a body implies the desire to acquire unity; it involves integrating the individual activities in a common effort; obliged to implement the work entrusted with organizational perspective; motivated to work with successes and setbacks of the rest of the brothers; ennobling, in other words, it have the honor of being part of a great project. To be a body that feels part of the family and work to build it; to have ideals and shared projects, and strive together to advance them; keeping in mind that everything is ordered to the common good; to perceive that each member “receives its share of grace, so that more is for the growth of the whole body (...) until the fullness conforms with the ideal”; it is to know that all partake of the same mission and as we join Christ in his Church.

What happens if we lose the consciousness of forming an apostolic body? To lose a sense of body, the vocation is weakened (because it is with-vocation); the projects become mediocre; selfishness gives way to despair and inaction; discontent opens space between us; there is a danger that each one will feel like a stranger in his own house, that is to say, is not happy, suffers and makes others suffer; they lose support in the apostolic works; and “last but not least”, “the sacred interests of God, to the souls and the Congregation are harmed”. In other words, it endangers our collaboration in the salvific mission.

It would be necessary to ask several questions: why is it we can't acquire awareness of apostolic

body and become one? Why are we so easily persuaded by erosive arguments? Why do we find it so difficult to continue what others began? Wouldn't it be that we put our interests before those of the Mission? Wouldn't it be that we do not truly believe that the Spirit speaks through the voice of our brothers?

3) The "Congregational We"

"And we are witnesses to all that he did"
(Acts 10:39)

"We who ate and drank with him"
(Acts 10:41)

*"And he commanded us to preach to the people
and to testify that he is the one"*
(Acts 10:42)

The fact that the pages of this booklet are written in first person plural (we) is not a mere coincidence or a literary strategy. In the Constitutions, the personal pronoun most often repeated is the "we". In the letter of October 2012, we were reminded by the Fr. General: "The Lord convoked [the first Claretians] to form a community in which they will experience that presence of the Spirit that unites people with ties stronger than any other and which they will find the motivation and the support necessary to consecrate itself to the Mission of proclaiming the Gospel." The history of the Congregation shows that the stronger the experience of the links of community, the more joyful has been the vocational experience of each, and more effective the missionary outreach" (NUNC, 493-494). The "Congregational We" is a hidden evidence, which is there though we do not always perceived it; is another of the fruits that the silent Spirit poured out on us.

In the circular letter of 1994 "Toward a renewed missionary commitment", Father Aquilino Bocos devoted an entire chapter on speaking of the "we Congregational". The statements were clear and almost blunt: "Only in the communion of the "we" manifests its splendor and its possibilities of the charism that we share. The fruitfulness that is in us! It is one of our greatest responsibilities. To live in a state of congregation (...) leads us to not to be independent, not to act in isolated groups, not to neglect those who must work alone, to operate as an authentic organism. The declarations are not enough, the words need to act together: only to surmise the "We!" ensures the dynamism of the Congregational community". It is easy to draw some conclusions: 1) To be aware of this we release one from the bondage of the personal "I". 2) To move away from oneself broadens the horizon and leads to discover the true extent of the gifts of God. 3) The mission is compromised if we fail to recognize that it has been entrusted to the Church as a community, and within it, those who



have received the call to serve the Gospel, reproducing on a small-scale, the community-congregational identity of the Christian life.

To live from the perspective of the "we" involves combining unceasingly a number of verbs which are set below:

- To trust in the Congregation: believe in it and recreate it.
- To qualify ourselves because we cannot be repetitive; we must be prophetic.
- To build, to make the Congregation; praying, suffering and working for the glory of God and the salvation of all people.
- To make credible with personal depth and vital coherence our Congregational life.
- To inculturate making dialogue, listening, discernment and apostolic creativity in our proposed great evangelizing.

- To expand our horizons, without rejecting our own, what is safe and acquired.
- To collaborate with all those who seek the transformation of the world according to the divine plan (cf. CC 46.)
- To interchange incessantly the gifts received, and thus making them bear fruit in favor of the Kingdom of God.

The quote from the Acts of the Apostles of Peter's discourse in house of the centurion Cornelius, who heads this section, reminded us the three axes of the ecclesial 'We': the knowledge of Christ, the breaking of the bread (the Eucharist) and the announcement of the Kingdom with works and words. The Congregational missionary 'We' is only possible in fidelity to the word, in the experience of the Eucharist and in the testimony of the risen Christ. Is there a better way to be and called Sons of the Heart of Mary?

Exercise 2: Creed of the Claretian Congregational Community

(Fr. Aquilino Bocos)

- *We believe in God the Father, origin and purpose of all good, who has blessed us and chosen us to be signs and instruments of his glory among men.*
- *We believe in Jesus Christ our Lord, sent by the Father, made man from the Virgin Mary and anointed by the Holy Spirit to evangelize the poor; He, in his infinite goodness, has wanted us to join in his salvific work in this world.*
- *We believe in the Holy Spirit, who awakens in the Church various ways of following Jesus Christ and to proclaim the Kingdom of God. We welcome, as an experience of grace and as a project of sanctification and apostolate, the life and the teachings of St. Anthony Mary Claret, prototype and model of servants of the Gospel.*
- *We believe that Mary is at the origin of our community by inspiring and encouraging the foundation of a Congregation of Missionaries who were called and call themselves Sons of the Heart of Mary. In our Mother's heart we are configured with Jesus Christ and act as instruments of the compassionate and merciful love of the Father for all.*
- *We believe that our vocation in the Church, lived in brotherhood and following the example of Mary, that involves the following of Christ, chaste, poor and obedient, so as to witness the unequivocal proof that the world may be transfigured and offered to God through the spirit of the Beatitudes. Such was the rule of apostolic life that the Father Founder made his own and transmitted to us in the Constitutions.*
- *We believe that our mission consists in prolonging the prophetic action of Jesus through the ministry of the Word. Urged, therefore by his sacrificed love, and sharing the anxieties and hopes of men, particularly the poor; we seek for them the beatitudes of the Kingdom now begun on earth.*
- *We believe we have been gathered in the Church to collaborate with the Supreme Pontiff and the Bishops in announcing the life, death and resurrection of the Lord, until He returns, so that all people may be saved by faith in Him. We choose to do this, by all means possible, responding to that which is most urgent, timely and effective.*
- *We believe that Jesus and Mary will continue to protect the Congregation, awakening vocations, and giving His Spirit to those called so that, living the same consecration and mission, we should glorify the Father. We offer the testimony of ecclesial communion and make more effective the evangelizing action.*
- *We believe, Lord. Increase our faith. Mary our Mother, you are blessed because you have believed. Let us share your same blessing. Amen.*

2.3. The difficulties

In the third stage, we will emphasize some difficulties to be faced on this arduous journey to become a missionary Congregation. In the introduction it was affirmed that it was not easy to become a Congregation. The first generations of Claretians had to face problems of a very diverse nature; to a certain extent these were logical because every new organism is accused of weaknesses. The important thing is that our brothers could move forward and continue this work of Mary and of the Spirit that is our missionary community. Why did they go forth with joy? Simply because more than to look at themselves and at the adversities, they opened their lives to God and placed themselves in the divine project of salvation.

The difficulties of today are of another type. The Chapters and the Assemblies have helped us identify them repeatedly, and it is not necessary to list them. We will not consider our faults by ourselves, but seeing how they influence our mission; only this way will we realize its real scope and especially, we will be able to overcome them because by having gone out of our personal circle, we will underline more the search of the Glory of God and the fulfillment of His will, in spite of our inevitable shortcomings

1) Neutralized prophetic mission

The ADN of our Congregation has a very characteristic sequence, with a few clear prophetic profiles: the Spirit and the Word, the desire to follow Jesus anointed by the Spirit, the heart and faithful believer of Mary, the universality of places and means. Like the prophets, we are listeners and passionate servants of the Word. To make real our Congregational communion we need the presence and power of the Spirit that spoke through the prophets, that brings us together and leads to the communion of saints, which empowers us to be witnesses (martyrs) of Christ.

But this prophetic Congregational mission is neutralized by several viruses that often attack us: idolatry takes us away from the worship of God in spirit and in truth (cf. Jn 4:24); a lack of theological sense, the loss of healthy spiritual tension; divisions, murmuring, envy and suspicion; individualism, ego-centrism, provincialism, and the lack of a spirit of sincere collaboration; laziness in setting aside time to analyze reality and recommitting ourselves to the calls of our more humble brothers; the temptation to live off the backs to the world that surrounds us; the lack of the warmth, tenderness and compassion which are part of the heart of Mary.

To be indifferent to prophecy, to the point of neutralizing it, our vows lose radicality; they turn off the ideals of excelling, selflessness and solidarity. It dampens the mission; they forget the poor and the brothers. We lose our own selves. The congregation-

al mission deteriorates.

2) Eschatological Mission without horizons

In proclaiming the Gospel of salvation and being a witness of God in the midst of the world, our Congregation is invited to be a sign of future blessings, for the new earth and new heaven. This is a task in which we are all committed, by accepting the call of the Spirit to liberate consciences and structures to realize the Kingdom of God. We have the certainty that everything is sustained by God in the face of personal community, congregational and social difficulties, so as to not lose sight of the promise of God. It would only take a moment to look at the comprehensive plan of God to relativize many negative and disheartening analyzes that we lose so often.

Our Congregational mission is hampered and canceled when we are not able to admire, contemplate, to look beyond; when don't nurture the prophetic "look", which is profound and observed with the eyes of the heart. It is when we let ourselves be drawn into routine and insensitivity; when we settled for currents of thought that are unimportant, hopeless, consumerist; when we give priority to any ideology other than the message of the Gospel; when we are afraid of what is new, we become closed to the depth and silence of the truth; when we let others win by secularization.

The challenges of the Congregation are the challenges of the mission: unless we are open to the greatness of God's plan and we put in dialogue the reality that surrounds us, we will lose little by little our identity and relevance: we will be simply become inauthentic, as the salt that is distorted and loses its worth (cf. Mt 5:13).

3) Apocalyptic Mission without stimulus or consolation

The Congregation is heir to the apocalyptic disposition that Claret exercises in his ministry of the Word (cf. Aut 686). The book of Revelation is an open book, which enables us to read the history of the Congregation as a history of salvation and of consolation, while helping us to discover how our condition is prophetic and who are the enemies that want to destroy us. We have Christ at the center: it is the Lamb who has conquered death. It is He who is and who was and who is to come (cf. Rev 1:4), the "alpha and the omega" (Rev 1:8). To retrieve the encounter with the Spirit, obtains for us the security that good triumphs over evil.

In the reading of the Book of Revelation we now can also specify the evil spirits, the demons that shut off our "shouting of the Word". The letters of the Spirit to the Churches remain current and direct us in His word of warning, encouragement and of consolation. Today what would be those evil spirits? Let us enumerate some: to slacken in the struggle against the forces of anti-kingdom; to lose sensitiv-

ity and connection with the creation that is the work of God; with history, that is the history of salvation; with the Church, which is the People of God; with the Congregation, that is a missionary family; not to move ourselves in the face of the future Kingdom, the salvation that is near; to smother our pastoral activity; to be lukewarm and not working on a daily basis for our own conversion; in being satisfied with the minimum; to stifle the Word; to domesticate radical options for the poor, for the universal brotherhood; to make pacts, even unconsciously, with the sins of our time; to cease to scream from the depths of our heart "Come Lord Jesus".

Perhaps some may think that all these attitudes are too 'personal and intimate', that have little or nothing to do with the Congregational mission. **If people are the greatest wealth of the Congregation, all is lost if they are overwhelmed by mediocrity, incompetence, lukewarmness, and lack of spiritual tension.**

Exercise 3: Examination of conscience

Questions of the Spirit to each community of the Congregation (Paraphrases of the Cardinal Martini)

1. Do you live intensely your adhesion to the living God that the Church has made known to you? Are you a community that listens to the Word with faith, which celebrates the divine liturgy, and bears witness to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus? How do you live the Beatitudes of the pure of heart, of the afflicted, the merciful? How do you live the spiritual knowledge? Are you prepared to observe the Word of God? Do you allow yourselves to be questioned by this?
2. Are you a community that is fed on the knowledge of faith? Are you caring for the catechetical formation and theology of your members? Are you interested and concerned about listening to the professors of theology and the spiritual experience that the Spirit awakens in the Church which He proposes or recommends you? How do you stay attentive to pastoral projects?
3. Are you a community in which the gift of council is appreciated and promoted? Are the processes of personal maturation and its consciences respected and valued in your innermost being, even if it might cause some difficulties to the common road? Do you animate your members in the practice of spiritual direction, in so far as possible with people sufficiently free from the temptation of absolutizing their belonging to the group? Are you aware that your group membership is only "a path", one of many in the Church, and that this "way" is only truly ecclesial in that it recognizes that "other roads" are or can be vocations of God and that without them the plan of salvation in the Church today is not complete?
4. Are you a community rich in hope? Faced with the many evils of the present time, having the ability to look always and in every circumstance directed towards the horizon of God's future for us? Do you witness hope to those who are in relation with you? Do you live the joy of those who really hope in the Lord? Are you living the Beatitude of the poor according to the Spirit, that of the hungry for justice, the persecuted?
5. What place do you give to the fear of God in your values and your projects? Are you a community that permits itself to be judged by the concern for the Lord concerned with pleasing Him in everything? Do you respond to the demands of the Gospel and in following Christ, or sometimes leave yourself to be guided by the calculations of earthly success?
6. Are you a community strong in hope? Are you constantly following your path, persevering in your faithfulness to God's call? Is it possible to trust in you? How do you keep your faith in your commitments, even though it may cost you real sacrifices?
7. Are you an open community, welcoming and generous? Do you respect the diversity that is given in the Church and in your being, not only with words but with actions and truth? Are you open and avail yourself to those from the outside who approach you, especially to those who are seeking the Face of God and want to find Jesus Christ? Are you ready not to serve yourself in the Church, but to serve it, so that God's Kingdom grows, even if you would have to disappear? Do you show docility in the face of misunderstandings and conflict? What service do you offer to understanding and to peace?
8. A community of faith, hope and charity makes us recognized, in a particular way by its piety. Are you a community prone to worship and venerate God in every one of your options? Do you feed each one of your members with that tenderness of God that is the fruit of a great love, received from on high and given freely? Do you witness to this world this urgency of the love of the Lord, more than anything, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your being?
9. Are you a community that lives the wisdom of love and the wisdom of the Cross? Do you make sure that the primacy love is in everything you do? Do you give yourself in love for God to each one of your members by being welcoming and generous in love?

2.4. Pathways to the future

Our Congregation, founded and animated by the Spirit, discovers open roads toward the future in this world where God continues operating discreetly, by means of a Church that testifies to His presence. We know that we are not actors but servants of the Mission: instruments, humble ministers of Communion. When you open the windows of our missionary Congregation, we look to the horizon and we see that God's work is still ahead and that today challenges us in many ways. In this last section, we will propose some questions in accordance with the content we've been developing.

1) Centrality of the experience of God

Our Congregation will disappear if it loses prophetic power, that is, if the way of God is off-centered. Let us remember the simile of the measure: " [the missionary must be like] a compass one of whose points - the soul - is fixed on Jesus who is the center, while the other - which is the body - describes the circle of my obligations" (cf. Purposes 1866, 8).

2) Revitalization of fraternal life

From the beginning, our Congregation has expressed the gift of fraternal brotherhood in a diversity of ways of living (ordained ministers, students, brothers). Today we are required to intensify our fraternity and in addition take a step forward.

There are words that are no longer strange concepts to us, but an everyday reality: universalization, multi-interculturality, reorganization of structures, charismatic family, inter-congregational, shared mission. The charism today requires us to provide a much richer experience of a brotherhood, but also more complex, diversified, and challenging.

3) A real experience of poverty

The options in the last Chapters have directed us to see the situation of the poorest. Many of our brothers are suffering on a daily basis in lacking fundamental human needs and living in extreme poverty and immense pain. If this trend is true, in fundamental term, a large part of the Congregation will share in one way or another this same poverty. Such a situation is also a gift of the Spirit, because we are identifying with the way of the life of Christ and gives birth to our missionary configuration with

him. It is a new voice of the Spirit, a Pentecost gift to qualify our identity as evangelizers, and awaken a new shared solidarity.

4) Intensify the 'sensus ecclesiae': we are an ecclesial family

The Church is our spiritual homeland and in it our charism finds its place. We are not understood outside of ecclesial communion. Within it we are a charismatic family that is gradually becoming aware of this fact. Gone are the times of the differentiating features, the ecclesiology of communion has given us a new horizon and will awaken us to the spirit of collaboration, and joint fruitful work. Our Founder matured in his vocation alongside many persons (collaborators, men and consecrated women, laity, etc...). He knew how to create a family and take on a charism with an ecclesial sense. We are called today to follow the same path.



5) The Need to live in 'the state of formation'

The challenges of the mission may not be answered in solitude, nor with repetitive and prefabricated formulas. **Prayer and study are the two feet of the missionary, which affirms our tradition.** Formation today is more necessary than ever, because it not only opens our minds, but also awakens the capacity to analyze reality and look at it from the prism of the Word of God.

3. Suggestions for the community encounter

The five talents of our Congregational "Five talents you gave me..." (Mt 25:14 -30)

The theme of the Community Assembly proposed for this month revolves around the parable of the talents. The Lord has also given our missionary Congregation five talents and, as the faithful and dutiful servant, he calls us to bear fruit. The last General Chapter suggested five very specific calls, which were presented as the latest thing. These calls would be like five talents that the Lord has granted us so that now, congregationally, we would bear fruit.

1. **Greeting** of the one who presides over or directs the meeting.
2. **Invocation of the Spirit:** you can recite the Sequence of Pentecost. Before praying it, it is good to make reference to the icon of the Cenacle (cf. Point of departure, 1)
3. **The reading of the parable of the talents:** Mt 25: 14-30..
Stop briefly at these three expressions: 1) he called his servants and entrusted them with his property (Mt 25: 14). (2) The good and faithful servant (Mt 25: 21-23) – The evil and lazy servant (Mt 25: 26). (3) For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich (Mt 25: 29).

4. Application to the Congregation

A new man

MFL 34: "After the first profession we add to our name the acronym CMF (Cordis Mariae Filius) (cf. Dir 25). This is not just an external detail. It expresses that with our profession we take on a new identity that includes all the others: being Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is the concrete way

of being men, Christians, religious, ordained ministers, and apostles (Cf. CC 4, 159; Dir 24-26; MCH 132). Our charismatic name expresses the new mission to which we are called: to be the "arms" of the Woman who is still defeating the dragon (cf. Ap 11:19 - 12: 18) through the Word of God, of which we are listeners and servants".

A new family

MFL 37: "a Son of the Immaculate Heart of Mary does not follow Jesus alone, but rather as a member of the Congregation, a new charismatic family founded by the Holy Spirit in the Church (cf. CC 4, 10). Because we are sons we are also brothers, brought together to share the same plan of evangelical life. "The grace which reaches and congregates us" is called us to "the principle that organizes and articulates all our hopes, aspirations and projects" (cf. MCH 126,133). "For this, although we live in a network of multiple belongings (family, social and ecclesial), our belonging to Christ, expressed in the vocation we share in the Congregation, takes the first place over all".

A new way of life

MFL 43: "In the 'definition of a Missionary' we find the truth about the human person in relationship with God: salvation is found in the God who sets us on fire. When accept this truth we renounce models of individualism and self-sufficiency in life and open ourselves to new forms of relationship with God and with others. For Missionary Sons, the starting point of a consistent spirituality is knowing ourselves, nurturing the core of our personality and developing our own talents. It deals, definitively, with being reborn" (cf. Jn 3:3).

A new path

MFL 46: "Jesus is the passion that spurs us on (cf. 4 CC) and the path we follow. With him we look for the glory of God and the salvation of humankind, praying, working and suffering. Prayer sets our love of God and our brothers alight. Missionary work expresses that love and communicates it. The acceptance of suffering refines us in the same fire as Jesus; it makes us one with the crucified of this world and makes us credible. To set ourselves alight in prayer like Claret, spurs us on to work and suffer for the Gospel. Centering ourselves on these values throughout our life and formative journey purifies our motivation, illuminates our perplexity and directs all that we are and do for the greater glory of God and the salvation of all".

A new direction

MFL 47: "Whoever loves Jesus will feel loved by the Father, will radiate and testify to His love and will bear much fruit. Our Founder, captivated by apos-

toxic zeal, "Yearns and strives ... to make God known, loved and served" (EE, p. 417; Cf. Aut 233). The zeal of Claret, fruit of the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5; CC 39-40), knows no borders: his spirit is "for the whole world" (EC I, q. 305). To be on fire with love changes us into men of fire for others to the point of spreading the flame wherever we go. Thus we share in the mission that comes from God. Like Claret, we can also say: "Caritas Christi urget nos" (2 Cor 5:14). Like our Mother, we are able to proclaim the Magnificat, because that which the Lord has said will be fulfilled (cf. Lk 1: 45-55). The mission entrusted to us is born from an experience of love, it is nourished by caring for it assiduously, it is radiated in the world under the sign of compassion and closeness, above all, towards the impoverished and excluded".

5. Brief sharing

God has called us to be a Congregation; we have been entrusted with the care of his people. We have received a lot: how do we make use of it? Do we share our fruits or hide our gifts? Let's talk and comment briefly in community whether or not we are aware of the talents we have received. Perhaps it would be convenient to conclude the dialogue having specified together a 'sixth talent', typical of the concrete community.

6. Closing prayer: the definition of the missionary.





Benedict XVI
Apostolic Exhortation
Verbum Domini
(n. 83)

4. Tips for the "Lectio Divina"

"With regard to the consecrated life, the Synod first recalled that it "is born from hearing the word of God and embracing the Gospel as its rule of life". A life devoted to following Christ in his chastity, poverty and obedience thus becomes "a living 'exegesis' of God's word". The Holy Spirit, in whom the Bible was written, is the same Spirit who illumines "the word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and every rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it", thus opening up new pathways of Christian living marked by the radicalism of the Gospel.

Here I would mention that the great monastic tradition has always considered meditation on sacred Scripture to be an essential part of its specific spirituality, particularly in the form of lectio divina. Today too, both old and new expressions of special consecration are called to be genuine schools of the spiritual life, where the Scriptures can be read according to the Holy Spirit in the Church, for the benefit of the entire People of God. The Synod therefore recommended that communities of consecrated life always make provision for solid instruction in the faith-filled reading of the Bible.

Monday, September 1, 2014

- 1 Cor 2: 1-5
- Psalm 119
- Lk 4: 16-30

We have here, they say, the biblical text that is most Claretian. It gives the name to this stage of the Forge. It is a programmatic discourse of our missionary vocation. And, above, is a discourse “of grace”: to announce good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners and oppressed, to proclaim a year of favor from the Lord. Jesus identifies himself as the Anointed One, filled with the Spirit, consecrated to communicate the good news for men. And we have been sent and anointed as missionaries in Him; let us be joyful in the proclamation of the Kingdom that we wish to carry to others. The Spirit of our Father and “of our Mother” is upon us. Perhaps, like Jesus, we feel rejection when we preach a message of grace. But “we have our eyes fixed on Him”, and we know that, every day, his Word is fulfilled, this grace for us is renewed.

Tuesday, September 2, 2014

- 1 Cor 2: 10b-16
- Psalm 145
- Lk 4: 31-37

Cafarnaum submits to the Prophet of Nazareth. Everyone is in amazement and all marvel at the authority with which Jesus speaks and acts: “He spoke with full authority”, “gives orders with authority”. He frees the one possessed by evil: it is the victory of Jesus over the forces of evil. The same unclean spirit recognizes Him: “Have you come to destroy us?”. The source of this authority lies in the fact that at the same time, he preaches and liberates. It is found in word and deed: he felt what he said and did what He said he would do. In Him everything sounded like the truth. Like Jesus was the truth. With Him the Kingdom of truth and love has arrived. As missionaries we need credibility. What we do and say will inspire cordial acceptance, even in our weaknesses. It does not mean that we are saints but we that we open ourselves to salvation. To see that it is the heart speaking, tht God speaks through us. And, in the same way that he send us, to heal and announce. At the same time.

Wednesday, September 3, 2014

- 1 Cor 3: 1-9
- Psalm 33
- Lk 4: 38-44

“I have to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God”. It seems like a campaign slogan or, better, the entire life of Jesus the missionary. And always comes together in the same way: preaching and healing. He barely goes out to fulfill His religious duty in the synagogue, when we see Him healing everyone. It begins with Simon’s mother-in-law, and just as the Sun was setting, with all those who were sick including those possessed. It is the sign that the Kingdom has come. The description of this journey of Jesus points out a few details that are like triggers for our missionary activity. First, the attitude of service from Simon’s mother-in-law: the Apostle does not seek it for himself but for the one who sent him and for those to whom he is sent. Secondly, we take into the account that Jesus placed his hands on each one of the sick, personally: we attach importance to each person; it is a sign of closeness. Finally, we know that Jesus’ mission is universal, for all. We cannot hold onto Jesus, taking possession of God; it would be like shrinking God. And, of course, a missionary is itinerant, he is not detained in any part. Even if he feels very comfortable.

Thursday, September 4, 2014

- 1 Cor 3: 18-23
- Psalm 24
- Lk 5: 1-11

The crowd lined up and pressed to hear Jesus. The fish caught were so large that they broke the nets. The Evangelist Luke writes in the times in which the Church enjoyed an abundant catch of Gentiles and Jews. This is well also reflected in the book of Acts. It is a vocational scene. Jesus takes the initiative: “Put out to deep water, lower your nets for a catch”. Then comes the objection on the part of the man: “If we have caught nothing all night,” “I’m a sinner”. But in the end, the grace of the Lord wins: “Now are you going to catch men”. And leaving everything they followed him. Jesus has begun to search for collaborators. The Pope has addressed the third millennium of the Church with the same imperative of Jesus: “go out to deep water”. It is cry that carries in its depth audacity and hope, thus placing trust in the Lord. It’s that we go in the same boat. (Although, at times, it appears that we are asleep, as on another occasion). He sends us, and recreates us. When Peter says “I am a sinner,” Jesus replies “you are a fisher of men”. If we do things because Jesus sends us, in his name, our fragility does not fall into the temptation of fear or discouragement. We will end up like Peter: “Lord, you know that I love you”. It all started in a fragile boat, in the Sea of Galilee.

Friday, September 5, 2014

- 1 Cor 4: 1-5
- Psalm 37
- Lk 5: 33-39

With Jesus the Messiah has already arrived, the groom has arrived. By fasting we come to see that Jesus senses His Messianic call. And Jesus is the bridegroom in the wedding banquet of the New Covenant. The Kingdom of God is likened by Jesus to a wedding banquet. We are their guests to the feast; we are followers of the bridegroom. It is time to celebrate, rejoice, and celebrate it. When the bridegroom is absent, only then, will it be a time of fasting and sadness. It will not disrupt things here, by analogy, what the early Christians said on Sunday: “We celebrate the day of the Lord as a day of joy” (Peter of Alexandria). “It is a sin for those who on this day are sad” (Didaskalia). And this joy is not frivolous; it emerges from the banquet of the New Covenant achieved with the blood shed by Jesus. Welcome this bridegroom with a radical newness. Jesus expresses it in the images of the new dress and the new wine. It is not merely external cosmetics, lightweight patches or the use old wineskins. We must “be clothed in Christ Jesus”. Be filled with this spousal joy, this Easter newness, it is a good baggage for a missionary.

Saturday, September 6, 2014

- 1 Cor 4: 6b-15
- Psalm 145
- Lk 6: 1-5

Saturday was a day of grace for the people. It came from the hand of God through the creation of things that came out good for you. The day of rest, of joy for the liberation from Egypt, day of the Covenant. Jesus himself went every Saturday to the synagogue to hear the word and pray. The bad thing is that the Sabbath was becoming unbearable and ridiculous. It became an exaggeration of ridiculous minutiae like the prohibition of collecting firewood on this day; in our case, the insignificance of take some heads of wheat to kill ones hunger. The reaction of Jesus is emphatic: He feels free to interpret an institution as holy as Saturday, and presents a strong argument in the example of David and ends with a resounding judgment: "The Son of man has authority over the Sabbath". It is sad to think that the happiness of people, the freedom from work, is converted into conflict and torment. Why not face the cult of God with love for the man? We cannot debate ourselves in a dry and formalistic religion. Sometimes it seems that the heart is barren, that we live only to work in our life and for the suffering of the people. Facing a hard heart, we ask for a compassionate heart, like that which our Founder speaks to us.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2014. XXIII SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

- Ez 33: 7-9
- Psalm 95
- Rm 13: 8-10
- Mt 18: 15-20

In the primitive community were also problems of coexistence. And in that case, how do we deal with sinful or conflictive brothers? First of all, it will be necessary to resort to the correction between brothers. Immediately after, the evangelist comments, though it is not in today's Gospel, we find the balm of forgiveness. In the style of evangelical correction it does not draw an activity to discipline but an act of great welcome towards the brother who strays. It is not in vain just to narrate the parable of the lost sheep. Only love and gentleness have to be present, in accordance with the exhortation in today's Letter to the Romans: "He who has love does no harm to the neighbor". Although it adjusts the participation of the agents of the correction, there is big importance in what the Evangelist gives to the community. Jesus is in the center when we met in his name; so, too, in what we tie or ask on the earth shall be bound in heaven or what the Father in heaven will give us. We are all, in some way, responsible for the acts of the other. No one can be tucked into the position of Cain: "Am I, then, the guardian of my brother? If a member becomes sick, we are all sick. Then will come the skillful touch and the love to do it alone, or with another brother, or in community. Before one murmurs, judges and condemns, it is love that will inspire to us to dialogue, with patience and reconciliation.

Monday, September 8, 2014. Birth of the Virgin Mary

- Mic 5: 1-41
- Psalm 13
- Mt 1: 1-16, 18-23

Today is the day of the birth of the Virgin Mary. In today's Gospel, Mary appears last in a list of women; some of them coming from sin and paganism, like Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba. Finally, as the light in the darkness, comes Mary "from whom Jesus was born", full of grace. She shines in the mystery of the Incarnation in all its realism, and at the same time, the victory of the Virgin over evil. In this capricious genealogy of St. Matthew, we can see ourselves aligned. On the one hand, we are children of the victorious woman, Mary. On the other hand, we are baptized in Christ, born of water and the Spirit, by faith, continuing that lineage. In the womb of the creature who is born today will be "the son who is the work of the Holy Spirit... and saves his people from their sins". Born is the aurora that announces the sun of justice, the image that is welcomed by both Parents. Born is the mother of our Savior. Through her, God is Emmanuel, God who is close to all people, God with us. If the birth of any child moves everyone to gladness and joy, how much more is the birth of the Virgin Mary, "our life, our sweetness and our hope"!

Tuesday, September 9, 2014

- 1 Cor 6: 1-11
- Psalm 149
- Lk 6: 12-19

Without papers, without documents, how well Jesus organizes his life and ministry. Graphically we can point to a mountain and the plain. The mountain is a place conducive for the gathering, for intimacy, openness to the mystery. On the mountain, Jesus spends the night in prayer, as a guarantee and foundation of the entire activity of the day. When daylight came, the disciples who follow him arrive; it is then He chooses to the twelve apostles. They are going to accompany Him in his life and mission. They are fragile individuals; one will be the traitor and will deliver him to the executioners. He will be forming them patiently, but they will disappoint him often. This is like Jesus' community. With his apostles, on the open plane. We compose the scene: Jesus in the center; around the apostles; then comes the circle of disciples, in whom we see the Church; closing the circle, the gathering of all the nations, even the foreigners of Tyre and Sidon. Thus, the life of Jesus unfolds in three moments; three moments that are also for us missionaries. First, the prayer on the mountain during the night. To be with the Father, to be with Jesus in a personal sense, in a friendly encounter; to know that it is he who sends us, who gives us humility and trust, in time. Then, the community: to be in group with Jesus and to carry his lifestyle. And to communicate the life of Jesus to others: to preach and heal; to be his witnesses.

Wednesday, September 10, 2014

- 1 Cor 7: 25-31
- Psalm 45
- Lk 6: 20-26

The Beatitudes are a revolution in the scale of values. In the face of power, wealth, domain, prestige, pleasure, violence and things of this style, Jesus places in first place poverty, peace and gentleness in the Kingdom. What was considered a curse becomes a source of happiness. Soon we look at the differences of Luke in front of the most well-known text of Matthew. Luke refers to four Beatitudes; and he is the more aggressive. Matthew gives more of a nuance; he adds four “woes”, which are four curses toward the satisfied and conceited. He maintains the tripartite scheme: First, a call to happiness; all aspire and are looking for happiness. Then come the subjects, who are the poor, the meek, the hungry, those who are despised for Jesus’ sake. Finally, comes the reward that is not small: they will receive a great reward in heaven. Before the “constitutional” text of the Beatitudes, one could slide, even unconsciously, into two disastrous attitudes. First and foremost, to fall into a routine; to hear it a thousand times that we already are without color or flavor. Or also, we leave them with an unattainable ideal. But we missionaries, we know that the Beatitudes are the fruits of the Spirit, it is to live in Christ. There we find the reason for happiness.

Thursday, September 11, 2014

- 1 Cor 8: 1b-7, 11-13
- Psalm 139
- Lk 6: 27-38

As long as the gospel is preached in the world, Jesus’s message will be alive, even though His followers may wallow in mediocrity. To pardon and love one’s enemy is the summit and the heart of the love. This is Jesus’s revolution: before changing structures or redeeming minorities, it is “painful” for His followers, because to love one’s enemy is terrible. Then, the rest will come. We could indicate in the text these parts: a) a solemn exhortation: love, bless, pray; with a difficult object: to your enemies, to those who curse you. (b) Some expressive images: when they strike you on one cheek, offer the other cheek, to the one who takes your tunic, offer him the other, c) it aims to reason: otherwise the sinner does just as much. (d) offer the promises of God: you will be children of God, who is kindly with the disgraced and the bad. Forgiveness and love of the enemy is the litmus test of Christian love. Here everything is “by grace”, just as we have received grace from God. “As I have loved you”. We are touching the depth; it is like we are touching God’s heart. Only by grace, the spiral of violence will be broken and we will come closer to reconciliation. It is not necessary to expect the other will apologize for us to grant our pardon.

Friday, September 12, 2014

- 1 Cor 9: 16-19, 22b-27
- Psalm 84
- Lk 6: 39-42

Three lessons appeared in this gospel text. The three, on the merits of the maxim of Jesus, exposed in verses immediately preceding: “Judge not, condemn not”. These are three popular phrases which Jesus uses to enrich and explains the law of love of neighbor. First there is the saying: “Can a blind can lead a blind man?”. The experts here say that dominion of one over the other was frowned upon. Then comes is the sentence: “The disciple is not above his teacher. Only when you finish your learning will you be like you master”. This equality moves the power away of one over another. Finally, the image of the straw and the tree trunk. It is the supreme expression of condemnation, of dominion, of judgement that we have over others. Jesus teaches us to clean our eyes to look with the eyes of God, who does not condemn, nor judges, but always looks with benevolence. Blessed are the pure in heart, which neither straw nor tree trunks can cloud their eyes. Never impose anything on anybody; who does not want to be nor make oneself more than the brother; that the love of Christ breaks the dialectic of the dominant and the dominated, of winners and losers; that we move from the attitude of binge prosecutors to the attitude of self-criticism, by looking first at our own defects. It is good to look in the mirror of the Word.

Saturday, September 13, 2014

- 1 Cor 10: 14-22
- Psalm 116
- Lk 6: 43-49

There are two small lessons, two very expressive images, the tree and the rock, which help us to discern the quality and authenticity of how we are following Jesus Christ. Or, negatively, they can help us to expose false ways and attitudes in our relationship with God. We look at the fruit tree. The leaves, flowers, height, the slenderness, the foliage don’t matter. Does it bear fruit? Does it give good fruit? This is how we judge ourselves as disciples and those sent by Jesus. Not enough is the foliage or other examples of human knowledge, of prayers that they say “Lord, Lord”, of perfect organizations, of pious and calculated words, and other similar things. What determines if it is worthwhile fruit is if it agrees with the sermon of the plain, if we love others, if we share the fruits of the Spirit which are peace, amiability, simplicity; that is to say, for us missionaries, the apostolic virtues. The opposite would be a formal and empty cult, an inconsistent front. The second image is the rock, is what follows. The tree becomes strong in its roots, like the house on the foundation of the rock. We need to flee superficiality and enter into the depth of conversion, to renew the center of our lives, our desires and feelings. We have a model who is very close, Mary, who listens and keeps the word; she builds upon rock.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2014. FEAST OF THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS

- Num 21: 4b-9
- Psalm 78
- Phil 2: 6-11
- Jn 3: 13-17

We are left looking at the Cross “on which the salvation of the world was nailed”. And we listen to Jesus as he is discovering his mystery to Nicodemus, a high Jewish leader, but man of goodwill. Jesus, like the snake in the desert, is raised on the Cross. His crucifixion is exaltation, it is a sign of victory; it is a paradox: this humiliated, naked, degraded man, who was hung on the cross, is exalted to glory. The Cross is the path back to heaven. But at the same time, it is the exaltation of love. They say in this brief text that the most important verse of the fourth Gospel is: “God so loved the world... “. The love of God appears as the cause for the presence of his Son in the world. Christ on the Cross is salvation for all who believe in him. In the greater pain shines the greater love. An innocent man carries all the sins and, giving death to sin, is the cause of reconciliation of mankind with God. A condemned man who does not condemn, but who gives eternal life. The Cross of Christ is the better response to the suffering of the world. Without falling into a sense of victimization or suffering, each one of us takes up our cross, as Jesus asked us. If we set out on the path of love, we feel that along with love will come the cross.

Monday, September 15, 2014. Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows

- Heb 5: 7-9
- Psalm 31
- Jn 19: 25-27

We listen and contemplate the Word with Mary, beside the cross of Calvary. To call her Our Lady of Sorrows is proclaiming her universal motherhood and her collaboration in the redemption of Christ. Here is the Mother of the Crucified. Associated with the pain and the death of the Redeemer. The obedient woman, the handmaid of the Lord by faith, who is next to her son who became obedient unto death, even death on a Cross. She who had been away from him in the moments of his glory urgently attends to him now in the hour of his pain and death. How she was always present in the difficult moments of the life of her son: in the poverty of the birth, in exile, in the indifference when He was twelve years old in Jerusalem, or in the incomprehension of the religious leaders. At Calvary, Mary listens to the words of her Son which are “almost sacramental”: “Behold, your son”, “Behold your mother”. Mary is the new mother. In the beloved disciple we have been sons of Mary. We can only receive her into our house, as the disciple did. The Church is the house of the Virgin. Like Jesus, we will never be without Mary in difficult moments. She is the beloved mother of all those who are crucified. Perhaps looking at her this way makes her more visible, more tangible now than we know: that God is beside those who suffer; the first all.

Tuesday, September 16, 2014. St Cornelius, pope, and St Cyprian, bishop, martyrs

- 1 Cor 12: 12-14, 27-31^a
- Psalm 100
- Lk 7: 11-17

To a woman widow whose only son has died, and now is taking him to be buried. It was the clearest example of precariousness and helplessness. During this time the security of the woman was dependent on men; one was completely defenseless. She has the fortune of meeting Jesus in a moment of major abandonment. As always, the verbs are repeated: Jesus approaches the pain, contemplates, sympathizes with her, and acts with words and deeds. “Do not weep,” he says to the mother. “Arise”, he tells the boy; the same words that he would later say to Mary Magdalene and Lazarus. With trembling, writes the evangelist who was given over to his mother: what a gift Jesus had in this woman. He would say, as on the cross, “woman, here is your son”? It is not strange that the multitude that was forming the funeral procession erupted in praises to God. When Jesus is present, confidence and hope is born, even where it seems that all roads are closed in poverty, illness or death. Now, on having listened to Jesus, “do not cry”, we understand the Beatitude of those who cry because they will be consoled. At Nain we continue saying that Jesus is the life and who has come that all may have life. Let us not forget that in God is where man is moved to mercy and gives life. Like Jesus.

Wednesday, September 17, 2014

- 1 Cor 12: 31, 13: 13
- Psalm 33
- Lk 7: 31-35

He who has his heart closed to the presence and actions of God, always, always, will find excuses not to listen to him. Jesus resorts to an example of an infantile world. Like a group of children who reproaches another group who will not play with them: “We played the flute for you but you did not dance”. This is the way it happens with the men of Israel. They reject the strict, austere, ascetic life of those who lived in the solitude of the desert, like John. And in the same way reject the Teacher who spontaneously participates and eats with the people, and even accepts invitations by the Pharisees. There is always a dilemma. To the aesthetic He is called the fanatic; as one who participates with the people, a glutton and friend of sinners. Jesus rebuked them in a hard way: “You will not enter nor prevent others from entering into the Kingdom.” When the soul is harden and we are closed to the inspirations of God, to his grace, what little worth the words already have, the reasons, the same testimonies, even though they are eloquent in themselves. We look for pretexts and excuses as defense mechanisms to reject people and proposals. Even a beautiful testimony can offend me when it contrasts with my mediocrity. Like the Jews, we can label: he is bourgeois, or a communist; and thus we can discredit him. Let us open, then, our hearts, and be present and collaborative.

Thursday, September 18, 2014

- 1 Cor 5: 1-11
- Psalm 118
- Lk 7: 36-50

It is the story of the sinful woman. A story of sin, of love, of pardon and salvation. It does not lack the hardness of heart. In the scene, confronting Jesus, are two characters. A sinful woman: without name, not associated with anyone at all; she has not been invited, but is present. Seduced by the kindness of Jesus, she offers the Master the only thing she has left - perfumes, tears and kisses; thus she expresses her love. In contrast, Simon the Pharisee, who took the gesture of friendship to invite Jesus, he judges the woman and judges the guest. He sits in possession of the truth, no doubt, is self-sufficient, strong in his judgments. But the eye of God is different from the gaze of men. Jesus takes the initiative. We would say that he takes a provocative attitude because he wants to transmit a fundamental message of love and forgiveness. A message "that comes and goes": she is forgiven much because she loved much, and loves much because she has been forgiven much. God is always at the point for forgiveness. Either we are open, like the sinner, or closed, like the Pharisee. We should ask ourselves, to look at both directions: do we feel in need of the forgiveness of God? Do we look with the love of Jesus at the sinners? For this, the best thing is to feel the experience of this love of God.

Friday, September 19, 2014

- 1 Cor 15: 12-20
- Psalm 17
- Lk 8: 1-3

In the Gospel, the presence of women is frequent. We remember Anna the prophetess, the widow of Nain, the woman with the hemorrhage, the woman of the town who shout blessed is the womb of the mother of Jesus, the Samaritan woman, the adulterous woman, the widow's mite, Martha and Mary, the women at Calvary and the Resurrection. Today the Gospel speaks of many women who helped Jesus with what they had. It was not easy, then, the relationship with women because they were always subordinate to the male. "I prefer to throw the law into the flames than to teach them to a woman", an extremist rabbi exclaims. Nevertheless, Jesus places these women in the community of the apostles. With them, in some way, they become missionaries; they go traveling and preaching God's Kingdom. They fulfilled what St. Paul will preach: "Now there is no distinction of Jew nor Greek ... neither of man nor woman, since you are all one in Christ". Jesus helps us to eliminate sexist prejudices and contemplate the equality and the value of the woman in society and in the Christian community. With a clean and grateful view, we remember so many women who have worked in the Church. Lay and religious women, women catechists, mothers, missionaries, educators, those dedicated to the health field, in positions of high responsibility, in the sciences and in the art ... in everything. So many saints. If we are still are held back, let us break barriers of the mind and of the heart.

Saturday, September 20, 2014. Sts Andrew Kim, Paul Chong and companions, martyrs

- 1 Cor 15: 35-37, 42-49
- Psalm 56
- Lk 8: 4-15

Here is a parable of great literary beauty and highly charged in its contents. It's that its content is the same Word of God. God speaks to us, is revealed to us, revealing to us the mystery of love... scatters his seed over the minds and hearts of men. He sends his Son, Jesus Christ, constituted as epiphany, the Word, made flesh, as revelation to all. Now it is up to man to respond. God does not impose, only proposes. It is the mystery of human freedom that leads us to accept or close ourselves to the Word of God. Good is the sower and good the seed, now we must see how the terrain responds on which this seed is scattered. According to the explanation of the parable, the man can hide from some obstacles: the evil one, the frivolous and superficial life, the cares of life and wealth. There are so many things that are drowning the Word, the inspirations of the Spirit. Jesus finishes His parable with the good soil, with the persons of good heart. This is what God expects from us, missionaries, and servants of the Word. We look to Mary who listens and keeps the Word. Today we have big worries for the Word, with a double meaning. First, by knowing it in the study of the Bible, in Lectio Divina, etc. Secondly, because the the fruit of the sower is scarce. As missionaries, we are the reason for this Word; we listen to it and we pray it, until "it burns in" our heart, as to those of Emmaus.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 21, 2014. XXV SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

- Is 55: 6-9
- Psalm 145
- Phil 1: 20c - 24: 27a
- Mt 20: 1-16

The temptation of privilege, of enjoying certain rights over others is always lurking. It happens also among us. For the Christians of Jewish origin of primitive communities it did not enter their minds that "other" Christians, who originated from the gentiles, would have the same conditions and equality in the Church. Before, the Pharisees, as God's chosen people, believed they were the first before God, even with the right to impose their observances of the law. This parable seeks to show that for God nothing is right contracted by force, but that everything is free. God invites us to his vineyard until the last moment and some hear the call at the last minute. At the time of the reward, with nobody it is undeserving, but, comes from his goodness, with sovereign liberality, with a logic that does not fit into human understanding He sympathizes with those who are last, and without looking at what they deserve, gives to them in clear disproportion to their acts. Everything is a pure gift and blessing. The Kingdom of God and the work in his vineyard is never a right of man but simply a grace. God always gives more than we deserved. God gives an equal reward for unequal work. The kindness of God must not provoke "to see with bad eye", with envy. Let's allow God to be God.

Monday, September 22, 2014

- Pro 3: 27-34
- Psalm 15
- Lk 8: 16-18

Everything is understood from the image of light in these three small lessons. The light illuminates and is placed on high to enlighten; the light penetrates the interior of man that is shared with others; finally, “he who has”, he who is open to the gift of God, “will be given more” and “the one who does not have”, the one who is closed to grace, “the little that you have will be taken away” will remain useless. Light is a metaphor that runs throughout the Christian vision. Jesus tells us: “I am the light, he who follows me will not walk in darkness”. The Church, in the Second Vatican Council, begins the Constitution about itself by calling itself “Lumen Gentium”, Light of the People. We Christians are the enlightened ones; we are the light that illuminates with the testimony of the Word and our works. In the baptism we receive the light of Christ, especially at the Easter Vigil, on the baptismal night. We are light or, better, we reflect the light of Christ. And if it is the light of Christ, is a light so powerful that it cannot remain hidden. We carry the light of Christ, of the Word, of the Gospel, of the seed of the Kingdom. First is the light within us, to communicate it, to illuminate. We cannot hide this light by fear, laziness, fatigue, or by false humility. We are going to search our charisms and those of the brothers so that they will come to light. Thus we will be witnesses of our Lord. We need to discover saints and prophets. There are more than we think.

Tuesday, September 23, 2014

- Pro 21: 1-6, 10-13
- Psalm 119
- Lk 8: 19-21

For the Jewish people the glory of a woman was her motherhood. Jesus does not diminish the importance of this glory, but points who is more perfect: his mother and brothers are those who hear and keep his message. The good thing is that all this was fulfilled at Mary, his mother, who was the “good soil” of the parable. Two planes are distinguished in the area of maternity: the womb and the sound of the Word. The two come together in the Virgin Mary. San Augustine says: “She conceived him earlier in her heart, by faith, than in her womb”. And the Virgin maintained this faith in the Word, in spite of the darkness and difficulties; when Simeon announced to her that the sword that would pierce her heart or when she stood at the foot of the Cross along with her agonizing son. “Mary advanced in the pilgrimage of the faith” (Vatican Council II). A faith put to test. For this reason, the mother of Jesus was his first disciple, the first believer. And it was logical: if Mary was the mother of the Word, from the Word, who better than she able to listen to the word and put it into practice? A consequence we can deduce also for our missionary life. If Jesus relativizes the title of “mother”, the more we can relativize other titles and dignities. The major title is to become children of God, having been called to collaborate in the construction of his Kingdom.

Wednesday, September 24, 2014

- Pro 30: 5-9
- Psalm 119
- Lk 9: 1-6

St. Luke draws us an example of a missionary of Jesus sent to his disciples. Those sent are given power and authority to heal and cast out demons; they do not need any other titles or worldly power. They took on a style of apostolic life, filled with simplicity and evangelical poverty: no walking stick, nor purse, no bread, no money, nor spare clothing. They do not have to put their trust in more powerful means, but rather in the strength of the message that they were going to communicate. The objective of their mission is double, or better, it is one with two-prongs: to cure and announce; as Jesus did, as he always wanted the Church to do. Finally, Jesus does not forget a warning: the message and the messenger will not always be welcome. There will need then, to shake the dust from their feet and move on to another place. Jesus wants to share his missionary life with others, with us. This is our bell of glory, to participate with Jesus in his task of speaking and doing good things for people, by humanizing this world, according to the plan of God. If we trust in He who sends us, he will make us ideals and we will propose to us the opportune means. For our part, faithful to the Master's command, we will take care to only announce the Kingdom of God and not ourselves; to cure, to heal, to transform this world with the love that God has for it; to be transformed, also, those who are sent.

Thursday, September 25, 2014

- Ecl 1: 2-11
- Psalm 90
- Lk 9: 7-9

“We want to see Jesus”, were the pleadings of those Greeks to Phillip. Also Herod Antipas, is noted in the gospel today; he wanted to see Jesus. He had sent some to kill John the Baptist. Later, when Jesus receives threats from him, Jesus will respond to him with hardness calling him “fox”; and in the moments of the passion Herod will deny him a word because “for quite some time he wanted to know Jesus, because he had heard a lot about Him, and looked forward to see him perform a miracle”. The king laughed at him by placing a mantle of purple on Jesus. The attitude of Herod always appears somewhere between fear and frivolous curiosity. Herod has to ensure his security, and is frightened hearing that John had been executed. Then Jesus arrives, the new prophet. The two move the people. On the other hand Herod wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle. How many times, throughout history, and also now, appear images, responses and attitudes toward Jesus; superficial, frivolous, misleading, and more or less, blasphemous. We remember the last Temptation of Christ, Jesus Christ Superstar, Godspell, Jesus the gorilla, Jesus the hippy, “the Jesus Revolution”, etc. It is only from faith that we came to see the true Jesus, the Son of God. Only by exploring the gospel, listening to His words, contemplating His works, we are able to confess and follow Jesus Christ.

Friday, September 26, 2014

- Ecl 3: 1-11
- Psalm 144
- Lk 9: 18-22

And Jesus keeps asking us: “Who do you say that I am?”. Thousands of times we have recited the Creed. Our faith in Jesus is strong. He is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Christ, the Master, the one that God has sent his Spirit to carry out His mission. To confess him as the Messiah, we overcame the messianic vision of political ideals of conquest. For us he is the Messiah already looked at in the post-paschal perspective. Because He is also the Son of Man, faithful to His suffering condition, who by death comes to the resurrection. In Him history reaches its fullness. As missionaries and Servants of the Word, we know the importance of the vision and experience that we have of Jesus. To follow Jesus Christ is, in its depths, a personal relationship with the Son of man who dies, and with him Resurrected and Living who is present in us by the Spirit. A missionary is a mystic. Before you head out to the apostolic dispersion, Jesus asks us: and you, who do you say that I am? First, it will be the experience of feeling called, loved, sent by Jesus. Then, we’ll look after the image of Jesus that we present to the others. We have to discern with spiritual nobility so as not to fall into reductionist temptations in creating a Christ to our measurement. Only to preach Christ crucified and risen.

Saturday, September 27, 2014. St Vincent of Paul

- Ecl 11: 9-12, 8
- Psalm 90
- Lk 9: 43b-45

Jesus is finishing His mission in Galilee. He is going to start the ascent to Jerusalem, to the place of his death and resurrection. There is something very important he wants to say at the beginning of the journey. He begins with the solemn words: “hear it well, don’t forget it”. It is already the second announcement of the passion: “The Son of Man will be delivered”. Despite the admiration and amazement of all for his miracles, Jesus begins to talk about his death. But the disciples found this incomprehensible. “They didn’t understand, and also were afraid to ask.” It did not enter into their heads, when they could only think of a political Messianism where they yearned to have positions of honor, to be on the right and left of Jesus. Only this remained facing his destiny of suffering and death. Here he collects all his strength in the title of Son of Man. Not so much as a judge, but as he who has power over the Sabbath and to forgive sins. He is the Son of Man in his death and resurrection, who shows his power in weakness and suffering. We have another perspective than the disciples about that hour. That is to say, we know that those same Apostles who now do not understand and are afraid, are the same who will give testimony about Jesus in the midst of persecutions and will go to the death for him. The spirit makes these things happen. Do not be afraid.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2014. XXVI SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

- Ez 18: 25-28
- Psalm 25
- Phil 2: 1-11
- Mt 21: 28-32

Jesus has now entered into Jerusalem. These are his last days. The tension between the Pharisees, priests, the leaders of the people and the Master of Nazareth is strong. He wants to clarify the attitude of Israel in His presence and his message. They believe themselves to be observant of the law and just; thus they reject the call to conversion from John and Jesus. The parable is located here. There are “disobedient” children who, later, when they think about it become obedient: they are the people deemed to be cursed, that do not know the law, the pagans, the non-Jews; they hear the call to conversion and respond. And there are “obedient” children who, later, disobey: they are those who said ‘yes’ to the law of Moses but refuse to accept the invitation to penance to enter the Kingdom. In this way, the ‘yes’ is diminished by the ‘no’ to life and the initial ‘no’ hides a heart open to the ‘yes’. We look at examples of the Gospel. It is not initially with Zacchaeus, or the Samaritan woman, or the sinful woman; the paltry ‘yes’ of he who says Lord, Lord, but does not comply with the will of God. Practitioners of religion could not do it with their hardness of heart. It was the heathen, like the Canaanite woman or the Roman officer who were able to hear from the lips of Jesus: “I have not found such great faith in Israel”. Of course Jesus does not praise sin, but looks at the heart of man. The good heart that allowed them to be converted and follow him. “A contrite heart you will not reject, Lord”.

Monday, September 29, 2014. Feast of the Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and Rafael

- Dn 7: 9-10, 13-14
- Psalm 138
- Jn 1: 47-51

Today is the Feast of the three Archangels. In the Constitutions it explicitly makes reference to St. Michael; Gabriel and Rafael are implicitly referred to as angels. Michael is invoked by Claret to start missions under his tutelage placed at the Academy of San Michael, the Religious Library and the Congregation. His presence is in the coat of arms of the Congregation, and in official documents is an invitation to battle against evil for the missionary service of the Word. The story of the Gospel is, at the same time, a story of vocation and a discovery of the person of Jesus. Even though it does not appear in this text, we should remember the three previous verses of the meeting of Nathanael with Phillip. From here we find the vocational testimony: “We have found Jesus”. He is answered with an objection, as usual: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth? And then comes the clear invitation: “Come and see”. Here the encounter with Jesus is made - which is the call of the new disciple - with Nathanael who pronounces the confession of faith in the Teacher from Nazareth. Here we find all the Messianic titles: Jesus, the Son of God, King of Israel, Son of man. Clearly only the light of Easter could discover the disciples; but the Evangelist places them now in the portico of the Gospel. With St. Michael, the mediator, we renew our missionary call on the part of Jesus, our Master, Savior, and friend.

Tuesday, September 30, 2014. Memorial of St. Jerome, priest and doctor of the Church

- Job 3: 1-3, 11-17, 20-23
- Psalm 88
- Lk 9: 51-56

A change of course in the life of Jesus. He leaves Galilee and makes the decision to go to Jerusalem. It is the journey that, through death, carries him to the Father, to heaven. Jesus is now “a being for death”. No more to begin, passing through Samaria; they encounter difficulty, the rejection of those who do not want to receive them. Before this setback their reaction are very different. The sons of Zebedee seek to bring down fire from heaven on the Samaritans; they want to use the power of God to take revenge on their enemies. The attitude of Jesus is very different. It is a tribute to what he said in Galilee: “God is also kind to the disgraceful and the bad”. He makes the sun rise on good and bad. It is true that the Founder wrote: “the Lord wants me and my companions to imitate the apostles James and John”, but specifically: “in zeal, in chastity and the love of Jesus and Mary”. Like Jesus, a missionary is put on the road to Jerusalem, to the mystery of Death and Resurrection, to live it and announce it. And always with the Evangelical style, without intolerances, without vengeance or righteous ways. You have to accept failure, assume suffering, as described in the Definition of the Missionary. Rather than destroy the bad one we should try to transform him into good by the cross, for love. Not to condemn but to save. Our fire is the one by which the missionary burns in charity and burns wherever he goes.

5. Texts for reflection

Appendix 1: The “Congregational We”
(Aquilino Bocos, CMF)

33. Fr. Claret, seeing the lack of evangelical and apostolic preachers in his day, determined to come together with some zealous companions, in order to be able to do with them what he could not do alone. Later, he would say that this apostolic community, which he called a Congregation of missionaries, had been inspired by God and by Mary, Congregation: this is a word we tend to use in its historical and juridical sense, as a synonym for Institute, but it is charged with deep theological meaning. In itself, the term stresses a societal character and stands as a synonym for an institution or organizational structure. Nevertheless, its charismatic thrust enfolds the whole community dynamism that it entails. The institutional “We” it refers to is the undergirding of an evangelical and ecclesial “We”. Our Constitutions are written in the first person plural: “We”. This is not just a literary genre. This pronoun implies a number of person “Priests, Deacons, Brothers and Students” who have received the same vocation to share the lifestyle of Jesus and to preach his Gospel to every creature, by going forth throughout the whole world.

A charism that has to be lived "in congregation"

34. . We are called and are a "congregation". Authentic "congregation" is the event of the convocation, meeting and assembly of the People of God, which is the Church. Hence, in calling ourselves a "congregation," we are understanding ourselves "ad instar Ecclesiae". We are a modest, but real community in and of the Church. We are a congregation within the great Congregation of the People of God. By vocation we must make manifest this congregational being to which we are called. We are a prophetic and charismatic "we" in the midst of the world divided, and even of a Church divided into Christian confessions, in which it is hard to form an authentic congregation in the Lord. Only in the communion of us all does our Claretian charism show forth all its splendor and all its possibilities. It is a symphonic charism which cannot express it manifold potential in individualist endeavors. It is an organic charism which cannot rightly act without putting the whole body into action.

35. The charisms of institutes of consecrated life are gifts of the Spirit that are especially important for begetting the Church and carrying out the Christian mission. They are legitimated and reaffirmed only in the measure that they enter into harmony with other ecclesial vocations in order to make the Body of Christ grow. No single one of them has a monopoly on the holiness and mission of the People of God. All are instruments of the Spirit to bear witness to the values of the Gospel, to gather together those who are scattered and to overcome the divisions and clashes begotten by sin in the family of God's sons and daughters. This is where we stand as a Congregation that collaborates in all and with all in building up the Kingdom.

36. The Spirit is the principal agent of the Congregational "We." It is the Spirit who has chosen us to have but one heart and one soul in order to share our goods and live in community, relying, even, on our differences. The depth of the Congregational "We" and of its fraternal love makes us an authentically co-responsible and open body. It leads us to look with sympathy and empathy on the Congregation of the past, to love the Congregation of the present by being concerned and taking responsibility for it, and to desire that the Congregation of the future may be splendid and may respond ever more forcefully to the demands of its universal missionary charism. "As members of one body", we all share in the same life, the same mission. Thus our real fellowship or communion makes all of share in all things: the grace and in sin. Each one of us is a frontier missionary among our frontier missionaries, a saint among our saints, a suffering member of the body of Christ among our suffering brothers, a man of prayer among our brothers at prayer, a ray of good news among our evangelizing brothers. The awareness of our mutual belonging and co-responsibility leaves a concrete and intense outline on the face of Christian brotherhood that ought to characterize the whole Church.

37. Part of our Congregational "we" is the Congregation that has already been, those whose names we commemorate every day in our Necrology. The "communio sanctorum Congregationis" is not just an outward datum. It is a grace that we must cultivate inwardly. The memory or our forebears in our charism fills us with energy to carry out their unfulfilled dreams, to be creative. This "solidarity with the

past" strengthens our present communion and invigorated it for the future. Clearly, this leads us to question ourselves on the esteem we have for our brother "saints" of whom there are not a few.

38. Because the Congregational "We" is fruitful, it is meant to help us surpass our present, partial "we." The fruitfulness of our present charismatic "We" is one of our greatest responsibilities. The "We" that we ought to bring to light will exist even after we disappear. We have to build bridges with it, so as to assure our charismatic continuity. We would, however, be collaborating in the death of the Congregational "We" by blocking all roads to the future, by selfishly shutting ourselves off in our present, by denying access to many gifts and by not welcoming anything new.

39. The Congregational "We" is operatively embodied in our project of missionary life, the Constitutions. These are teeming with expressions in favor of communion, coordination, collaboration and teamwork. Among us, the religious vows can only be lived fully in community. Outward signs or symbols (such as prayers, songs, pictures, statues, mottoes, etc.) help us to recall our family ties.

40. Our charismatic "We" spiritually overflows canonical bounds. It is more far-ranging. There are many persons, both men and women, with whom we in fact share our charismatic "We." These include, in the first place, the Claretian Family, laity, ordained ministers or religious with whom we are or ought to be bearers of mission or spiritual life. Unsuspected horizons open up for us when we take seriously this charismatic "We" for which we find the most creative example in our Fr. Founder.

**Appendix 2: A woman surrounded by "outsiders"
(Gonzalo Fernández Sanz, CMF)**

The beginning of this Booklet 7 makes reference to the mural that is in the chapel of the General Curia in Rome. Over the years it has become a Congregational icon. I'm going to start with what I don't like - which is little - to finish off this reflection with what I like - which is almost all of it-. Let me start with the reproductions that are circulating about it: photos, prints, etc. I do not think they do justice to the reality of the work. It is impossible represent on a flat surface a mural painted on a concave surface. It loses depth, volume, proportion ... and mystery. So, whenever I compare the photos with the original I experience a slight sadness: No, this isn't it!

Then there is the frustration of the various colors. It is almost twenty square meters of the mural in a symphony of red, blue, orange and green, with variety of tones and intensities. In the reproductions everything remains a little faded, smooth, as if the ink on the paper could not reproduce the force that the oil has on the plaster. And, again, a little more sadness: No, it is not this!

Finally, there is the matter of the lighting. There are so many murals like the hours of the day. It is not the same to contemplate it at dawn or in the evening – it is only illuminated by a lightbulb that highlights the center and leaves the periphery half-lighted – then to admire it when the light of the midday enters through two pointed skylights that flank the mural at a height of the Holy Spirit. Most of the photos recreate an artificial illumination, by means of the use of the flash and later with digital treatments. The light accentuates the work poorly: No, it is not this!

But let us stop wailing and go directly to the original to enjoy everything else.

It is evident that the center of the mural is the figure of Mary and, more specifically, her heart, surrounded by a halo of light beams, like a small lake of tenderness. But what has always impressed me is the apostolic group that surrounds her. There are six men on each of the sides. Their faces are similar, but their hands express various attitudes. Any observer recognizes them as the apostles gathered with Mary in the upper room. Any observer would not. To see them with a tanned faces, an elder Slovenian Claretian exclaimed some years ago: Wow these apostles seem to be odd, they seem like “outsiders”! (It should be noted that the term “outsider” is one that is applied in Italy to the citizens that do not belong to the European Union, especially to Asians and Africans).

The elder brother, in his spontaneity, which is not exempt from a soft xenophobia, highlighted something subversive. The apostles that accompany Mary are not of “us”. The color of their skin and the traits of his face denote a non-European origin: coming from far away. Unlike the classic Apostles, painted by Giotto, Michelangelo or Leonardo Da Vinci, these “outsider” apostles do not have faces of Greek beauty nor look like young Florentines or Romans. Then, I cannot but recall the words of Jesus: “They will come from East and West and they will captivate the Kingdom”. The apostles of the mural denounced the easy symbiosis that we have made between culture and Gospel. The Gospel does not seem to us to be ours and we tend to suspect that “the others” (Americans, Africans, and Asians) have not yet come to the depth and quality that we have reached after so many centuries of European Christianity. But this is a fragile truth because the great drama of Europe is the strong divorce between the Christian tradition and the emerging culture. We need someone from outside to look directly into our face and help us heal our self-sufficiency. What is said of the Church in general can be applied to our Congregation in particular. Today, the face of the Congregation is not Euro-American, as in their first 100 years, but global: multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual.

If we adjust ourselves to the proportions, the greatest schematic figure is the dove, white, yellow, green and blue. This represents the Holy Spirit. In a realistic scale, the dove should not be larger than the head or the hands of any apostle. However, it is several times larger: it flies majestic over the whole scene and is illuminated with four triangular rays, red on the edges and orange in its interior. This corner of the mural conveys a clear message. Mary is the Mother of God by the power of the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Lk 1:35).

The apostles are converted in the church by the power of the Spirit: “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit has driven them to speak” (Acts 2.4). The Holy Spirit, to whom we confess as “Lord and

Giver of life” is he who energizes the life of the Church. Without him, nothing is possible. The Christian life is reduced to mere compliance and the mission to propaganda. In the mural, the figure of a dove, which is extraordinarily enlarged, is the source of the light that is reflecting in the Heart of Mary, illuminates the whole painting.

I left the figure of Mary to the end. Can I say what I like the most? It is simple: her posture of being on a journey! Although the scene evokes, rather, the experience of Pentecost, I remember now the words of the Gospel of Luke when he recounts the visit of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth: “set out on a journey with haste” (cf. Lk 1:39). The apostles that surround her are in an attitude of prayer and contemplation. Mary, however, is on the way, with bare feet. It seems, almost, that she would escape from the mural and leave to meet the observers, somewhat like the protagonist of the film “The Purple Rose of Cairo”, by Woody Allen. This extroverted attitude is the one that connects the mural with our reality. Mary is close to us, she invites us to let ourselves be warmed and enlightened by the Spirit, to be part of the apostolic group, to be Congregation, and on our journey to respond to the needs expressed by the six hands - two of ulcerated - that open from the left and right of the mural in a supplicant attitude. The hands are another story. They appear with an unusual prominence. We don’t know they belong to. By their size in relation to the rest of the characters in the painting, hands should be gigantic, whose bodies and faces do not fit in the space of the apse. And, in effect, gigantic are the needs they represent. With these enormous earthy hands, we can foretell all the problems that afflict mankind today, especially for people who have no face or voice and only have hands to beg.

In the center of the mural, as being born from a large womb is the slender body, also slightly “outsider”, of Mary. She wears a white tunic and blue mantle. It is a fully human figure. Only the heart is red, because in her dwells the presence of God. The Heart of Mary is the “meeting place” with the divinity, the place where God and man have definitively embraced. It is also a heart disproportionately large, capable of pumping the love that we need to not falter in the mission. This brings to mind the words of Claret: “Oh, Heart of Mary, forge and instrument of love, let this love burn within me for the love of God and neighbor”.

While the right hand appears to mark the rhythm of the step, the left acts as pedestal or throne of the heart. One hand is active, prophetic. The other is contemplative, so as to listen. Both synthesize the whole itinerary of Christian life. Or, at least, this is how I feel it from my wooden bench. The mural is still talking. It is enough to contemplate it with admiration and patience. But other eyes and ears that will perceive new messages and be put it to writing.



"We Claretians are the ones carrying out the mission of the Congregation. Its dynamism, therefore, depends largely on the dynamism of the missionary life that each one of us has. With-out a deep spirituality, our apostolic work would not be able to communicate the Gospel. The General Chapter pointed out as a priority the need to give special attention to our experience of God and to the mystical dimension of our missionary vocation." (Josep M. Abella, *Missionaries*)

spiritus domini

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