



CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES



God-centred and mission-driven
A reflection at the closing of the “Year of Clotet”

CIRCULAR LETTER

Dear brothers,

Jaime Clotet (1822-1898), the youngest of our co-founders, to whom the Congregation has wished to pay a well-deserved tribute. We have done so by recalling with fraternal joy the life and spiritual heritage of our brother through a handful of activities in keeping with his personality and his style: simple and profound, without offending the modesty of one who never abandoned a fruitful second place in our Institute. The subsidies entrusted to the Centre of Claretian Spirituality (CESC) helped our communities to celebrate this event last July. In September 2022, the *Scientific Conference on Fr. Clotet* was held under the initiative and sponsorship of the University of Vic. A second conference on Fr Clotet was held in Fontfroide and Narbonne (France) on 24 October, the anniversary of the death of our Father Founder. And the third, which will be the celebration of the closing of the “Year of Clotet”, is set for 4 February 2023 in Barcelona, taking advantage of a long-standing tradition of celebratory meetings at the Shrine of the Heart of Mary on the anniversary of Fr Clotet’s death. On this occasion it is sponsored by the General Government in collaboration with the Province of Sanctus Paulus, the Ministry to the Deaf of the Diocese of Barcelona and various associations of the deaf in Catalonia.

Just as remembering is easy for those who have memory, forgetting is impossible for those who have a heart. Fr. Clotet is still alive in the memory and in the heart of the Claretians. We have not promoted this occasion to venerate the ashes of a deceased person but to transmit that fire that made him burn in charity and that it is up to us to continue preserving and nourishing. By delving into the heart of Fr Clotet, we get to know the deepest reasons for this missionary’s total dedication to serving his community and the poorest of the poor. This is what we have modestly pursued this year: delving into the depths of Fr Clotet’s heart and to push a little from below so that what was hidden in his soul comes to light. And what has come to light is a crystalline testimony of rootedness and missionary audacity in the early days of our Congregation.

Fr. Clotet, a mosaic of profiles

Onofre Francisco Jaime Clotet y Fabrés, as stated on his baptismal certificate, was born in Manresa on 24 July 1822. The proximity of the day of his birth to the feast of St. James the Apostle meant that he was known by the name of Jaime. After studying in Manresa, Barcelona and Vic, the socio-political adversities of the time forced him to receive the oil of the presbyters in Rome. On his return and after a few years of ministry, a first meeting with Fr. Claret in Vic in 1849 turned his life upside down. Clotet’s soul acquired since then the shape of a polyhedron which, being something unique, offers very different approaches and perspectives within our congregational development. We remember them in order to welcome, value and imitate them.

- **Good by nature:** Fr Clotet was above all a man full of goodness, a goodness that was almost wounding. It has been said of him that he “did not have an enemy.” Together with this gentleness, his lively sense of introspection and self-analysis stood out. Gifted with great spiritual and human refinement, he was meek and humble, devoted to God and to others, industrious, orderly and methodical always and in everything. It is true that he did not have

¹ JOSÉ MARÍA DE GARGANTA, *Founder of the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation*. Valencia, 1976, p. 20.

the qualities of a leader, nor the presence of an orator with a powerful voice. He did not seek to be attractive, but to radiate the goodness that beat within him. Nor did he pretend to figure among the wise and erudite of his time, despite being recognised today by experts as the *discoverer and describer of the Catalan sign language*². He was enriched with other gifts as valuable for education and government as those of advice and discernment, prudence and, also, firm fortitude. It was with these gifts that he faced delicate matters in his capacity as a member of the General Government. He endured great suffering when he had to maintain his conscientious objections to dissent - and to persist in dissent - from the actions of the Superior General, without ever breaking communion with him. At no time did he allow himself to be dominated by a desire for prominence; on the contrary, he knew how to remain always in the shadows of discreet loyalty without renouncing the search for what he considered to be the truth.

- ***Seduced by Fr Claret.*** With his overwhelming missionary impetus, Fr. Claret fascinated him from the moment he presented his project to him at their first meeting. Fr Clotet did not have to spend much time devoting himself heart and soul to the great work that was to be born in a humble cell of the Seminary of Vic. From then on, he lived and worked hard for the Congregation, enjoying its growth and expansion and, at the same time, facing very adverse situations: persecutions and banishments, economic problems, personal miseries, difficult decisions, misunderstandings, failures... everything that life itself entails. Apart from being the co-founder, he was the great transmitter of his spirit and of the life of the Founder to the first generations of Claretians. To Fr. Clotet we owe, in particular, the custody, the study and the knowledge of the life of Fr. Claret. From his small and clear handwriting, we know many details of his life collected with admiration and meticulousness, many of them unknown.
- ***A Missionary in everyday life.*** In his first years as a Claretian, he gave popular missions. Soon, because of his amiable and coherent profile, he was assigned to tasks of government and formation. In his preaching he avoided all artifice. His word was simple, popular, evangelical and, at the same time, full of unction and encouragement for the people. One of his best qualities as an apostle was his *honesty*. Not only did he enjoy a good reputation, but he was also a man of integrity, without evil, like an “angel in human flesh.”³ He moved better in short distances than in the pulpit. From close quarters he was able to move people to conversion. His most recognised inclination was, above all, catechesis; there he “was at his centre.”⁴ In spite of his withdrawn temperament, he did not live absent-mindedly, nor did he avoid friendly conversation. He creatively innovated catechesis with gestures, drawing or questions. In fidelity to the Founder, who had recommended them, he defended the schools for children. His apostolate was based on proximity to the needy, on care and concern for their fate.

² This is the title of XAVIER MORAL's paper at the Scientific Conference of Vic on 8 September 2022, which will appear in full in the next edition of the *Studia Claretiana* journal.

³ The Servant of God Antonio Plancarte y Labastida defined Fr Clotet with these words (CRISTÓBAL FERNÁNDEZ, *La Congregación de los Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María. Compendio histórico de sus primeros sesenta y tres años de existencia (1849-1912)*, Madrid, 1967, I, p. 698).

⁴ MARIANO AGUILAR, *Biography of Servant of God, Fr. Jaime Clotet y Fabrés, co-founder of the Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*, Barcelona, 1907, p. 63.

- **Forger of Missionary Brothers.** His dedication to the formation of the first generations of Missionary Brothers of the Congregation should be justly highlighted. For them he wrote in 1858 the *Directori dels Hermans (sic) Ajudants*, a pedagogical manual containing practical guidelines for their training. In its pages one can feel his tendency towards order, method and a sense of duty. He expounds his orientations from the theology of the religious life of his time, also pouring in his own personal experiences, essentially contemplative, but without rising to impossible heights. In his pleasant and pedagogical conferences, he instructed them in spiritual matters as well as in material and domestic matters, going into details that gave rise to tasty anecdotes and amusing episodes. When he had to leave the house, he would be accompanied by a Brother, whom he would try to honour with great grace in the presence of outsiders, so that the outsiders were edified and the Brothers returned home happy and fond of Fr. Clotet.⁵
- **Catechist of the deaf.** A chance encounter with the world of the deaf, which occurred during his ministry in Civit in 1849, explains how, even before he joined the Congregation, he was already invincibly attracted to the deaf, especially the less privileged and those who did not attend school. He never gave up this service. He devoted much of his time and writings to it, despite his absorbing responsibilities in the Congregation. He sought in many ways to involve and empower others as the aim of his books: “*My aim in writing about the deaf-mute is to help priests and parents and others who wish to instruct a deaf-mute ... with the knowledge gained from long experience,*”⁶ a criterion which invokes a hint of a shared mission. It is not surprising, then, that the Superior General himself, Fr. José Xifré, in the obituary written in his own handwriting on the occasion of Fr. Clotet’s death, emphasised this in these words: “in addition to his apostolic work, he extended his zeal to hospitals, prisons and especially to the deaf and dumb...”⁷ This personal sensitivity helped to give a full response to the educational emergency of the deaf, one of the neediest social groups. The genius of his intuitions, ahead of his time, is something that sign language specialists not only recognise, but continue to investigate... and even apply, as is the case in our “Clotet Centre” in Mexico.
- **A man in the presence of God:** Fr. Clotet was not a perfect man - as he shows in his spiritual notes - but he was a man of presences. His manuscripts make it possible to reconstruct his spiritual itinerary. At his ordination to the priesthood, he became clearly aware of an extraordinary gift that the Lord was giving him: the intimate experience of the divine presence, in such a continuous way that he constitutes “*a singular case in the Congregation.*”⁸ We venerate him, then, as a mystic of the presence of God. Missionary mysticism is the simple and pure love of God and in him all his sons; love underpinned by the pillars of intense prayer, continual examination, Eucharistic celebration, the experience of missionary sending, filial devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and, in particular, the awareness of the constant presence of God in all of this; ... this last dimension being the one which marked his most complete spiritual profile. St. John Paul II, in declaring him Venerable on 13 May 1989, wrote in the official document this statement which places him in his rightful place: “*His mission in*

⁵ Cf. *íd.*, p. 440.

⁶ *Letter from Fr Clotet to Fr Batlló*, 3-11-1889, en AG CMF/PG, CL, 32.

⁷ *Annales Congregationis Missionariorum Filiorum Immaculati Cordis Beatae Mariae Virginis* 6 (1898) p. 296.

⁸ JUAN MARÍA LOZANO, *A man in the presence of God. Jaime Clotet*, CMF, Rome, 1971, p. 9.

the Institute can be summed up as follows: firm defender of the interior life in an intensely apostolic Institute."⁹

Aromas that do not fade

Each person is unique. Therefore, emulating Fr. Clotet does not mean copying his personal style or repeating his work, his pedagogical genius or his mystical profile. But neither should we simply admire him. It is something very different that has to do with what Rainer M. Rilke warned: "*God waits where the roots are.*"¹⁰ Clotet urges us to make a frequent journey to the roots and beauty of the Gospel in order to welcome the God who wants to take up residence in our hearts. Thus, inhabited by his love, we will feel inflamed to love the Congregation more and to serve with audacity the poorest and most helpless. In this way, the memory of our distinguished brother will be a perfume that will last in time with four genuine aromas:

- a) The most urgent, today and always, is *fidelity*. Dedication to the mission entrusted to us, with methodical and untiring industriousness in the services and ministries, whatever they may be, knowing how to walk on the waters of our own fragility and placing ourselves as he did among the least... It was this fidelity that sustained and strengthened the vocational perseverance of Fr. Clotet in difficult times such as during the revolution of 1968 and the consequent eviction and dispersion of the missionaries,¹¹ or his fortitude on the occasion of the smallpox epidemic in the house of Alagón in 1878,¹² or in the obligatory substitutions for Fr. General that he had to assume, or in the painful frustration caused by the "*disastrous foundation in Cuba*" in 1880 because of yellow fever.¹³ We could add many more and of dark shades of colour. This perseverance was further compounded by the blindness that crucified him at the end of his days: "*The lack of sight is the greatest cross God could send me,*"¹⁴ the good Fr. Clotet confessed to Fr. Ramón Muns. Clotet's fidelity should not only make us his admirers but should spur us to firmly embrace our vocation in times when we are so tempted by fragility, inconsistency, instability and vocational fragmentation.
- b) Fr. Clotet also shone with his own light because of his *compassionate heart*. Compassion, such a missionary virtue, is the key to opening the way in the midst of hardness of heart, indifference and exclusion. Fr. Clotet experienced compassion in a particular way in Civit, in his first encounter with that deaf child. That touch produced in him something like a visceral cramp of the kind that only comes from contact. His experience becomes a lesson for us. Because in order to *sympathise*, one must first appear, approach. It is a matter of approaching even those who are humanly detestable or repugnant. Clotet's compassionate simplicity bordered on childish innocence. "*Because of his extraordinary candour, he was abused by the shrewd,*"¹⁵ Fr. Xifré would say of him. Compassion is

⁹ *Annales Congregationis Missionariorum Filiorum Immaculati Cordis Beatae Mariae Virginis* 59 (1989) p. 70.

¹⁰ This heading heads Eloi Leclerc's work, *Wisdom of a Poor Man*.

¹¹ Cf. MARIANO AGUILAR, o.c., pp. 134-138.

¹² Cf. *id.*, pp. 173-174.

¹³ Cf. *id.*, p.186.

¹⁴ *Íd.*, p. 443.

¹⁵ CRISTÓBAL FERNÁNDEZ, o.c., p. 52.

God's way of looking at human beings and saving them. His gaze embraces from below, looks for the lost, never dwells on a past full of mistakes, but looks with infinite trust at those who have made mistakes, awakening an ardent and hopeful desire for the best.

- c) If Fr. Clotet is recognised for anything among us, it is for his *spirituality of the presence of God*. This spirituality proves to be essential and urgent for those of us who live in apostolic action, running - sometimes without realising it - the serious risk of forgetting where the source and goal of all activity lies: communion with the hidden and revealed God. Imprisoned by activism, dispersion and worldliness, we can be good people, do many things, have religious and social sensitivity, and at the same time be off-centre, without dedicating ourselves entirely to God. This spirituality was for Fr Clotet the “*most effective means to reach union with God*.”¹⁶ His example invites us to live permanently connected with the Lord from a growing depth and to qualify “*our profound experiences of encounter with the Lord*” (QC 39). The exercise of the presence of God is nothing other than going there where God hides and reveals himself, “in that secret place” (Mt 6,6) where we empty our minds and fill our hearts at the same time. Thus, we perceive that simple, clean and uncluttered presence, recognising that God often comes to meet us in the disguise of our own life.
- d) A hidden dimension, but one that is as necessary as it is little appreciated and desired among us, and which Fr. Clotet lived with passion, was his sense of *fraternal communion*, which was expressed above all in his *humble service to the confreres* in the less attractive and less appetising daily tasks. We can say that Fr. Clotet was a missionary “ad intra”, because of his willingness to devote himself to the internal ministries of government or formation, to the hard and patient service of animation and care of the confreres. This explains his tendency to observe and carry out his daily and domestic occupations with “liturgical attention”: “*He did not limit himself to carrying out certain lowly and humble tasks like anyone else, such as serving at table when it was his turn, washing the dishes in the kitchen, sweeping his own room... but he did these things very frequently and with naturalness and simplicity,*”¹⁷ and without ever seeking popularity or prominence. May our tendency to stay in our “*comfort zone, individualism and indifference*” (QC 38) be diluted in the face of a witness such as his. How would the path of synodality be possible without people who take on with joyful dedication those services that nobody wants, but without which our missionary life project cannot be sustained? The sense of “we” will avoid putting “*personal interests and comforts before common projects or the needs of others*” (QC 26).

Grateful memory

If it is true that “*death does not come with old age but with oblivion*”, as Gabriel García Márquez said, we Claretian missionaries will always keep alive the memory of our venerable brother. Remembrance is a way of clinging to two realities: to the people we cherish the most and to what we are and do not want to lose. We do not recognise the true value of both until they become an enduring memory. Someone said of Fr Clotet that he was one of those saints that

¹⁶ Propósitos de los Ejercicios de la Semana Santa de 1877, in JUAN MARÍA LOZANO, o.c., p. 267.

¹⁷ MARIANO AGUILAR, o.c., p. 171.

God grants to religious Institutes when they are born.¹⁸ He remains so to this day. His intense piety, his will to be faithful to the spirit of the Founder and to the Constitutions, keep him forever in the conscience and the heart of the Congregation beyond the time of life that God granted him. Let us make of his witness an inextinguishable deposit in our memory bank.

His influence was never expressed from the vehemence of command, but from moderate and insistent gentleness. And his greatest fruit was *inner joy*, which does not depend on success, nor on recognition, nor on favourable circumstances, but on the presence of the living God and humble love for his brothers. It is a joy that no one can take away because it is born of knowing God and necessarily leads to making him known to others. We are missionaries to the extent that we experience “*the sweet and comforting joy of evangelising*” (EG 10) which allows us to have certainty and to transmit it to all: the good news that the human heart is made for joy.

Clotet’s witness of being rooted in Christ and audacious in his mission invites us to review our own concept of prudence. It is a fact that all the saints have been considered excessive, very imprudent in the eyes of this world. Clotet was. He shows us by his life that when a missionary finds himself inhabited and loved by God, he necessarily feels the urgency to announce the Gospel to all, especially to those on the peripheries.

The memory of Fr Clotet’s missionary holiness should not remain limited to the memory of his brothers in the Congregation; he is a passionate witness to the following of Jesus as a missionary and his light is called to illuminate the life of the whole Church. As early as 1923, the Congregation began the diocesan process in Vic with a view to his possible beatification, and in 1964, his cause was introduced in Rome. In 1989, Pope John Paul II decreed his heroic virtues and declared him Venerable. According to the Church’s current practice, only one miracle is needed for his cause to continue and for him to be recognised as Blessed. It is only right that we, his brothers, grateful for his testimony, make him known and promote among us and among the faithful the fervent prayer that God, through the intercession of the Venerable Fr Clotet, may work a miracle. We hope to count him soon among the Blessed, officially recognised by the Church so that his testimony may shine for the greater glory of God.

I wish you a happy closing of the “Year of Clotet”. Perhaps this closure for some of you may be the beginning of a journey of deepening our knowledge of Fr Clotet. I ask the Lord that his memory may stimulate us to continue walking as missionaries who radiate the aroma of the joy of the Gospel wherever they go.

Cordially

Rome, 22 January 2023
Word of God Sunday

Mathew Vattamattam, CMF
Superior General

¹⁸ Cf. *Summarium*, p. 18; in JUAN MARÍA LOZANO, o.c., p. 215.



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SONS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

SUPERIOR GENERAL