



Prot. PS 160/2023

ANNOUNCEMENT LETTER OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL ON THE 175th ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE CONGREGATION

“Rekindle the charism of God that is within you” (2 Tim 1:6)

Dear brothers,

At the threshold of the 175th anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation, allow me to begin this announcement with a grateful heart to God for the gift of our charism in the Church given by the Holy Spirit through our beloved Founder, St. Anthony Mary Claret. In these 175 years, the Lord has given the same spirit to numerous missionaries to become part of God’s Dream for the Congregation implanted in the heart of Claret. We are in the Congregation because we have received the same spirit that formed the apostolic missionary dynamism of our Founder as manifested in his *Autobiography* and encapsulated in the *Definition of the missionary* (cf. Aut 494).

A time to revive the original spirit and respond to the calls of God in our times.

Jubilee is a time of grace. It invites us to take a closer look at how we are living out our charism in fidelity to the original spirit according to the signs of our time. Our Congregational history is one of an ongoing journey adapting to the changes in the world and listening to the callings of God. What we are today is the fruit of God’s amazing grace, the faithful witness of our brothers in times past, the ever-present spirit of our Founder, and the ardent prayers of so many dear people. With grateful hearts, let us “re-member” ourselves to the heavenly community of so many exemplary brothers who gave their best and left a legacy for us to treasure and carry forward. With courage let us assume the responsibility to keep alive the same spirit of the Founder that we too have received and give audacious missionary presence wherever we are in our mission. Jubilee is a propitious time to rekindle the fire of our charism in our hearts and in our communities and keep alive the “first love” (cf. Rev 2:4) that beckoned us to follow the Lord in the style of St. Claret. Let me share with you some insights to meaningfully celebrate this jubilee year.

Sons of the Heart of Mary

Our Founder wanted his missionaries to be called sons of the Heart of Mary and ministers with an apostolic readiness, “an arrow poised in her mighty hand” (cf. Aut 270) to be released against the ploys of evil. He saw the Congregation itself as founded by Mary who forms her sons in the forge of her heart and sends them on a mission, and they would be the seven thunders of apocalypse raising their voice (cf. Aut 686). We are called and are sons of the Heart of Mary (cf. CC 8). It signifies a deep identity that affects our being and behaving and transforms every aspect of our lives. We are not servants, devotees, or fans of Mary, but rather sons in her Son as we grow in our conformity with Jesus. The more our missionary identity is rooted in this sonship, the deeper our fraternity’. As we are sons of the same Mother, we are truly brothers to one another.

When we are sons of the Heart of Mary, we naturally behave like her Son with a heart docile to the movements of the Spirit. Forged in the heart of Mary, we acquire the qualities of listening to God’s Word, discernment, perseverance amid trials, and the virtues necessary for a missionary (Aut 340-453). We can identify easily with what Pope Francis wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* “evangelizers with Spirit”, who are aflame with the fire of the Spirit and of the mission¹. I have observed the fruits of this dimension of our charism in different parts of the world. I see it in the apostolic zeal of our brothers who are closer to the people in their struggles with the consolation of the Gospel message and in the warmth of fraternal life in communities. If we lose the sense of being sons of the Heart of Mary, we become like salt which has no saltiness in it (cf. Mt 5:13). In this Jubilee year let us grow deeper in our identity as sons of the Heart of Mary and learn from her the art of following her son.

Men on fire with God’s love

The inner experience of our Founder is best expressed in the biblical image of fire as an indication of God’s presence. It is to be noted that despite living amidst many wars in Spain from his childhood, our Founder did not choose combat images to express a missionary’s identity. He profusely used the image of “being on fire with love” to speak about the vocation and mission of himself and his missionaries².

In keeping with the biblical tradition

The theme of fire in the biblical accounts expresses God’s presence and allusion to the temple, God’s dwelling place. Moses encountered God at the burning bush and the place was marked as a holy ground (Ex. 3). Mount Sinai -where God spoke to Moses- was covered with smoke because the Lord descended in fire and the smoke billowed up as from a furnace (Ex 19:18-19). When the tabernacle was built, the glory of God dwelt in it. God showed up in a column of fire above it and marked it

¹ cf. EG 259, 261, 268-274; *Missionarii Sumus* 39

² cf. Aut 342, 439, 441, 446.

as God's dwelling place among His People (cf. Ex 40:34-38). Jeremiah speaks of the word of God as fire in his heart (Jer 20: 9). The two disciples on the way to Emmaus felt their hearts burning when Jesus opened the scriptures for them (Lk 24:32). Luke cites John the Baptist referring to Jesus as the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 3:16) which he narrates in the book of Acts as having taken place in the event of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).

The foundation room in Vic was the cenacle where the germinal community gathered under the portrait of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. They were men on fire with God's love. Claret referred to the Pentecost scene to allude to the fire of charity that impelled the missionaries saying, "The same Holy Spirit, by appearing in the form of tongues of fire above the Apostles on Pentecost, showed us this truth quite clearly: an apostolic missionary must have both heart and tongue ablaze with charity" (Aut 440). It is not surprising that an eyewitness of the nascent community of the Founder in Vic recalled years later thus: "It seemed as if those missionaries were coming out of the Cenacle; I saw it; it was an image of Pentecost"³. How confirming it would be for us if people who know us closely say the same about our communities today!

What does it mean to be on fire with God's Love?

In his Autobiography, Claret concludes the narration of the foundation of the Congregation with the definition of the missionary (Aut 494) which he wanted all the missionaries to carry with them. This is both a self-definition of our Founder himself and the charismatic portrait of committed Claretians all over the world. Every missionary is a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit when he is on fire with God's love and spreads its flames wherever he goes. Each Claretian then would be a living temple, a meeting place for an encounter with the mystery of God. The eucharistic miracle in the life of Claret transformed him into a living tabernacle internally strengthening him to face the most difficult trials of his life and externally radiating God's love and forgiveness even to those who persecuted him. The challenge for us today is to keep our hearts on fire with God's love and make our interior a warm heart in the cold winter of spiritual apathy and burn as a flame of hope by our way of being and ministering in the Church.

The definition does not delude us with false promises but assures us of the gifts of the Spirit in the life of a missionary. They are the gifts of delight in privations, enthusiasm for work, readiness for sacrifices, consolation in slander, spiritual joy in suffering, and glory in the cross of Christ. I am sure, you will have personally experienced them at various moments in your life. We are not masochists seeking pain and suffering. Our source of joy amidst suffering comes from the gaze we have on the life and mission of Christ. That is why a missionary is concerned about how

³ cf. Cristóbal Fernández, *Compendio histórico de la Congregación*, Vol. I, 62-63.

to follow Christ and imitate him in praying, working, and suffering solely for God's glory and humankind's salvation. In this jubilee year, we shall strive to vividly live the definition of a missionary in our life and mission in the different cultural, geographical, and socio-political contexts where we are present.

The apostolic prayer

The ensuing prayer that flows from a heart on fire with God's love is the apostolic prayer. The sole focus of this prayer of Claret is the very concern of Jesus that His Father be known, loved and praised above all beings. We may say that it is Claret's version of "Shema Israel" (Dt 6:4-6) and the commandment of Jesus (Mt 22:37). This prayer unplugs us from our earthly concerns and connects us to what truly matters in life. Let us render the apostolic prayer of Claret to vibrate constantly in our very being. Let us join our Founder in resonating that prayer in our hearts:
"O my God and my Father, may I know you and make you known; love you and make you loved; serve you and make you served; praise you and make all creatures praise you. Grant, my Father, that all sinners be converted, all the just persevere in grace, and all of us attain to eternal glory. Amen" (Aut. 233)

The priorities of the Jubilee year

In the jubilee year, the primary concern is to revive the spirit of our founder in the life of each of us and our communities to become creative evangelizers in our times. Our Founder and the first community are our models. It is an opportune time to cultivate a deeper understanding and living of the definition of Claret, the apostolic prayer, and our Constitutions. The General Government has constituted a commission to animate a program for the Jubilee year. One of the important events would be the Spirituality Congress to be held in Vic. Here is an outline of the program prepared by that commission for the Jubilee year at the level of the General Government.

The programs of the Jubilee year

31 May 2023	Announcement letter of the Superior General
June-July 2023	Composition and distribution of the Jubilee song Distribution of the Jubilee prayer
1 July 2023 16 July 2023	Inaugural mass of Jubilee in General Curia - shared online Opening of Jubilee at the level of Major Organisms
September 2023	Short video on the definition of Claret An updated version of Fusimaña apps in Spanish and English

October-December 2023	Short videos on the history of the Congregation in different phases
January 2024	Short videos on the mission of the Congregation
May-June 2024	Publication and distribution of books: Claretian Missionaries Vol III (written by Gustavo Alonso) Reflections on The Definition of Claretian, and The Apostolic Prayer (prepared by the Province of Santiago)
	Various programs at the initiative of Major Organisms and communities
7-15 July 2024	Spirituality Congress at Vic
15 July 2024	Vigil Service
16 July 2024	Jubilee Conclusion

We welcome the Jubilee year as a time of grace and growth for the Congregation in her charismatic spirit and apostolic vitality. This is also an opportune moment for us to walk forth on the synodal path situating our journey within that of the Universal Church. Let us also benefit from the forthcoming ecclesial events of World Youth Day and the Synod on Synodality. We shall honor our Founder through our rootedness in Christ and audacity in our missionary commitment in the Church and the world. Together let us step into the 175th year of the Foundation of our Congregation with our hearts open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit who set our hearts on fire with God's love.

Fraternally,



Fr. Mathew Vattamattam, CMF
Superior General

31st of May 2023

