

**LIKE CLARET
WEAVERS OF THE KINGDOM**

**200 ANNIVERSARY
OF HIS BIRTH
1807-2007**

**MISSIONARY DIMENSION
OF THE CHARISM**

**CLARETIAN MISSIONARY SISTERS
2008**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PRESENTATION

I - IN SEARCH OF THE WILL OF GOD

1. Childhood
2. Youth
3. Young priest

II – CALLED TO “WORK WITH OTHERS”

1. Foundation of the Claretian Missionaries
2. The community of the Archbishop
3. The Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Virgin Mary
4. In communion with others

III – APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY FOR EVER

1. An apostolic man
2. Characteristics of the Claretian mission

INTRODUCTION

This booklet that we present to you is part of the program we have made for the Bicentennial of the birth of St. Anthony Mary Claret. The goal is to help us to reflect more deeply in what was the essence of his personality: APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY

Soledad explained this very well in her letter at the beginning of the jubilee year.

*Let us dedicate this jubilee year, to reflect, and to encounter in a new and more deep way the **apostolic missionary dimension of our charism**. Let us receive from our Founders the **"threads"** of the "urgency of love, of the zeal for the wellbeing of our brothers and sisters, the obedient availability for the mission, his giving up of himself and sacrifice" to continue **weaving the Kingdom**.*

***To read again today the life of Claret**, his works and writings, deepening in the apostolic and missionary dimensions, will help us to find the motives, the source and the sense of his intense mission and apostolic zeal.*

***To see also how this apostolic dimension has remained present in our history** and, overall, to find the energy for a renewed commitment to our apostolic mission today.*

***Let us recall the memories of our life. The voice, the call** which urged us to surrender ourselves, which made possible for us to leave everything behind, "to leave our home and our country" to go where "I will show you", continues to call us every morning. With the gift of life, God renews to us his invitation to follow him...*

The pages which follow are based on some of the paragraphs of the autobiography of Claret and, in their simplicity, they want to help us in our process of reflection – discernment which leads us to renew our missionary vocation, and to find personal and community answers more in tune with the challenges of our world.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

Once more, during this Claretian Jubilee Year, with this booklet, we try to put ourselves in communion and to renew our sense of belonging.

The content of this booklet is the central theme of the reflection of this year. The booklet is divided in three parts, at the end of each one of the parts there are some questions which will help us to reflect and to apply in our lives and in our communities, the missionary dimension of the charism.

Each Governance studies and adapts it to its own needs, according to the reality of its own society, culture, church and institute.

Suggesting the most appropriate method. Proposing other biblical, charismatic and ecclesial texts that could be helpful for this study. We wish that these materials help in a holistic way, not only theoretically but leading to real and concrete personal and community commitments.

We may also share these materials with the lay persons who work with us, maybe changing some of the questions. In order for this process to be helpful, it is necessary to plan the different meetings according to the needs of each Organism, taking into consideration the life and mission of each community (meetings, retreats, annual retreats, assemblies, encounters...).

As any other project and program, this one, will have the "life" that we want it to have, each one of us has to revitalize it with our personal commitment.

Prayer

We consider of the greatest importance, that besides the personal reading and reflection, the sharing in community, we may have a quiet time for prayer. These prayerful moments are transcendental and have to be prepared very carefully.



I – IN SEARCH OF THE WILL OF GOD

1. Childhood

The first ideas I can remember date back to when I was five years old. When I went to bed, instead of sleeping –I never have been much of a sleeper- I used to think about eternity. I would think "forever, forever, forever." I would try to imagine enormous distances and pile still more distances on these and realize that they would never come to an end. Then I would shudder and ask myself if those who were so unhappy as to go to an eternity of pain would ever see an end to their suffering. Would they have to go on suffering? Yes forever and forever they will have to bear their pain. (8)

The theme of this jubilee year is: "Born to proclaim the gospel". It would seem that the boy Claret had been born with a missionary soul. What is true is that Claret came into this world with a great deal of natural gifts: good theoretical and practical intelligence, imagination, creativity, strong will and intense emotions which give to Claret a rich sensitivity.

He finds at home the best conditions for the seed of vocation to develop. His parents are faithful believers who transmit to their children by word and example, the faith which gives meaning to their lives. They pray frequently, they participate together at the Eucharistic celebration, they read religious books, and they dedicate their whole life to their family and their work. They relate with justice and love with the employees of the family business and they do not allow that any beggar leave their home with empty hands.

Besides that the social environment is permeated with religiosity, since the Church is still part of the life of the Government. The little boy Antonio becomes very soon familiar with writing and reading thanks to the help of a very pious teacher called Antoni Pascual. With him he learns the catechism by heart. The pastor widens his

religious knowledge and helps him also to grow in virtue, completing in this way the formation cycle of the family and school.

Thus his sensitive soul opens up to the personal friendship with Christ, which he cultivates most of all in the sacrament of the Eucharist. He nurtures his affectivity with a deep love for Mary, with the frequent recitation of the rosary. The Holy Spirit opens his ears to listen to God.

His "*tender and compassionate*" heart leads him to love the elderly in a practical way:

I could stand for anyone to make fun of them [...] when I was seated in church and an old man would come in, I would stand up gladly and give him a seat. I would always greet old people on the street and if I had the pleasure of talking with one of them, I enjoyed it immensely. (20)

When he was 7 years old he already wanted to be a priest. Once he had finished the elementary school he took one year of Latin, but when his teacher died his father put him to work in the family workshop. Here he learns the art of making cloth and also the way to treat the workers with kindness.

Remembering these years of his childhood and adolescence he says of himself:

All my joy was to work, pray, read and think about Jesus and Mary... I was always content, happy and at peace with everyone. (50)

2. Youth

Before his 18th birthday, he moved to Barcelona to improve his knowledge about manufacturing.

Besides design I studied Castilian and, later, French grammar, but always with an eye to their usefulness in business and manufacturing. (57)

Anthony lived with passion this time of his life: he worked without ceasing, he analyzed different samples, created new ones, he filled his mind with machines and he was walking away from that first call to the priesthood.

My life at this time was an embodiment of what the Gospel says about the thorns chocking the good grain. My ceaseless preoccupation with machines looms and creations had so obsessed me that I could think of nothing else. (65)

During the first three years in Barcelona, the fervor that I had at home began to cool [...] My only goal and all my anxieties were about manufacturing. I can't overstate it- my obsession approached delirium. (66)

Nevertheless he continued to participate in the Mass the days of obligation and he tried to take from his mind these distractions which did not allow him either to think about what he was doing or to pray. It is in this situation when he remembers the words of the Gospel. Words that will give him again the right orientation: **¿What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life?** (Mt 16:26)

These words make a profound impression in him and shed light, from the regained faith, on some of the events which had put in danger his life and his spirit: the experience of being taken away from the shore at the beach, the passion of a woman and the fraud of a friend.

He understood that God was calling him to another kind of life. Not knowing what to do, he went to St Philip Neri House for advise. There they orientated him on the way of piety and study of Latin.

3. Young Priest

Disillusioned of the world and with the new converted zeal, he decides to become a Carthusian monk. But this was not his road either... different situations make him understand that this decision

is not the right one. We see him again as a Seminarian at Vic, committed to sanctify his soul and trying to imagine "*what should he do and how, to save the souls of his neighbors*" (113). He got his inspiration from the lives of the saints but most of all it was the Word of God that nourished his spirit and put his heart on fire. In a very special way the words of the prophet Isaiah quoted in the gospel of Luke (4,18) "***The Spirit of the Lord is on me, for he has anointed me, to bring the good news to the poor..., freedom to the oppressed.***"

Due to his age and also because the Bishop wanted to give him the church of Sallent, he received before the normal time the different minor orders and was ordained on June 13, 1835.

Due to the political situation he could not continue his classes at the seminary and he completed them privately in Sallent, where he was sent as assistant pastor.

He remained there for four years serving his people, two years as assistant pastor, the other two as pastor. He led a very strict life of prayer and penance. He celebrated the Eucharist very early every morning and afterwards he would seat at the confessional until there would not be anyone else to confess. He worked as much as he could: he preached, taught the catechism, visited the sick, and very frequently he would visit the homes of those in the country-side and he was always at the service of all without distinction.

Everyone loved him, because, besides his untiring self-giving, he was considered a man of miracles due to some extraordinary deeds and cures that he had done. But he felt called to proclaim the gospel without boundaries and he felt that the parish was too limited for his zeal. When he completed his theological studies in 1839, he explained clearly to his bishop his vocation as an apostolic missionary.

In many passages of the Bible I felt the voice of God calling me to go forth and preach. The same thing happened to me when I was praying. Thus it was that I determined to leave the parish, and go to Rome, to present myself to the Congregation for the

Propagation of the Faith so that they could send me anywhere in the world. (120)

After many difficulties he gets the permit to go to France. He goes walking to Marseille in order to board on the boat "Tancrede" which will take him to Rome. He arrives to the Eternal City the day of the Rosary of the year 1839.

The Cardinal Prefect of Propaganda Fide was out of town, so Claret decided, while he was waiting, to do the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius under the guidance of a Jesuit. This priest encourages him to enter the Company to be able to fulfill his dreams to go to foreign missions. He enters and he is immediately accepted into the novitiate in Saint Andrew of Montecavallo, near the Quirinal.

He makes any effort to live according to the practices of the novitiate and to be faithful to the constitutions of the Company. *He learned how to give the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius and methods for preaching, catechizing, hearing confessions usefully and effectively (152)* but what continued to fill his soul was the desire to dedicate himself to preach the gospel.

...The flame of zeal for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls took fire in my heart and totally consumed me. (153)

He was very happy in the novitiate (165) but this was not his place either. On February 29, 1840 he left the Company due to health reasons. The Superior General had told him some days earlier *"It is God's will that you go quickly, quickly to Spain. Have no fear. Courage!" (166)*

He is again in Catalogne, his superiors assigned him to the parish of Viladrau. Since there were already two other priests –an older pastor and an assistant pastor- he had more time to begin his missionary activity and thus we see him giving missions, in towns and farms, preaching, hearing confessions and supplementing the lack of doctors by means of natural and spiritual medicines.

In mid-January 1841, after eight months as regent in Viladrau, where I had been ministering to the parish... I finally left it for good, so as to be permanently free to preach wherever the might sent me, without any fixed residence. My address during the few days I stayed there, was at Vic. From this city I would set out with a list of the towns I had to preach in. (193)

On July 9 of the same year he received from the Holy See the title of APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY.

From Vic he would go to preach to the cities and towns. He walked many hours through mountains and valleys, in good and bad weather, suffering hunger and thirst, in danger from bandits y the midst of persecutions, caused by the liberal laws of the time.

He was scared of nothing. He would always go sent by his bishop and driven by the fire of the love of God in his heart which did not allow him to be silent.

... My aim is to make God better known, loved, and served by everyone. (202) Another of my aims is to prevent all the sins and offenses that are being committed against God... (203) I am also driven to preach without ceasing by the sight of the throngs of souls who are falling in hell. (205) Charity urges and impels me; it makes me run from town to town shouting... (212)

He was requested by many pastors and many people would come to listen to his sermons, producing many good results of conversions. For this reason, the enemies of the Church were looking for ways to discredit him and thus had recourse to calumnies accusing him to be against the government. In spite of this, he was never arrested and he could go around most of Catalogne until the year 1847.

Since the political conditions of Catalogne did not allow him to dedicate himself to preaching as he wanted, he accepted the proposal of the Sisters of Charity to go to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, with the newly nominated bishop Codina with the only

condition that his bishop Casadevall had to sent him. He stayed in the Canary Islands from February 1848 to May 1849.

He developed an intense apostolic ministry by means of the popular missions; he preached many sermons, heard confessions during unending hours, prepared a new reduced edition of the catechism, conducted Spiritual Exercises for the Clergy and did some extraordinary things which caused admiration among the people. He was followed everywhere by large number of people, mainly among the simple people, with much fruit. They called him Padrito, he is still known by this name in the Canary Islands.

We can say that since 1841, Claret had found the essence of his vocation and the concrete way to accomplish it. To be an itinerant missionary, preaching and hearing confessions... To proclaim the gospel by all means available, especially through the spoken and written word. Always in obedience to his bishop, being sent by him.

He was the APOSTOLIC MAN which María Antonia París had known through revelation in her convent of Tarragona.

One night while praying and in bitter tears, pleading to our Lord that by the merits of his passion and death to have mercy on the necessities of his Church, which at that time were many, our Lord told me pointing at Mosen Claret as if I saw him between our Lord and me:

"This, my daughter, is the apostolic person whom you have asked me for so many years and with so much tears". His Divine Majesty showed me the graces he poured on that holy soul for the preaching of the gospel...(Aut . 19)

FOR REFLECTING AND SHARING

1. What part of the vocational itinerary of Claret calls the most your attention? In what part do you feel yourself more identify with him?
2. Remember with gratitude the moment in which you felt called to follow the Lord Jesus as a Claretian. What motivated you to be part of a missionary congregation? Through what paths has the Spirit led you through the years?
3. How do you live your call at the present moment, in your concrete ministry? Who fills your heart and mind? Do you feel yourself happy and in love with the Lord?
4. As we read this part of the life of Claret to what is the Lord calling us?
5. How can we help each other in keeping alive the missionary availability and the fire of love which impels us to proclaim the gospel?



II – CALLED TO WORK WITH OTHERS

1. Friends in mission

During the time of his itinerant apostolate in Catalogne and the Canary Islands, Mossen Claret had always a great interest in directing the Spiritual Exercises to the priests, since he was convinced that if the priests would be converted and lived better their vocation, that would be good for the sanctification of the people.

During the years as an Apostolic Missionary in Catalogne he looked for those who would better understand the ministry according to his way. He proposed them to be his companions in the apostolic mission. With those who were more convinced he wanted to form a fraternity of companions dedicated to preaching. Before traveling to the Canary Islands he had been thinking about some kind of structure for this fraternity.

His friend the priest José Caixal had intended to persuade him not to make this trip, because he was very much interested that Claret continued to form the Apostolic fraternity (Letter January 2, 1848). It is even possible that he had communicated to him the inside that the novice Ma. Antonia Paris, whose confessor he was, had received during her prayer:

... I told him that the will of God was Msgr Claret to gather other companions to live simply and plainly in community. (Aut. M. Paris 241)

Now, after his return from the Canary Islands and being Catalogne in peace, the moment had come to give a more serious thought to this project, which more and more he considered to be of divine inspiration.

In his discernment he thinks that this is the moment for the foundation, and when he realizes that something is the will of God, he does whatever it takes to make it happen. He talks with the Bishop, gets in touch with the priests who had cooperated with him and he looks for a building.

While the bishop was in the process of putting the monastery (Our Lady of Mercy) in order, I talked with a number of priests whom the Lord had given the same spirit that motivated me. These were Fathers: Stephen Sala, Joseph Xifre, Dominic Fábregas, Manuel Vilaró and Jaime Clotet. I, Anthony Claret, was last of all... (489)

Thus, two month after his return to the peninsula, the foundation of the Congregation: Missionaries Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, took place on July 16, 1849.

... Gathered together in the seminary with the approval of the bishop and the rector, we commenced our own Spiritual Exercises, which we followed with all exactness and fervor, [...] We left those Exercises full of fervor, bound and determined to persevere... (490) Thus we had begun and thus we continued living together strictly in community. (491)

On the first days of August Claret says to Caixal: *"...we are seven and we apply ourselves to practice all the virtues, especially humility and charity. We live in community in this college a life of poverty and mission."*

For the moment, the new-born Congregation was only an association of priests dedicated to missionary preaching, without having any legal bond of belonging; but from the beginning they had a very demanding and organized community life, orientated completely to the mission.

The missionaries will remain at home from May to September and they went on preaching missions from October to Easter o May (Juan Manuel Lozano. "A life at the Service of the Gospel". Pg. 198)

2. The community of the Archbishop

As we already know, in this occasion too, the Lord did not allow him to continue the Projects he had planned for himself: to dedicate his efforts to the new Congregation and to the Religious Library. On August 11 he receives the Royal Nomination as Archbishop of Santiago of Cuba (491) and, in spite of his first normal negative reaction, he has to accept the nomination. His Episcopal consecration took place on October 6, 1850.

When we read his autobiography we realize how difficult was this new responsibility for Claret. Not only in view of the future difficulties, but most of all for what he was leaving behind. Would he stop being an apostolic missionary and to have a life in community? We see that this was not the case, he will accomplish all of this in another way, as soon as his new condition of life allows him.

He chooses a good group of coworkers to help him in the evangelization and leadership of the Archdiocese, but also to be able to share with them his prayer life, his possessions and the practice of all the virtues.

Let him tell us how they lived all of this even during their trip to Cuba.

My group got up every day on schedule, washed and made a half-hour meditation together [...] After meditation I celebrated Mass in our quarters, where an altar had been set up. (506)

In the next paragraph we find a detailed program for the day, prayers, formation lectures and personal studies.

The situation that the Archbishop encountered when he arrived at Santiago of Cuba was devastating, not only on the political and social areas, but also in the church.

D. Jerónimo Mariano Usera Alarcón, who was the Apostolic Governor since 1849, described it in the following way:

"The situation of the Church ... is pitiful. Having been without a prelate and shepherd during twelve years..., the churches' buildings are in bad shape; the priests reduced to extreme poverty, the Seminary College, which is the only public educational establishment of the province, deserted and almost closed due to the last plan of studies [...] It is of the most urgent need that the Government look with compassion towards the situation of the clergy in Cuba."

The missionary Claret was arriving to this reality, being now also the Shepherd of a large and difficult local Church. And as usual, he begins to solve the problems by organizing his group of co-workers (his family), to ensure the good care of the Archdiocese, the formation of the seminarians and priests and the evangelization of the faithful.

Other priests will join him in Santiago, some of them secularized from their Religious Orders by the civil laws of the Government of Spain. All of them will be the **family of the Archbishop** and will form with him a true fraternal community to devote themselves to the service of the Archdiocese. Claret writes with details about it in chapter X of his autobiography, he says:

"... our house was like a beehive, with everyone coming and going at my request, and all of them quite content and happy. Outsiders were always amazed at the sight of it and praised God for it."(608)

"I often wondered how it was possible for so much peace, joy and harmony to reign for so long a time among such a large group. [...] This is a singular grace God has given us in his infinite mercy and kindness. I knew that God was blessing the efforts we were putting forth when He gave us such a special grace." (609)

Although they had a very monastic schedule, they were a community extremely missionary and opened, where the values of

co-responsibility, subsidiarity, team work and welcoming were present.

3. The Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy

Among the great needs that he discovered was the education of women, especially the girls in need. In his letter of 1851 to the Queen he said:

" And it is urgent that the government try to entrust, at least, the elementary education to some religious congregation. With this many ills could be avoided. "...

With this perspective Claret understands that it was the moment to open the doors of his diocese to María Antonia París and her four companions. They had been waiting in Tarragona to receive some help from him to begin the New Order of Apostles.

I received this letter as an express call of God. Since, His divine Majesty had assured me that this holy man would give me a hand to found the first house of the Order, I did not harbor the least doubt that this New World was the place where God our Lord had determined to start His Work. (Aut.M.Paris 127).

They will answer without hesitation, and will arrive at Cuba on May 26, 1852, after a long and dangerous voyage. By that time the Archbishop was doing his first pastoral visitation.

In the petition for the foundation presented by the sisters to the Archbishop they say:

"We preferred to come to this Great Antille which is in great need of the spiritual assistance of religious education, being part in some way of the holy Mission that brought Your Excellency. to these shores... we faced all the difficulties and abandoned everything for the love of Jesus Christ, in search of a greater perfection and to dedicate ourselves to his holy service where the spiritual needs would be greater..." Santiago, September 24, 1852.

After reflecting, consulting the Cathedral Charter and the priests of the diocese the Archbishop presents the petition for the foundation to the Captain General of the Island on December 10, 1852, with these words:

"I am sending to you with great satisfaction the application for the canonical and legal establishment in this City of the Religious Institute of the Society of Mary (known as) Teaching Sisters, which has been presented by four novices of the convent of Tarragona, who filled with charity and zeal have abandoned their country and convent to come to serve where the needs are more urgent, and I am pleased to be able to announce to you that I can recommend them to you since they have the virtues that make them commendable ..."

The cloister was established officially on June 7 1853 and the 15th of the same month the classes began.

This is how, moved by apostolic reasons, the Archbishop will be doing whatever it takes to make real the foundation of the new Institute which he will call: "Apostolic Institute of the Immaculate Conception of Mary Most Holy" which is now called **Religious of Mary Immaculate Claretian Missionary Sisters**. The legal difficulties of that time are the cause that the canonical foundation could not be done until August 25, 1855. Claret mentions it briefly in his autobiography:

I established a convent of nuns dedicated to teaching girls, and I bought them a house that cost me about 12,000 duros. (561)

The sisters earned their bread with their work, by means of the religious education of girls and young women in greater need and the washing and ironing of the vestments for the worship. In community they lived with the greatest perfection possible the evangelical vows, in a very especial way the poverty. Joy and unity prevailed among them.

Let us see how Claret mentions that in a letter to Caixal dated December 23, 185: "*The sisters are well and they are very much loved...; all of them are in good health, happy and joyful.*"

When Claret returns to the Peninsula as confessor of Queen Elizabeth II, he will do the necessary steps for the foundation of the second house of the Institute, as a house of formation of the new sisters, precisely in the diocese of Bishop Jose Caixal.

4. In Communion with other Men and Women

The needs of that society are many and many hands are needed for the task. Thus he does not hesitate to ask for help from the peninsula, inviting other men and women to join him in the project of evangelization: more priests who would have a truly missionary spirit and religious congregations that could take care of the education and of the works of mercy. Little by little they will be arriving, the Piarists, Jesuits, Priests of St Vincent de Paul, and latter on the Daughters of Charity.

He also seeks for the help of the laity, which he considers of great importance for the task of evangelization. Anthony Mary Claret had begun to work with the laity during his itinerant missions through Catalogne, by the establishment of the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament and the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the conversion of sinners. J.M. Lozano says in his book "A Life at the service of the Gospel" pg. 141: "*Twenty thousand persons registered in this group and from there it spread throughout the entire diocese.*"

It is an institution according to the spirituality of that time, whose main goal was the spiritual wellbeing of the members. Very far from what we understand today as collaborative ministry.

He collaborated also in making known the Confraternity of the apostolate of prayer, which Fr. Palotti had established in Rome on 1846. Claret modified it according to the Claretian spirituality.

He wrote a booklet explaining the goals of an institution which he called "Fraternity of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary and lovers of humanity" but he had to withdraw it because the Bishop of Tarragona did not accept it:

"I have received your letter in which you tell me in the name his Excellency that I have to withdraw the booklet of the Fraternity which speaks of the deaconesses, which I have done as I have been told, because God forbids me to do anything against the will of the Bishops of the Church..." (Epistolary of Claret, volume I, pg. 260)

It seems that it was not yet the time to give to women some apostolate, although Jesus had entrusted, many centuries earlier, to Mary Magdalene and the other women the proclamation of his presence as Lord and Messiah.

Some years before he had conceived also the idea that some women, who had difficulties in living the religious life, as it was lived and allowed by that time, could make private vows and continue to live in their homes. He shared this idea with Caixal in a letter dated August 18, 1847 and again in another letter from the Canary Islands on the next year:

"The booklet on the Daughters of the Heart of Mary, the last one I have written and of which you have the handwritten copy, would also be very useful. They would be a sort of nuns like the Nuns of St Philomena."

The book was published in 1850 with the title Religious Women in their Homes or the Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Those are guidelines and rules that he gives to young women that want to life the religious life in the world...; with the passage of time and after Council Vatican II, the spirit of this association would be clothed with new structures and will give origin to the Secular Institute **Daughters of the Most Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Filiacion Cordimariana.**

During the six years that he was in Cuba, plus establishing many confraternities of the Heart of Mary and prayer groups, he would look for ways to take care of the most urgent needs of the people, inspiring, collaborating or participating in different associations for social assistance:

- *He promoted the foundation of an Association of the Daughters of Mary "with the goal to welcome poor and destitute girls and educate them.*
- *He gave support to the Association of Domiciliary Charity that had been established by a group of Catholic women.*
- *He encouraged the participation of a group of lay persons in the Board of Charity.*
- *As President of the Royal Economic Society he promoted the human development of the people.*
- *He established the Fraternity of the Christian Doctrine for the catechesis, he had founded it in 1851.*
- *He envisioned the laity to establishing savings banks in the parishes.*

While he was recovering from the wounds inflicted on him during the attack in Holguin, he planned and started to write the by-laws of the Academy of St. Michael to fight against evil, from the world of culture. This association, with the appropriate adaptations has become the **Movement of Lay Claretians**.

We see that Claret who began his ministry alone and in obedience to his bishop, is impelled by God to promote, cooperate, think and establish diverse institutions or associations for the sanctification of their members and for a greater efficacy in the mission of evangelization. In his personal life, he lives in community since the foundation of the Claretian Missionaries, as much as his responsibilities allow him; he tries to establish in Madrid a Claretian community while he is the royal confessor and he plans to live with the missionaries during his last years.

It is not what we understand today as life in communion and collaborative ministry, but it is really a life lived in communion without vows and dedicated to "do with others" the mission.

It is our turn here and today, to fully receive and to transform in life the theology of communion and participation proposed by Council Vatican II in the decree on the Church and in other documents issued later which explain it.

Leaving aside ways of living and doing which belong to the past, we may ask some questions over our community life from some essential elements which the sisters that preceded us lived.

FOR REFLECTING AND SHARING

1. Do we live in our communities a life which is truly poor and apostolic?
2. Are happiness and joy present among us?
3. What means do we use to contribute to the union of all, so that the world may believe?
4. Is the way we live our community life a fountain of life and hope for us and for all those who see us more closely?
5. May we say that prayer, Eucharistic Celebration and formation for the mission, nurture our fraternal communion?
6. List some concrete situations in which we can see that the elements mentioned in the previous number are part of our apostolic options, of the analysis of reality, of our being part of our society and of the collaborative ministry.
7. Do we fulfill our ministry from the community and we act always as sent by the community?
8. Do we know how "to work with others" making easy the way for the others or do we tend to be individualistic and act in parallel? How do we try to be part and make others part of the collaborative ministry?

III – APOSTOLIC MISSIONARY FOR EVER

1. An apostolic man

We have seen in parts I and II of the booklet, that Anthony Mary Claret (fit the profile of the apostolic man that Maria Antonia had seen during her prayer: *“I saw or understood, I do not know how to explain it, that our Lord left to the judgment of this holy soul the interests of the Church; as if from him depended to put into practice the Evangelical Law and it seemed to me that his Divine Majesty was telling him, ‘I have given you grace for that’.* (Aut.M.Paris 33)

The truth is that Claret responded to the grace and his life was completely oriented towards imitating and following Jesus in the way the apostles did, although his way had to be adapted to different times, places and responsibilities.



But, what motivated him to do the mission? Was it to give way to his creative and enterprising temperament or so as not to be subjected to the structure of the parish? Was it only the desire to save souls and to give glory to God? There was something deeper. It was the fire of the love of God that did not allow him to rest and that impelled him to proclaim the gospel from town to town, going to the encounter of the people like Jesus on the roads of Palestine.

Love is the source of apostolic creativity and it helps to discover the potentiality of the situations, persons and things. This is the reason that he knows how to find solutions to the most urgent needs, without waiting to have greater plans or unreal utopias, but in the measure of his possibilities; with courage and prudent discernment; with simplicity and effectiveness.

Claret dedicates the whole Chapter XXX of his autobiography to the virtue of love. Let see one of the sentences that describes Claret himself:

... an apostolic missionary must have both heart and tongue ablaze with charity. (440)

This is the reason that he tries by all the means available to look for "*this hidden treasure*" of love. (442) The Holy Spirit produces in his inner being a process of identification with Christ which grows more and more, which allows him to make his own the expression of Paul: "The love of Christ impels me."

He accomplishes in his life a perfect synthesis between contemplation and action, spirituality and mission, and thus he can fully be an apostle: prophetic witness to the Risen Christ. He encounters the Lord every day in the Eucharist and in prayer, from this transforming experience he is able to speak and write, heal and liberate, endure with joy the sufferings, and accepts with patience calumnies, persecutions and exile.

The reading and meditation of the Bible enkindle his heart with the love of neighbor, in a particular way "*the examples of the prophets, of Jesus Christ and of the Apostles.*" Also, the writings the Fathers of the Church and the lives of the saints, especially those who showed a greater zeal for the salvation of souls.

To make progress in his configuration with Christ and to produce more fruit in his mission, he will make a great ascetic effort to acquire the virtues that he considers most necessary for an apostle: humility, poverty, meekness, modesty, mortification, obedience and apostolic charity.

Mary accompanies him with maternal tenderness since his childhood until the end of his life. She fills with joy his heart when he visits the shrine of Fusimaña, she helps him to overcome the temptations, she protects him in dangers and difficulties, she is his model in the fight against evil and in the obedience to the plans of God. In the forge of her Heart he fortifies the steel of his will and

rekindle the fire of love in each new flame. He feels towards her an intense filial love and an extraordinary devotion which he passes on to others.

Mary most holy is my mother, my patroness, my mistress, my directress and my all, after Jesus. (5)

2. Characteristics of the claretian mission

The spirit of Claret is still alive today, not only in those of us who belong to the Claretian Family, but also in many others which feel themselves attracted by the prophetic testimony of his life.

What are the traits of the Claretian mission that we have to incarnate today? From what we have reflected and taking into consideration some writings already existing on this theme, we may point out the following aspects:

PRIMACY OF THE ABSOLUTE OF GOD AND GOD'S KINGDOM

Our spiritual and apostolic journey has always to begin with the experience of God the Father who sends the Son into the world because he loves us. This experience of filiation and fraternity makes us messengers and witnesses to the God News and gives us eyes to discover his presence in the reality of our time.

CENTRALITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

The reference to the Word of God in our Founders was constant. Thus, the Word should be our companion, inspiration and point of reference in our inner journey and in our apostolate. In the written Word we may and must find the Word of God to his people and the word of Jesus to his disciples and to the people in general.

PROPHETIC AND LIBERATOR

It flows from the openness, listening and welcoming of the Word. The prophetic strength comes from the deep contact with the Word of God, read within the social and cultural reality in which we live; it

comes to us from the "events", the "cry of the oppressed", the "prophets present among all the peoples." In this word we discover our identity and the paths through which the Lord wants to lead us.

IN EVANGELICAL POVERTY

The evangelical poverty is essential to the Claretian spirit because it is essential to the Gospel. María. Antonia Paris puts it as the "foundation of the New Apostles" and sees it made reality in the life of Claret "I did not have anything, I did not want anything and I refused everything" (359)

It is a complete trust in the Father, which is only possible from the deep experience of filiation, which leads us to recognize our smallness and to accept the salvation from God. It shows also in a relationship of freedom and detachment from the created world. All of these because God is the center of our life, "O poverty of my God, who could inherit your richness! It requires a critical mind, a preferential attention to the poor and a commitment in the fight for peace and justice

MISSIONARY

What characterizes a missionary is to be sent to fulfill a mission, a message ... Like Jesus the "messenger of the Father", we must make of the Kingdom of God the center of our life and action. We are not called to teach a doctrine, but to witness to our experience of personal transformation and the salvation that the Kingdom of God has brought to us: "and that on the way they teach ... and make easy to others the same way..."

INCULTURATED

The people, their lives, their hopes and struggles, must always be present in our reflection and in the search for the different ways we may express our Claretian missionary charism today. So as to help in the building of a history that is more fraternal and solidary in the people and among the people, according to the heart of God. This must be a concrete expression of our commitment to proclaim the gospel.

MULTIPLIER OF LEADERS AND EVANGELIZERS.

To be able to offer evangelization processes which move other persons to welcome in their own lives the call from the Lord to be witnesses of the Kingdom and heralds of the Good News. This is what we call nowadays "vocational culture".

IN COMMUNION ... FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE CHURCH

We are members of the church community and from it we discover the meaning of the mission. The ecclesial dimension of our evangelization must have a especial strength, inside as well as outside, with other groups, institutions and organizations.

The "shared mission" is a concrete form to live the communion and the ecclesial dimension of the mission. This is typical of the Claretian spirituality.

WITH MARY

"Openness, listening and welcoming". Mary appears in the New Testament in the key moments of Salvation History. She is the woman open to the Word of God that sees reality from the point of view of the project of God, becomes enthusiastic with it and dedicates her life completely to it. The Magnificat should always point toward the utopia of our project to evangelize.

As our patroness we take Mary in the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. Our Congregation, inspired by the Woman clothed with the sun, must commit itself to fight against evil, in all its forms. It is necessary to protect the life of the Son –and of the sons and daughters- from the snares of the dragon (power, richness, pleasure, dominion, consumerism, neoliberal economy, hedonism...) Let us do it with tenderness and closeness, like Mary, the simple woman from Nazareth.

FOR REFLECTING AND SHARING

1. We are called together by the Father in the Spirit in order to follow in the footsteps of Christ our highest good. (c.5) How do we evaluate our configuration with Him, in relationship with the Father and in committing our life to the mission?
2. What place do we give in our personal and community life to the Word, prayer and Eucharistic Celebration? Do we distribute our time in such a way that there is an equilibrium between prayer, work and rest? Does our Eucharistic celebration extend itself in a greater communion with all and solidarity with the excluded from the earth?
3. What means do we use to help up grow in humility, meekness and evangelical poverty? Does the love of Christ impel us to "work until death" for the good of our brothers and sisters?
4. Do our hearts burn within us from love and thanksgiving to God for having called us? How do we live the contradictions and sufferings which flow from the ministry?
5. We rejoice in this Easter season for the triumph of Jesus over death, we have encountered Him, alive and present in our lives and in the center of our community. Are we joyful witnesses to this experience? Does our witnessing move other persons to adhere to the faith and following of Jesus according to our charism?
6. How do we actualize in our community the commitment for peace, justice and integrity of creation?

YOUR PERSONAL NOTES

ROME, MAY 2008