



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE CLARETIAN SUPERIOR GENERAL

To Fr Aquilino Bocos Merino, C.M.F.

Superior General of the Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

1. I am very pleased to address this Message to you for your congregation's 150th anniversary, as you recall that day, 16 July 1849, when St Anthony Mary Claret, with five other young priests, founded your religious family in a humble cell at the seminary of Vich. On this occasion I join in your thanksgiving to the Lord for all the generations of Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who have been witnesses to the faith and faithful co-workers in the evangelizing mission which the divine Redeemer entrusted to his Church.

This year, which the Church has dedicated to God the Father, your founder offers us an eloquent witness of fervent love for God, since his life was consumed with apostolic zeal to make God known, loved and served (cf. *Autobiography*, 233). Love for the Father prompted St Anthony Mary Claret to follow and imitate Jesus Christ always in prayer, work and suffering (ibid., 494), and to open himself to the action of the Holy Spirit, who inspired his mission of evangelizing the poor (ibid., 687).

2. The Second Vatican Council teaches that "the spirit and aims of each founder should be faithfully accepted and retained, as indeed should each institute's sound traditions, for all of these constitute the patrimony of an institute" (*Perfectae caritatis*, n. 2). This time of thanksgiving for which your Congregation is preparing is thus an invitation to turn your gaze to St Anthony Mary Claret. In a society affected by the changes brought by industrialization, he found himself as a missionary, putting the demands of the Gospel before the normal attractions which a comfortable life could offer. His weapon was the Word of God, lived and proclaimed as a message of salvation for everyone. He spread it through the printed word, catechesis and preaching, convinced that consolation for the sorrowful, strength for the weak, health for the sick and forgiveness for sinners could be found in it. With continuous prayer, study and a life of piety, he became an authentic

evangelizer, first in his native Catalonia, then in the Canary Islands and later, as Archbishop, in Cuba and Spain.

For you this experience of a vital relationship with the Word of God must be an authentic patrimony, a unifying inspiration and an inescapable commitment in the various situations of life which you must face today in your mission of evangelization.

3. Unlimited availability for the ministry of the Word, motivated by reasons of urgency, opportunity and effectiveness in the service of the kingdom of God, was a characteristic of St Anthony Mary Claret's missionary style, which you have inherited. Thus, transcending human and geographical borders, you are celebrating this 150th anniversary by your presence on all the continents, where you work in the mission *ad gentes* to inspire the birth of new Christian communities. Not forgetting the so-called "interior mission" of preaching renewal in the ancient Churches, you are furthering your option for the peoples who need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ since, as your founder taught, the apostolic missionary has been given various parts of the world which he must make fruitful, like the five talents (cf. *Avisos a un sacerdote*, Appendix).

As you carry out this work of evangelization, be a leaven of unity and brotherhood, teaching all men and women to regard themselves as children of the same God and Father. This is why it is encouraging to note that the consolidated universality of the congregation has also enriched you with vocations from the most varied parts of the world; this grace increases the joy and gratitude of your jubilee celebration.

4. Moreover, community life is an essential feature of your consecrated life. The Constitutions point out that collaboration in the ministry of the Word belongs to the very origins of your community life (cf. *Constitutions*, n. 13). Fr Claret wanted to do with others what he could not do on his own (cf. *Carta al Nuncio*, 12 August 1849, in *Cartas selectas*, p. 74). This celebration has led you to promote the spirituality of communion and to encourage everyone to work together in transforming the world according to God's plan.

Your vocation is described in the Constitutions as "the gift of following Christ in communion of life and of proclaiming the Gospel to all creation" (n. 4). Throughout their history this has been the hallmark of the sons of Fr Claret, who have shone brightly because of their witness in the Church.

5. St Anthony Mary Claret also knew how to pass on to his sons, as a distinctive sign of his charism, a profound "ecclesial sense", of which he gave clear proof during his ministry as a priest and Bishop in the difficult circumstances of the Church in his time. This deep love for the Church, expressed in full communion with and in diligent obedience to the Bishops, especially the Roman Pontiff, has borne abundant fruit throughout the history of your congregation.

Before the great challenges of evangelization lying ahead, Claretian Missionaries, particularly

those involved in theological research, teaching, catechesis and the communications media are called to live ecclesial communion with loyalty, to adhere with mind and heart to the Church's Magisterium and to bear a witness of *sentire cum Ecclesia*, since filial love for the Church imparts power and forcefulness to their apostolic activity (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 46).

As you know, evangelization in the forthcoming millennium calls for a new discernment of your missionary apostolate, especially in suggesting vocations to young people and in the formation of future generations of Claretians, following the teaching of their founder, for whom holiness and knowledge were both necessary, like the missionary's two feet (cf. *Constitutions of 1865*, 104, 4^o). For this reason it is worth mentioning the effort the congregation is devoting to the continuing formation of its members and to community ways of fostering its own spirituality, based on St Anthony Mary's ascetical and mystical experience, set out principally in his *Autobiography*, the Magna Carta of Claretian spirituality and of your service to God's kingdom in the Church.

6. Mary's presence is one of the features that distinguish your religious identity. From her Immaculate Heart Claret's sons learned her contemplative attitude in accepting the Word, her love and simplicity in transmitting it and her heartfelt devotion to the merciful plan of God, which prompts them to be close to the poor and the needy. This is why Claretian Missionaries must continue to bear the prophetic message of hope which today, in the language of the heart, Mary offers to the human family, so wounded in its deepest values and aspirations.

As the Church prepares to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Incarnation, I would like to entrust your apostolic projects, your missionary labours and the hopes that animate you to the Heart of God's Mother, so that she may grant you the joy of being docile and generous instruments in proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of our time.

7. Trusting in the efficacious intercession of St Anthony Mary Claret, I offer my thanks to the heavenly Father for all the exemplary Claretian Missionaries who, over the past 150 years, have distinguished themselves by their missionary energy, self-denial and zeal at the service of the Church on the five continents. In this regard, I would like to recall in particular the 51 Claretian Martyrs of Barbastro whom I had the joy of beatifying in 1992, all of whom were models of the enthusiastic following of Christ in community life.

I commend the present and future of the entire congregation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that she, a woman docile to the Spirit and a model of deep fidelity to Jesus, may fill you with her motherly love and zeal for souls. At this jubilee celebration, gathered round Mary in prayer, like the Apostles in the Upper Room, may you relive the experience of Pentecost, strengthening your missionary enthusiasm in order to go and preach the Gospel to the ends of the earth. With these heartfelt sentiments and with great affection, I impart my Apostolic Blessing to all the Claretian Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Warsaw, the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, 12 June 1999.

JOHN PAUL II

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