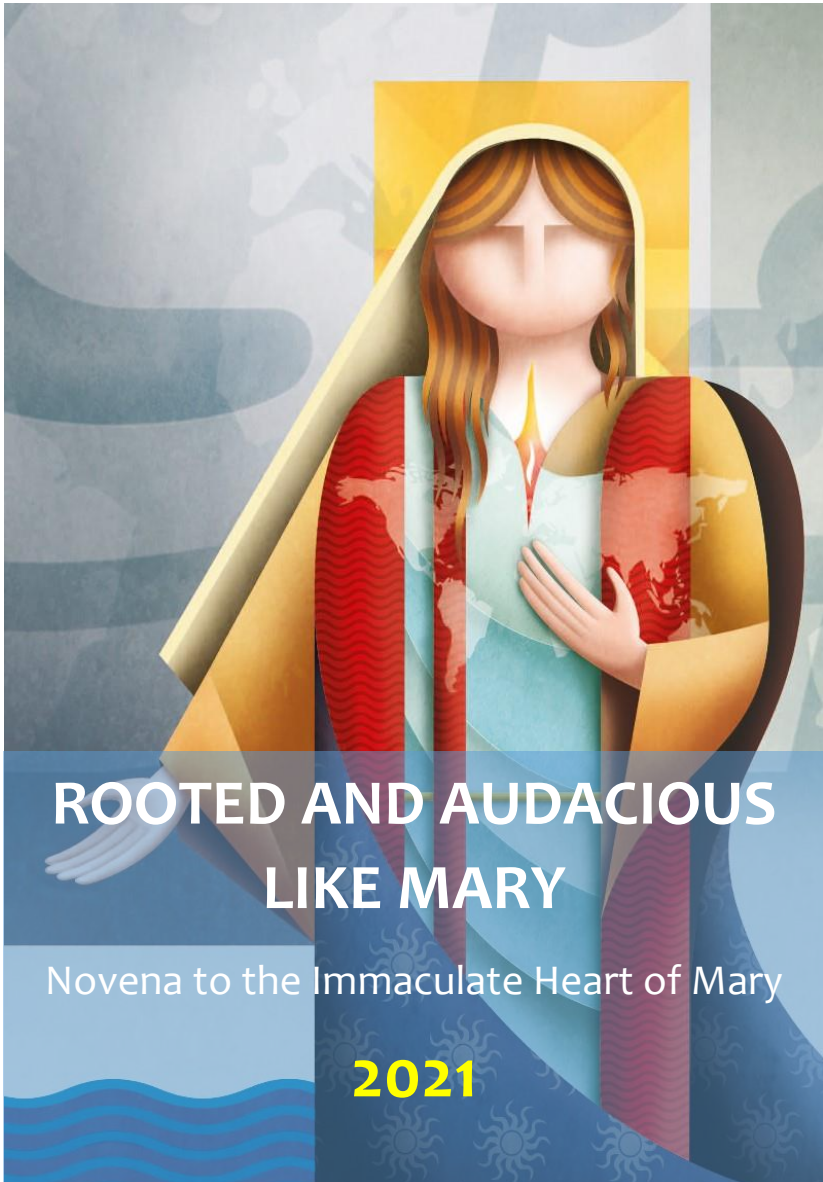


CLARETIAN MISSIONARIES



ROOTED AND AUDACIOUS LIKE MARY

Novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

2021

© Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

General Prefecture of Spirituality

Rome, 2021

Introduction

In 2020 the General Prefecture of Spirituality offered a model novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary within the framework of the *Claretian Year* and taking into account the context of the *Covid 19* pandemic.

This year 2021 we want to prepare ourselves for the Solemnity of the Heart of Mary (June 12) **in harmony with the path that the whole Congregation has followed in preparation for the XXVI General Chapter.** In the reports of the Organisms, the importance of the annual novena to the Heart of Mary in keeping alive the flame of our Cordimarian sonship is underlined.

As already indicated last year, it is recommended, as far as possible, **to make the novena with the people of God** and this year, in a special way, with some of the people who have participated at the local and provincial levels in the preparatory “conversations” for the Chapter. In fact, **this year's novena is also inspired by this “conversational” model.** It applies the *synodal*, *narrative* and *appreciative* principles that we are using in the preparation and realization of the Chapter.

This booklet offers only a **basic outline**, which each community can modify, adapt and enrich according to its characteristics and possibilities. In any case, it would be highly recommended **to keep the brief conversational moment between two or three people.**

The title of each day is **a question inspired by some of the texts of the Gospels of Luke and John referring to Mary.** These are “generative questions” that can help us to establish a *spiritual* conversation with our brothers in community, accompanied by Mary.

After the brief daily biblical text, **some words of Pope Francis** are added to update its meaning. This year's novena thus becomes an itinerary that helps us to contemplate some aspects of our missionary life from the perspective of our Mother. She is, in the words of Pope Francis:

“the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain. As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice. She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life, opening our hearts to faith by her maternal love.

As a true mother, she walks at our side, she shares our struggles and she constantly surrounds us with God's love. Through her many titles, often linked to her shrines, Mary shares the history of each people which has received the Gospel and she becomes a part of their historic identity.” (Evangelii gaudium, 286).

At the end of the booklet, we have included some prayers to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the **Prayer for the XXVI General Chapter** as a reminder of the journey we are making during these months.

1

DO WE REJOICE THAT WE ARE FULL OF GOD'S GRACE?

(cf. Lk 1:29)

Introduction

Greeting: We are celebrating the novena to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the year 2021 on the eve of the XXVI General Chapter. During the previous months we have made a journey as a Congregation through local, zonal, provincial and continental “conversations”. We have discovered that there are stories and questions that touch our lives and push us to give a more faithful response to the Word of God. This year's novena also revolves around nine questions inspired by some texts from the Gospels of Luke and John that refer to Mary. Let us prepare ourselves to answer them with the same depth and promptness with which she placed her life in God's hands.

Song.

Payer: Merciful God, who flooded your daughter Mary, the young girl of Nazareth, with your grace, we thank you that you have also blessed us with your love and chosen us to be your children. We ask that, following Mary's example, our whole missionary life may be a thanksgiving for the gift of your love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 1:26-28

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, “Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

Pope Francis' words

“In today’s Gospel the Angel’s greeting to Mary resounds: “Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!” (Lk 1:28). God has always thought of her and wanted her in his inscrutable plan, to be a creature full of grace, that is, full of his love. Yet, in order to be filled it is necessary to make room, to empty oneself, to step aside. Just as Mary did, she who knew how to listen to the Word of God and trust totally in his will, accepting it unreservedly in her own life. So much so that the Word became flesh in her. This was possible thanks to her yes.”

(FRANCIS, *Angelus*, 8 December 2019)

We talk to Mary

- As sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we too have been blessed with God's grace. To welcome it, *“we must seek humility, which prepares us to receive God’s grace, is the foundation of Christian perfection and is thus an absolutely necessary virtue for any minister of the Gospel”* (CC 41).
- The experience of grace is the source of joy. In this six-year period we have been invited to be “witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel.” Therefore, we need, again and again, to open ourselves humbly to God's grace. Upon each one of us, the Lord pronounces the words that the angel addressed to Mary: “Rejoice, missionary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.”
- It is not easy to live the experience of grace in a context where everything has a price. We need to ask ourselves how we are living this dimension of our missionary life.

After listening to the Word of God, we converse among ourselves, two by two, around this question: ***Do we rejoice to be filled with God's grace?*** We can share our experiences of sadness and joy in relation to the missionary vocation in the context in which we live.

We pray together

- Thank you, Father, because in the Heart of Mary you have made your grace shine forth, which reaches all human beings. With the woman *full of grace*, we say to you:

May our life always be a thanksgiving.

- Thank you, Father, that you have called us to follow your Son Jesus Christ as missionary sons of the Heart of Mary. With the woman *full of grace*, we say to you:

May our life always be a thanksgiving.

- Thank you, Father, that you grant us the gift of being witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel in a world that often lives an “infinite sadness.” With the woman *full of grace*, we say to you:

May our life always be a thanksgiving.

- Thank you, Father, because with the power of your Spirit you make us recognize the many seeds of life and grace that you have sown in our world. With the woman *full of grace*, we say to you:

May our life be always a thanksgiving.

- Thank you, Father, that you make us a mediation of grace for those who live an unhappy life. With the woman *full of grace*, we say to you:

May our life always be a thanksgiving.

Prayer to Our Lady of Joy

*Immaculate Heart of Mary,
flooded with the grace of God,
Mother of all holiness,
Virgin of joy,
we beseech you to help us
to transform our sorrows into joys,
our doubts into moments of reflection
and our setbacks
into a reason for inner growth.
Do not allow sadness or discouragement
to invade us,
and teach us the way of hope
knowing that we are sons of your Immaculate Heart.
Help us to discover each day
the signs of grace that the Lord
has placed in our world
because often we do not know how to perceive them
and we allow ourselves to be dominated
by the shadows of misfortune and sin.
Our Mother,
intercede for us always.
Amen.*

2

HOW IS GOD'S WORK BEING CARRIED OUT TODAY?

(cf. Lk 1:34)

Introduction

Greeting: Mary, the woman of the generous “yes”, was also the woman of questions. It was not mere curiosity, but her desire to be responsible, that impelled her to inquire. We too live our missionary spirituality inhabited by many questions. Grateful for the gift of our vocation, we ask ourselves how to be faithful to it. We also ask ourselves how God's plan is being realized in our world when we see around us so many indicators of misfortune and injustice. Asking questions from the depths of our hearts is also a way of believing.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, you who have placed in our hearts the questions that help us to open ourselves to your Word, grant us a humble heart to wait in faith and patience for your loving answer. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 1:29-35

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?”

Pope Francis’ words

“Obviously, the young woman of Nazareth was not part of the “social networks” of the time. She was not an “influencer”, but without wanting or trying to, she became the most influential woman in history. So, we can say, with the confidence of children: Mary, the “influencer” of God. With just a few words, she was able to say “yes” and to trust in the love and promises of God, who is the only force capable of renewing, of making all things new. And all of us today have something that needs to be renewed within. Today we have to allow God to renew something in our hearts. Let us reflect: what do I want God to renew in my heart?

We are always struck by the strength of that young woman’s “yes”, the power of those words “be it done” that she spoke to the angel. This was no merely passive or resigned acceptance. It was different to a faint “yes”, as if to say, “well, let’s give it a try, and see what happens”. Mary did not know that expression: let’s see what happens. She was determined, she knew what was at stake and said “yes”, getting straight to the point. It was something more, something different. It was the “yes” of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. And I ask each one of you: do you see yourselves as bearers of a promise? What promise is there within my heart to take forward? Mary’s would undoubtedly be a difficult mission, but the challenges that lay ahead were no reason to say “no”. Things would get complicated, of course, but not in the same way as happens when cowardice paralyzes us because things are not clear or sure in advance. Mary did not take out an insurance policy! Mary took the risk and for this reason she is strong, for this reason she is an “influencer”, the “influencer” of God! The “yes” and the desire to serve were stronger than any doubts and difficulties.”.

(FRANCIS, Vigil with young people on the occasion of the 34th World Youth Day, Panama 2019)

We talk to Mary María

- During the preparatory conversations for the XXVI General Chapter, it is likely that we have asked ourselves many questions about the present moment of the Congregation and the Church and the future that awaits us. Only those who truly appreciate the reality in which they live can ask questions.
- With Mary we learn to live a spirituality of questions. We allow ourselves to be questioned by those that arise within us, by those that are asked by the laity with whom we share the mission and by those that come to us from the social context in which we live. The question *How can this be?* helps us to value more the gift of God, to become aware of the depth of our vocation and to assume the risks it entails.

After listening to the Word of God, we converse among ourselves, two by two, around this question: ***How is God's work being carried out today?*** We can share the questions that are most pressing in relation to God's action in our world, in the Church and in the Congregation.

We pray together

(Each member of the community expresses aloud one of the questions that have come up in their conversation. A few moments of silence are left and then the Hail Mary is recited).

Virgin of the Questions

*Virgin and Mother Mary,
you who, moved by the Spirit,
welcomed the Word of life
in the depths of your humble faith,
totally surrendered to the Eternal,*

*help us to say our “yes”
in the face of the urgency, more imperative than ever,
to make the Good News of Jesus resound.*

*Help us also
to take charge of the questions
that beat within us
and in the hearts of the men and women
of our time.*

*Grant that we may not be afraid
to question and to let ourselves be questioned,
to listen and to respond,
not to be satisfied with prefabricated answers.*

*May your audacity be ours,
may your sincerity disarm our lies,
and may your youthful boldness
help us to open our hearts
to the surprises that God has in store for us.*

Amen.

3

DO WE LIVE AS SERVANTS OF THE WORD OF GOD?

(cf. Lk 1:38)

Introduction

Greeting: In our Constitutions we read that *“the ministry of the word, through which we communicate the total mystery of Christ to humanity, is our special calling among the people of God”* (n. 46). We are sons of a woman who said yes to God so that the Word might become flesh. Without saying a generous yes every day, the mission entrusted to us will be sterile. Once again, we lift up our weakness and inconstancy on the fidelity of Mary, who has kept her yes to the end.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, who revealed your love to us through your Word made flesh in Mary's womb, help us to listen to it, welcome it, incarnate it and proclaim it with humility and joy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 1:35-38

And the angel said to her in reply, “The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Pope Francis' words

“Here I am is the key phrase for life. It marks the passage from a horizontal life, centred on oneself and one’s own needs, to a vertical life, ascending toward God. Here I am is being available to the Lord; it is the cure for selfishness, the antidote to a dissatisfied life, which is always lacking something. Here I am is the remedy against the aging of sin; it is the therapy for staying young within. Here I am is believing that God counts more than my ‘me’. It is choosing to bet on the Lord, docile to his surprises. This is why saying here I am to him is the highest praise we can offer him. Why not begin our days with a ‘here I am, Lord’? It would be beautiful to say each morning: “Here I am, Lord, today let your will be done in me”. We will say it in praying the Angelus, but we can repeat it now, together. Here I am, Lord, today let your will be done in me!

Mary adds: “Let it be to me according to your word”. She does not say “let it be done as I want”, but “as You will”. She does not place any limitations on God. She does not think: “I will dedicate myself partly to him, I will deal with it and then I will do what I want”. No, Mary does not love the Lord when she feels like it, off and on. She lives by entrusting herself to God in all things and for all things. This is the secret of life. One who trusts God in everything can do everything. However, the Lord, dear brothers and sisters, suffers when we respond to him as Adam did: “I was afraid, and I hid myself”. God is Father, the most tender of fathers, and desires his children’s trust.

How often, instead, do we mistrust him; we mistrust God! We think that he might send us some trial, deprive us of freedom, abandon us. But this is a great mistake; it is the temptation of the origins, the temptation of the devil: weaving mistrust in God. Mary overcomes this first temptation with her here I am. And today we look at the beauty of Our Lady, born and lived without sin, ever docile and transparent to God. This does not mean that life was easy for her, no. Being with God does not magically resolve problems. The conclusion of today’s Gospel passage recalls it: “the angel departed from her” (v. 38). He departed: it is a strong verb. The Angel left the Virgin alone in a difficult situation. She knew the special way in which

she would become the Mother of God — the Angel had said so — but the Angel had not explained it to others, only to her. And problems began immediately: let us imagine the irregular situation according to law, to Saint Joseph's torment, the life plan tossed aside, what the people would have said.... But faced with problems, Mary places her trust in God. She is left by the Angel, but believes that God remains with her, in her. And she trusts. She trusts in God. She is certain that with the Lord, even if in an unexpected way, everything will be fine. This is the wise approach: not to live depending on problems — when one ends, another appears! — but by trusting God and entrusting every day to him: here I am! "Here I am" is the phrase. "Here I am" is the prayer. Let us ask the Immaculate for the grace to live this way."

(FRANCIS, *Angelus*, 8 December 2018)

We talk to Mary

- The General Chapter of 1991 reminded us that *"if the Word dwells in our community, as it did in Mary's Heart, our community will not lead a life that is divided or set in its ways (cf. Lk 1:38-39), it will never be insensitive to God's crying out to us in others (cf. Jn 2:3), nor will it serve any kinds of idols (cf. Lk 1:49,52). It will be good soil that bears abundant fruit (cf. Lk 8:15,21). Proclaimed by a community of brothers living united with Jesus and in Jesus (cf. Mk 3:14; Jn 17:23), the Word of the Kingdom will be both believable and winsome"* (SW, 7).
- For its part, the General Chapter of 2015 insisted that *"we are in the Church and in society an echo of Claret (cf. Aut 686), passionate minister of the Gospel in season and out of season... We, like Mary, as Sons of her Heart, want to welcome and meditate upon the Word in our hearts and to proclaim it with passion."* (MS, 42).

After listening to the Word, we converse among ourselves, two by two, around this question: **Do we live as servants of the Word of God?** We can share our experiences related to the reception and proclamation of the Word in our missionary life.

We pray together

Mary of the Word

*Mary, woman of listening,
grant that our ears may be opened;
that we may know how to listen to the Word of your Son Jesus
among the thousands of words of this world;
may we also know how to listen to the realities in which we live,
to each person we meet,
especially those who are poor, needy or in difficulty.*

*Mary, woman of decision,
enlighten our minds and hearts,
so that we may know how to obey
the Word of your Son Jesus without hesitation;
give us the courage of decision,
not to allow ourselves to be dragged
so that others may guide our lives.*

*Mary, woman of action,
make our hands and our feet move “in haste” towards others,
to bring the charity and love of your Son Jesus,
to bring, like you,
the light of the Gospel to the world.*

Amen.

4

WHAT GREAT THINGS HAS DONE THE MIGHTY ONE IN US?

(cf. Lk 1:49)

Introduction

Greeting: Every day we recite the *Magnificat* of Mary. The XXV General Chapter also elaborated a Claretian *Magnificat*: “We gratefully recognize that the Lord has blessed us generously. While sin has continued to manifest itself among us, the signs of God’s grace have been and are much greater. United with Mary we wish to add to her *Magnificat*, for the Lord has done great things” (MS 36). Today we ask ourselves what have been those “great works” that the Lord has done in our lives. We need to name them so that our song of praise may have the weight of reality.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, give us a humble heart like Mary's to recognize and sing of your works in our lives and in the life of the world. Do not allow the bad news that we fabricate to prevent us from welcoming the great news of your saving presence among us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 1:46-50

And Mary said: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior. For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed. The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him.”

Pope Francis' words

“Mary’s is a revolutionary prayer, the song of a faith-filled young woman conscious of her limits, yet confident in God’s mercy. She gives thanks to God for looking upon her lowliness and for the work of salvation that he has brought about for the people, the poor and the humble. Faith is at the heart of Mary’s entire story. Her song helps us to understand the mercy of the Lord as the driving force of history, the history of each of us and of all humanity.

When God touches the heart of a young man or woman, they become capable of doing tremendous things. The “great things” that the Almighty accomplished in the life of Mary speak also to our own journey in life, which is not a meaningless meandering, but a pilgrimage that, for all its uncertainties and sufferings, can find its fulfilment in God (cf. Angelus, 15 August 2015). You may say to me: “But Father, I have my limits, I am a sinner, what can I do?” When the Lord calls us, he doesn’t stop at what we are or what we have done. On the contrary, at the very moment that he calls us, he is looking ahead to everything we can do, all the love we are capable of giving. Like the young Mary, you can allow your life to become a means for making the world a better place. Jesus is calling you to leave your mark in life, your mark on history, both your own and that of so many others (cf. Address at the Vigil, Kraków, 30 July 2016).

(FRANCIS, *Message for the thirty-second World Youth Day 2017*)

We talk to Mary

- In recent years there has been a lot of talk about fake news and post-truth. Those who dominate the media can “fabricate” truths to suit their own interests. We do not need to invent anything, but to humbly accept the Truth that is Jesus and become faithful witnesses.

- The spirituality of the *Magnificat* allows us to read history upside down, with Mary's eyes, to discover that God “has shown might with his arm, dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart. He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty.”

After listening to the Word, we discuss among ourselves, two by two, around this question: **What great things has the Mighty One done in us?** We can share some recent stories in which we have clearly seen God at work.

We pray together

(The prayer ends with the Claretian *Magnificat* as proposed in *Missionari sumus*, n. 36).

United with Mary we wish to add to her *Magnificat*, for the Lord has done great things:

- The Spirit of Claret is alive and every day more inspiring.
- The Word of God occupies a place ever more central to our mission and spirituality.
- He has facilitated the growth of the Congregation and has enriched it with missionaries from many places.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

- He sustains our fraternity and helps us to leave behind jealousies and prejudices and to strengthen our communion within the Congregation.

- He has strengthened our awareness of ecclesial communion and has granted us a better understanding of the gift of Mission.
- He has made us capable of responding to the needs of many people, especially the poor, and the new faces of poverty.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

- He has motivated us with the testimony of our martyrs and the ecclesial recognition of their testimony.
- He graces us with the dedication of many Claretians (missionaries in formation, brothers, deacons and presbyters).
- He has facilitated the increase of collaboration and the sharing of goods and resources among us.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

5

WHAT MEMORIES DO WE KEEP IN OUR HEART?

(cf. Lk 2:19)

Introduction

Greeting: There is a poem by Pedro Casaldáliga that sounds like this: *“When He arrived / what time was it, Mother, / in your Heart? / (While He did not arrive / it was the hour / of hope) / But when He arrived / what time was it?”* The Immaculate Heart of Mary is for us the clock that marks the hour of our missionary life, that measures the beating of our heart in which we keep all that we live. The experiences that do not pass through the heart accumulate, but do not help us to grow. Today we want to ask Mary to help us to “keep in our heart” the passage of God through our life to learn to live in total availability like her.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, You who found a worthy dwelling place in the Heart of Mary and prepared her to welcome Your Son, give us a wise and humble heart like hers to keep Your Word, to bring it to life and to proclaim it with joy. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 2:16-19

So, they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known the message that had been told them about this child. All who heard it were amazed by what had been told them by the shepherds. And Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.

Pope Francis' words

“Far from trying to understand or master the situation, Mary is the woman who can treasure, that is to say, protect and guard in her heart, the passage of God in the life of his people. Deep within, she had learned to listen to the heartbeat of her Son, and that in turn taught her, throughout her life, to discover God’s heartbeat in history...

She drew near to the most diverse situations in order to sow hope. She accompanied the crosses borne in the silence of her children’s hearts. How many devotions, shrines and chapels in the most far-off places, how many pictures in our homes, remind us of this great truth. Mary gave us a mother’s warmth, the warmth that shelters us amid troubles, the maternal warmth that keeps anything or anyone from extinguishing in the heart of the Church the revolution of tenderness inaugurated by her Son. Where there is a mother, there is tenderness...

Mothers are the strongest antidote to our individualistic and egotistic tendencies, to our lack of openness and our indifference. A society without mothers would not only be a cold society, but a society that has lost its heart, lost the “feel of home”. A society without mothers would be a merciless society, one that has room only for calculation and speculation. Because mothers, even at the worst times, are capable of testifying to tenderness, unconditional self-sacrifice and the strength of hope.”

(FRANCIS, *Homily on the solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God*
1 January 2017)

We talk to Mary

- During the months of the pandemic, we have had the opportunity to ask ourselves more deeply about the meaning of our lives. Some of our Claretian brothers, relatives, friends and acquaintances have died.

We have experienced our fragility and vulnerability. It is likely that we have also felt a special call to take more care of ourselves in order to care for others, to cultivate community life and prayer.

- Like Mary, we need not to forget what we have experienced, not to turn the page too soon. Remembering will help us to understand what God wants to tell us through the experiences of this time and to prepare ourselves better for the future. A superficial memory is not enough. The “wisdom of the heart” is required.

After listening to the Word of God, we talk among ourselves, two by two, around this question: ***What memories do we keep in our hearts?*** We can share some experiences of God's passage through our lives that have marked us and that we carry deep in our hearts.

We pray together

- When we are tempted to forget the gifts that God has given us throughout our lives,

Help us, Mother, to keep everything in our hearts.

- When we find it difficult to interpret painful experiences or when we are assailed by questions,
- When some wounds that we thought were healed are reopened and we think that everything has been useless,
- When the passage of time confronts us with the mystery of existence and death,

Help us, Mother, to keep everything in our hearts.

Thanksgiving through the Heart of Mary
(*Spiritual Directory*, 22)

*Holy Father, we give you thanks,
for giving the Virgin Mary,
a wise and docile heart,
always ready to please You,
a new and humble heart,
on which to engrave the law of the new Covenant.
A pure and simple heart,
that made her worthy, as a virgin,
to conceive your Son
and empowered her to contemplate you eternally.
A steadfast and ready heart
to courageously bear the sword of sorrow,
and to await, filled with faith,
the resurrection of your Son.
Give us a heart wise and docile, new and humble,
simple and pure, steadfast and ready,
that we may imitate her and cooperate
with greater fidelity
in your work of salvation.
Amen.*

6

WHAT SWORDS PIERCE OUR HEARTS TODAY?

(cf. Lk 2:35)

Introduction

Greeting: Christian tradition has also contemplated Mary as the Virgin of Sorrows. The prophecy of Simeon alludes to a heart pierced by the sword of suffering. Today we want to pray from our wounds because we are convinced that where our wounds are, a way of salvation also opens up. But we do not think only of ourselves, but we open ourselves to the pains of the Church and the world. We remain, like Mary, close to the cross of all those who suffer.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, when we are pierced by the sword of sorrow, help us to remain united to the cross of your Son Jesus, like Mary, so that we may share in his sufferings and experience in you too the power of his resurrection. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 2:33-35

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Pope Francis' words

“On this Passion Friday, the Church recalls the sorrows of Mary, Our Lady of Sorrows. This veneration of the people of God has existed for centuries. Hymns have been written in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows: she was at the foot of the cross and they contemplate her there, suffering. Christian piety has collected Our Lady's sorrows and speaks of the “seven sorrows”. The first, just forty days after the birth of Jesus, is Simeon's prophecy that speaks of a sword that will pierce her heart (see Lk 2:35). The second sorrow is the flight to Egypt to save her Son's life (see Mt 2:13-23). The third sorrow, those three days of anguish when the boy remained in the temple (see Lk 2:41-50). The fourth sorrow, when Our Lady meets Jesus on the way to Calvary (see Jn 19:25). The fifth sorrow of Our Lady is the death of Jesus, seeing her son there, crucified, naked, dying. The sixth sorrow, Jesus' descent from the cross, dead, when she takes Him in her arms as she held Him in her arms more than thirty years before in Bethlehem. The seventh sorrow is Jesus' burial. Thus, Christian piety follows this path of Our Lady who accompanies Jesus. It is good for me, late in the evening, when I pray the Angelus, to pray these seven sorrows as a remembrance of the Mother of the Church, how the Mother of the Church gave birth to us all with so much pain.”

(FRANCIS, *Homily*, 3 April 2020)

We talk to Mary

- The Christian faith never hides the pain nor tiptoes over it. We follow a Crucified One and seek consolation in a Mother who, among her many titles, has one that makes her very close to us in this time of trial and suffering: Our Lady of Sorrows.
- Mary teaches us that pain and death, however destructive they may be, are not the last word. Mary's pain is intense, deep, but never

desperate. Her words are different: *“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”* This song does not come from a frivolous, superficial and unconscious heart, but from a mother who has witnessed the suffering and cruel death of her son and yet has not lost faith in God. Therefore, they are true and convey an absolute confidence in the unconditional love of our Father.

After listening to the Word, we conversed among ourselves, two by two, around this question: ***What words pierce our hearts today?*** We can share something of what is making us suffer in our personal life or in the Claretian mission.

We pray together

(The community spends a few minutes praying for people who are suffering and who, for various reasons, are close to them. It can use some symbols such as names, photographs, candles, etc.).

Sorrowful Mother

*O Sorrowful Mother,
Virgin of profound gaze,
you reach the human heart
for having first exposed yours
before the gaze of the Father.
Mother who knows pain
because you lived it at the foot of the cross
accompanying your Son Jesus with maternal love.
Today we need you,
today we want to tell you that we love you,
that we do not forget you*

*in the midst of suffering.
We turn to you
so that you may take us by the hand
to the merciful Heart of Jesus.*

*Mother of love
enkindle in our hearts
the flame of service,
as you kindled it in your Son,
protect us all
and bless especially
the most vulnerable and needy
of our Congregation.*

Amen.

7

WHY ARE YOU HIDING FROM US? (cf. Lk 2:48)

Introduction

Greeting: Today we contemplate Mary and Joseph searching “in anguish” for Jesus. In them we see our own searches reflected. Jesus is always close to us, but not at the mercy of our whims. As on the road to Emmaus, he makes a gesture to continue on the way to awaken in us the desire to seek him and to meet him, so that we can say to him: “Stay with us.” Mary and Joseph also set out on their journey. They did not understand when Jesus told them that he had to be, above all, in his Father's house. Mary and Joseph's difficulties are our difficulties on the journey of faith.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, You are a God present and hidden, absent and near. You flood our lives, but you are not within reach. Help us to seek you, as Mary and Joseph searched in anguish for Jesus, who lives and reigns forever and ever. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

Luke 2:47-50

After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” But they did not understand what he said to them.

Pope Francis' words

“The second element that I would like to grasp from the Gospel is the anxiety that Mary and Joseph felt when they could not find Jesus. This anxiety reveals Jesus' centrality in the Holy Family. The Virgin and her husband welcomed that Son, protected him and watched him grow in age, wisdom and grace in their midst, but above all he grew in their hearts; and, little by little, their affection for him and their understanding of him grew. This is why the family of Nazareth is holy: because it was centred on Jesus; all of Mary and Joseph's attention and concerns were directed toward him.

That anxiety that they experienced in the three days that Jesus was missing should also be our anxiety when we are distant from him, when we are distant from Jesus. We should feel anxious when we forget Jesus for more than three days, without praying, without reading the Gospel, without feeling the need of his presence and of his comforting friendship. And many times, days pass in which I do not remember Jesus. But this is bad, this is really bad. We should feel anxious when these things happen. Mary and Joseph searched for him and found him in the temple while he was teaching: for us too, it is especially in the house of God that we are able to encounter the divine Teacher and receive his message of salvation. In the Eucharistic celebration we have a living experience of Christ; he speaks to us; he offers us his Word; he illuminates us, lights our path, gives us his Body in the Eucharist from which we draw vigour to face everyday difficulties.

And today let us go home with these two words: astonishment and anxiety. Do I know how to be astonished, when I see the good things in others, and in this way resolve family problems? Do I feel anxious when I am distant from Jesus?”

(FRANCIS, *Angelus*, 30 December 2018)

We talk to Mary

- Today many men and women who once believed feel that they have lost faith. They find it difficult to find God in the fabric of life. We too can be exposed to this crisis. Mary appears today as the mother of the “second search”, the one that will allow us to discover a personal, warm faith, capable of providing, not only keys to understand the world, but, above all, energy to live from the experience of God's grace.
- Mary, the “seeker”, the pilgrim of faith, accompanies us on a new journey in search of God. It is possible that many dissatisfied adults, wounded by a thousand intellectual and affective adventures, will have enough courage to discover that Mary is not the eternal feminine myth that the Church has exploited for centuries, taking advantage of a universal archetype, but that she is the mother of Jesus who exercises in us a spiritual maternity.

After listening to the Word, we converse among ourselves, two by two, around this question: **Why do you hide yourself from us?** We can share something about our experience of searching and absence of God.

We pray together

- For all those who, in the midst of the crossroads of life, are searching for meaning in their lives,

Help them, Mother, to find Jesus.

- For the young people who have been most affected by the pandemic and see an uncertain future,

Help them, Mother, to find Jesus.

- For those who are troubled in their faith and do not see in their lives the signs of God's love,

Help them, Mother, to find Jesus.

- For those who work for justice and strive to protect the planet and make the world a better place,

Help them, Mother, to find Jesus.

By saying your name, Mary

(Pedro Casaldáliga)

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that Poverty
Has drawn the attention of God's eyes.

By saying your name, Mary
We say that we are with the Cross
And with the flames of the Spirit.

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that the Promise
Knows what a mother's milk tastes like.

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that every name
Can be full of Grace.

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that our flesh
Clothes the silence of the Word.

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that every death
Can also be His Passion.

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that the Kingdom comes
Walking alongside History.

By saying your name, Mary,
We say that His All
Is the cause of Our Joy.

8

WHAT IS HE TELLING US TODAY? (cf. Jn 2:5)

Introduction

Greeting: The Covid-19 pandemic seems to have spoiled the celebration of life. We have had to cancel meetings and activities. A feeling of languor has taken hold of us. We look to the future with fear and uncertainty. In this context, we contemplate Mary as the attentive Mother who perceives the needs of humanity. She knows that we lack the “wine” of joy and hope. She asks us to trust in her Son and to do what he tells us.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, You never cease to invite us to the feast of life. Do not let the wine of love be lacking. Help us to trust in the word of your Son Jesus to turn this time of trial into an opportunity to draw closer to you and to better serve our brothers and sisters. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

John 2:1-5

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine ran short, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” (And) Jesus said to her, “Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servers, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Pope Francis' words

“To better understand this call, seen today in the temple in the first days of Jesus’ life, we should move to the first days of his public ministry, at Cana, where he transforms water into wine. There too there is a call to obedience, with Mary, who says: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Do whatever. And Jesus asks for something particular; he does not suddenly do something new, does not produce the missing wine out of nothing – he could have done so – but he asks for something concrete and demanding. He asks them to fill six great stone water jars for the ritual purification, which recalls the law. That means pouring around six hundred litres of water from the well: time and effort, which seemed pointless, because what was missing was not water but wine! And yet, precisely from those jars filled “up to the brim” (v. 7), Jesus draws forth new wine. And so, it is for us: God calls us to encounter him through faithfulness to concrete things – God is always encountered in concrete things: daily prayer, Holy Mass, Confession, real charity, the daily word of God, closeness, especially to those most in need spiritually or physically. Concrete things, such as obedience to one’s superior and to the rule in the consecrated life. If we put this law into practice with love – with love! – then the Spirit will come and bring God’s surprise, just as in the temple and at Cana. Thus, the water of daily life is transformed into the wine of newness, and our life, which seems to be more bound, in reality becomes more free. This reminds me now of a humble sister who really had the charism of being close to priests and seminarians. The other day the cause for her beatification was introduced here in the Diocese [of Rome]. She was a simple sister, not well known, but she had the virtue of obedience, of faithfulness and of not being afraid of new things. We ask the Lord, through the intercession of Sister Bernardetta, to give all of us the grace to walk on this path.”

(FRANCIS, *Homily* 2 February 2019).

We talk to Mary

- As we know, the oldest prayer addressed to Mary is known as *Sub tuum praesidium* (3rd century): “We fly to thy protection, O holy Mother of God. Despise not our petitions in our necessities, but deliver us always from all dangers, O glorious and blessed Virgin.” Throughout the month of May we have been praying the Rosary from various shrines around the world asking Mary to deliver us from the pandemic.
- Today we prolong this supplication in our community, but what we ask of Mary is, above all, that she help us to put into practice the word that Jesus wants to address to us. The pandemic of lack of faith and justice is deeper and more lasting than Covid-19. We need to discern deeply the new calls that come to us in this time of trial, in this “hour” of God.

After listening to the Word, we converse among ourselves, two by two, around this question: **What is He telling us today?** We can share something of what is making us suffer in our personal life or in the Claretian mission.

We pray together

- In the hour of sadness and uncertainty, when we see the horizon of our life clouded,
Help us, Mother, to do what He tells us.
- In the hour of selfishness and indifference, when we tire of serving others with love,
Help us, Mother, to do what He tells us.
- In the hour of weariness and discouragement, when we lack the strength to proclaim the good news with joy,
Help us, Mother, to do what He tells us.

- In the hour of anguish and despair, when we find it difficult to believe in eternal life,

Help us, Mother, to do what He tells us.

Our Lady of Comfort

Immaculate Heart of Mary, Virgin Mary,
turn your merciful eyes towards us
amid this coronavirus pandemic.

Comfort those who are distraught and mourn
their loved ones who have died,
and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply.
Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones
who are sick and who, in order to prevent
the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them.

Fill with hope those who are troubled
by the uncertainty of the future
and the consequences for the economy and employment.

Mother of God and our Mother,
pray for us to God, the Father of mercies,
that this great suffering may end
and that hope and peace may dawn anew.
Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana,
so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted,
and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust.

Amen.

9

HOW DO WE WELCOME THE MOTHER IN OUR HOME?

(cf. Jn 19,27)

Introduction

Greeting: Jesus has given the Church everything she needs to walk in history; first and foremost, the life-giving Spirit and his Mother. We welcome Mary into our home. On this last day of the novena we contemplate her as Mother of the Church and of the Congregation, as the one who continues to bring us together and impels us to proclaim the Gospel. We ask her - in harmony with the Chapter motto - to make of us missionaries “rooted” in the experience of God and “audacious” in the mission.

Song.

Prayer: Merciful God, we thank you for giving us Mary as our Mother, Teacher and Foundress. Help us to welcome her with love, to be docile to your Word as she was, and to accompany her beside the cross of Jesus in all those who continue to suffer today. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We listen to the Word of God

John 19:25-27

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son.” Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.

Pope Francis' words

“On the cross, when Jesus endured in his own flesh the dramatic encounter of the sin of the world and God’s mercy, he could feel at his feet the consoling presence of his mother and his friend. At that crucial moment, before fully accomplishing the work which his Father had entrusted to him, Jesus said to Mary: “Woman, here is your son”. Then he said to his beloved friend: “Here is your mother” (Jn 19:26-27). These words of the dying Jesus are not chiefly the expression of his devotion and concern for his mother; rather, they are a revelatory formula which manifests the mystery of a special saving mission. Jesus left us his mother to be our mother. Only after doing so did Jesus know that “all was now finished” (Jn 19:28). At the foot of the cross, at the supreme hour of the new creation, Christ led us to Mary. He brought us to her because he did not want us to journey without a mother, and our people read in this maternal image all the mysteries of the Gospel.”

(FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 285).

We talk to Mary

- Today we complete the itinerary that prepares us to celebrate the Solemnity of the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Enlightened by some texts of the Scriptures that speak of our Mother, we conversed among ourselves and with her because we believe that the Lord makes Himself known to us when we converse along the way. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we answered some questions that helped us to take out of our hearts the memories, worries and dreams that we have lived during this last year.
- Now we want to thank God for the road we have traveled and ask Him to help us to continue to welcome Mary as the Mother of our house and to prepare ourselves for the "fifth conversation" that will be the Chapter.

After listening to the Word of God, we discuss among ourselves, two by two, around this question: **How do we welcome our Mother into our home?** We can share something about what Mary means to each of us.

We pray together

(Each member of the community spontaneously asks Mary for some need, especially for people who are suffering: the sick, the unemployed, migrants, the imprisoned, etc.). Everyone can respond by praying the Hail Mary.

If it seems appropriate, each Hail Mary can be preceded by a Marian invocation proposed by the person making the petition).

Prayer to Mary, Star of the New Evangelization

(Evangelii Gaudium, 288)

Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life
in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own “yes”
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Filled with Christ’s presence,
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy,
you sang of the great things done by God.

Standing at the foot of the cross
with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life
which triumphs over death.

Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty
may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God's kingdom.

Star of the new evangelization,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith,
justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel
may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God's little ones,
pray for us.

Amen. Alleluia!

The furnace of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

(Spiritual Directory, 17)

O Virgin Mother of God,
you know that we are your sons and ministers,
formed by you
in the furnace of your mercy and love.
We are like arrow poised in your mighty hand.
Release us, our Mother,
against what opposes the kingdom of God.
Trusting in your protection,
we proclaim the Gospel
armed only with the word of God.
and the title of Sons of your Immaculate Heart.
Mother, yours will be the victory.
Amen.

Apostolic Prayer to the Heart of Mary

(Spiritual Directory, 20)

O Virgin Mother of God!
I dedicate myself as your son
and in the honor and glory of your purity.
I consecrate to you my body and soul,
my appetites and feelings,
and I beg you to grant me
the grace of never sinning again. Amen.
Mother, behold your son.
Mother, behold your son.

Mother, behold your son.
In you, my sweetness Mother,
I have put all my trust.
Let me never be put to shame.
Amen.

Mother and Teacher

(Spiritual Directory, 26)

O Mary, Mother and Teacher of Missionaries,
pray that we Claretians
may always bear the same spirit
as our elder brother, Jesus;
and that we may be universal men,
with penetrating eyes and ears attentive
to the urgent cries of our world.
That as Sons of your Heart,
we may be men of mercy,
tenderness, compassion.
That we may not cease to train ourselves
to be open to new missionary horizons
That we may be docile and expert
in accepting what is different
That the apostolic charity
that springs forth from the furnace of your Heart
make us able to make our daily work meaningful
in the various contexts
in which the Spirit places us.
Amen.

Heart of Mary

(Spiritual Directory, 25)

Lord God,
you chose Mary ever Virgin
to be the Mother of your Son and our Mother:
Grant that we who faithfully entrust ourselves
to her maternal heart,
may be more fully conformed to Christ so that,
impelled by his charity,
we may devote ourselves more generously
to proclaiming the Gospel to all people.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Himno al Corazón de María

(Spanish)

Gloria a ti, Corazón de María,
fiel creyente en Jesús, el Señor.
Te aclamamos “la llena de gracia”,
Reina y Madre del Pueblo de Dios.
Con la fuerza y el don del Espíritu,
compartiendo la vida y el pan,
anunciamos la Buena Noticia,
construimos el Reino en la paz.
Te aclamamos “la llena de gracia”,
Reina Madre del Pueblo de Dios.

**PRAYER FOR THE
XXVI GENERAL CHAPTER**

We thank you, Father,
because you have called us
to follow your son Jesus Christ
and you send us, like the apostles
and our founder,
Saint Anthony Mary Claret,
to announce the Good News of salvation
throughout the world.

Rooted in You
and in the love of our neighbors,
we ask you to send us your Spirit
so that we may discern your will
for our Congregation
in this twenty-sixth General Chapter.

As sons of the Heart of Mary,
we entrust you with our pilgrimage so that,
our life-mission being transformed,
we may be daring and credible
messengers of the Gospel.

Amen.