



MESSAGE ON THE FOUNDATION DAY JULY 16, 2022

Dreaming together with God for a Congregation rooted in Christ and audacious in mission

Dear brothers,

1. We are two years short of 175 years of the foundation of our beloved Congregation. As we gratefully recall the foundation event, I invite you to use your imaginative gifts to get close to the inner state of Anthony Mary Claret on that blissful day of July 16, 1849, in Vic, Spain. I believe, it is a sure way to capture the spirit of the last General Chapter and the dream of the Congregation in our times. On this day, I raise my heart to the Lord in gratitude thinking of how much love and goodness the Lord has poured into the world through our confreres in the past and the present. Indeed, it all began with God's Dream which our Founder made his own in his time.

THE DREAM OF GOD IN CLARET'S LIFE

2. The young Claret grew up with many dreams that his socio-cultural surroundings implanted in him. His passion for textile design supported by his childhood memories of weaving in his family factory and the dreams of his dad for a prosperous future for the family trade shaped his human dream. The design to arrive at that dream was the study of manufacturing techniques in Barcelona and his commitment to getting skilled in them. However, it was just coaching for the bigger project God had in mind for Claret. The smaller dream of young Claret opened itself to the bigger dream of God for him. Our Congregation which entails the life of each Claretian today has its roots in that dream which God implanted in the heart of Claret. We need to return to that source each time we want to renew and revive the charism of the Congregation in each epoch and each culture.
3. It is through the interweaving of many lives that the Lord unfolds his projects for humans in history. For that, God chooses persons and endows them with the same spirit (charism) to pursue a common goal (mission). The five Co-founders of our Congregation had unique personalities with unique personal histories, but they received the same spirit to walk together pursuing the same dream that God implanted in Claret. Their common journey followed the same pattern that Jesus himself initiated with the twelve disciples, which the early Church made its own by sharing life in common and being sent to proclaim the Good News (cf. CC 4).
4. We will soon celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of the youngest of the co-founders, Fr Jaime Clotet on 24th July. Born in Manresa in a religious family, he joined the seminary in Vic and was ordained for the diocese. The bishop of Vic, seeing his missionary zeal, proposed the young Fr. Jaime join Claret to form part of his new missionary project on 16 July 1849. In the new missionary community, Fr. Jaime found an intense spiritual, community, and apostolic life which shaped him to be an apostle and mystic deeply rooted in Christ. He was audacious in dedicating himself to the catechesis of the deaf, to the formation of the brothers, and various internal services in the community. In the servant of God Jaime Clotet, we find an excellent model of a Claretian missionary, a true companion of the Founder, a tireless missionary who loved and lived for our beloved Congregation with great joy. We shall celebrate the bicentenary of his birth with gratitude to God for the testimony of a life lived to realize the dream of God for the Congregation.

THE DREAM OF GOD FOR THE CONGREGATION IN OUR TIMES

5. We have been using the term “Dream” frequently after the XXVI General Chapter and each of the Major Organisms have been elaborating their respective dreams in the light of the Congregational Dream. We need to understand the term in its biblical sense indicating the direction God gives to humans through dreams and visions at important moments in salvation history culminating in the Jesus event¹. Divine initiative and human collaboration lead history towards the fullness (pleroma) in Christ (cf. Col 3:19-21). We are part of that flow of history with the gift of our charism interweaving with other gifts and charisms for the building up of the Church, the mystical body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:12-16)).
6. At the beginning of our Congregation, our Founder masterfully described his Dream for a son of the Heart of Mary as “a man on fire with love who spread its flames wherever he goes...” (cf. Aut 494; CC 9). This definition of a missionary continues to invite us to be missionaries rooted in Christ and audacious in mission. The Congregational Dream articulated in the XXVI General Chapter (cf. QC 43) is the actualization of Claret’s dream for our times in fidelity to our charism. Claretian history has been the unfolding of this dream in each context and epoch which he foresaw as he wrote to the Nuncio soon after the foundation, “my spirit goes out to the entire world”².
7. The Congregational Dream will remain mere wishful thinking unless we make it our own at the level of each Claretian, every community, all Major Organisms, and the Congregation at large through suitable designs and commitments. It is here that the beautiful orchestration of divine-human collaboration takes place rendering our lives a beautiful symphony of God’s love for the world. It is worth asking oneself after reflecting on the Congregational Dream:

*What would be God’s Dream for me in my present life and ministry in the light of the Dream of the Congregation?
What would be God’s Dream for my community in the light of the Dream of the Major Organism?*

THE DREAM AND THE REALITY OF OUR SINS AND LIMITATIONS

8. The articulation of the Congregational Dream for our times is only a starting point as the homework is yet to be done by each missionary and each community to walk towards that dream. The life of our Founder and the history of the Congregation remind us of the hardships, persecutions, and even martyrdom for the cause of Christ. We also need to reckon with our sins, desires, and fears that may impede us from fulfilling the commitments made.
9. The potential of each of us to walk with God and realize God’s dream for the Congregation gives us a reason for hope amid trials and tribulations. Similarly, we also need to acknowledge and deal creatively with our capacity to hurt others and create hell for ourselves and others when the fire of God’s love is replaced by the fury of hatred, mistrust, and competition. The spiritual viruses that infect and distort the minds and hearts of the missionaries (for example selfishness, spiritual sloth, clericalism, spiritual worldliness, individualism, pessimism...³) can distort our vision of others and the world, wounding fraternity and harming apostolates.
10. It is interesting to note how Claret admired each member of his apostolic community in Cuba⁴ which resembled the early Christian community and how they went about preaching missions all over his vast diocese. We can glimpse a synodal style in the way Claret organized the life and mission of the missionary team as the archbishop of Santiago de Cuba. If we cultivate this appreciative mindset of our Founder, our

¹ We use the term *Dream* to denote its deeper meaning as used by Pope Francis and to distinguish it from *dreams* that refer to the fantastic imaginations during sleep or wishful fantasies of a daydreamer.

² Letter to Nuncio Brunelli on August 12, 1849.

³ cf. Pope Francis enumerates some of them in *Evangelii Gaudium*, 76-109.

⁴ cf. Anthony Mary Claret, *Autobiography* 606-613.

communities would be like an apostolic “beehive” of missionaries⁵. Such synodality is *sine qua non* for realizing God’s Dream for the Congregation.

SYNODAL JOURNEY, AN ANTIDOTE TO MANY ILLS OF THE CHURCH AND THE CONGREGATION

11. “Journeying together listening to each other and the Holy Spirit” is the core of the synodal journey that Pope Francis is inviting the whole Church to embrace. Our Congregation has welcomed it wholeheartedly as the Spirit has already been preparing us to walk that path through the preparation and celebration of the XXVI General Chapter. I thank the Lord and admire the zeal and commitment of most of our missionaries. Our communities where our brothers enjoy fraternity and mutual respect work together for the common mission of the community with incredible energy. I have come across people speaking so well of the testimony of our brothers and the beauty of their intercultural communities which edify them. These communities have developed the capacity to work together as a team, embracing differences, negotiating conflicts, complementing, and supporting each other with the unique gifts of everyone, and envisioning and carrying out our mission together.
12. One of the challenges that I would single out as most seriously affecting the missionary vitality of many of our communities is the difficulty to work together in a synodal way. We have encountered relational situations in communities that have caused serious damage and undue suffering to individuals and community-mission, tragedies that could have been avoided had there been honest conversations and fraternal dialogue in place. How many opportunities for grace and growth have been lost in missions because we were unable to plan and work together for the good of the mission! How many times have our brothers run into self-destructive situations because they refused to accept feedback, or their confreres failed to give timely fraternal corrections! Though differences, tensions, and conflicts in communities are natural and have productive potential in themselves, avoidance of them or unhealthy management of them open the door to the devil of division and various types of abuses (sexual, financial, and power abuses) to find room in our life and mission.
13. In our challenging times, it is vital to learn the art of honest conversations, dialogue, communal discernment, consensus building, and walking together as pilgrims towards the direction that the Lord indicates through the signs of the times. With Pope Francis, we too affirm that “it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium”⁶. Let us, therefore, cultivate synodal spirituality and open ourselves to a synodal conversion to welcome the necessary changes in our manner of working together and listening to each other and the Holy Spirit.

LET US JOURNEY TOGETHER

14. A pilgrim journey at the service of God’s Dream is meaningful and joyful when it is done with others facing difficulties together, with minimum luggage to carry, and with a willingness to march forward. An authentic synodal journey requires us to be rooted in Christ and audacious in mission. Our Founders and Co-founders were agile and available for mission because their hearts were rooted in Christ, their minds focused on His mission, their feet free to move to where He would want them to go, and their hands ready to serve His people. Let us make their missionary mystique our own and render the foundational spirit alive today. We shall commend our journey to our blessed Mother who accompanies her sons and cherishes them in her immaculate heart as she did for her son Jesus and our Founder St. Anthony Mary Claret. Wish you all a joyful Foundation Day!

Fr. Mathew Vattamattam, CMF

Superior General

16 July 2022

⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 608.

⁶ Address of Pope Francis on 15 October 2015.