



LET US RETURN TO THE SPIRIT OF OUR ORIGINS

*Message on the 172nd anniversary of the foundation of the Congregation
16 July 2021*

Dear brothers:

On July 16, on the Foundation Day of our Congregation, I invite you to take a few moments to contemplate our Founder and his five companions in the simple room in the seminary of Vic under the picture of the Immaculate Heart of our Blessed Mother. We shall focus on the fire of love in their hearts that moulded them into a community moved by the zeal to go from place to place to proclaim the Good News. Father Claret referred to his companions as persons “whom the Lord had given the same spirit that motivated me”.¹ They did not begin their mission with a strategic plan for their future, but with the love burning in their hearts which knew how to respond to the hunger of the people for the Word of God. Nor did they know how they would meet the expenses necessary to carry out their vision and mission, but they were certain that the Lord who had called them would provide whatever was necessary. In fact, the great work begun that day with such young men and so few in number counted on this conviction of the Founder to drive it forward: “[...] if we are few, God’s great power will shine brighter”.² Thus, the first community went about preaching and giving retreats with such a zeal that a Dominican priest recalled years later: “It seemed as if those missionaries were coming out of the Cenacle; I saw it; it was an image of Pentecost”.³

The gift of our missionary charism is not a one-time event of the Foundation Day. Our Congregation is renewed every time the Lord ignites the same charismatic fire in a person who joins the missionary project of the Claretian community. Yes, each of us has received “the same spirit”. The Congregation is re-founded every time the Claretians gathered in a General Chapter listen to the signs of the times and make a collective discernment of what the Lord is asking of them in the Church and in the world. Our charismatic spirit is awakened out of slumber each time we face setbacks, hardships, persecutions, and martyrdom, and pay the price to remain faithful to our vocation.

¹ Aut. #489.

² JAIME CLOTET. *Vida Edificante del Padre Claret*, 252, Madrid (2000). Aut. 490; Footnote 558.

³ cf. CRISTÓBAL FERNÁNDEZ. *Compendio histórico de la Congregación de los Hijos del Inmaculado Corazón de María*, vol. I, pp. 62-63.

On the other hand, our congregation suffers inertia and setbacks when the fire in our members and in our communities is put out, and the apostolic zeal succumbs to various kinds of fears (of failure, of risk, of persecution, of losing comforts, etc.) and we become accomplices of other spirits rather than be collaborators of the Spirit of Christ. We lose the *raison d'être* as a Congregation when any path other than that of Christ is chosen to avoid the way of the cross.

At the threshold of the XXVI General Chapter, we find ourselves beset with many challenges and radical changes in the world. This is a moment we need to weave together our fraternity with the thread of our charism and joyfully join to *co-create* our missionary future with the Spirit of the Risen Lord.

Following our Founder, we shall let our charismatic spirit to mould our life and mission in imitating Jesus and exploring creative ways to reach the Gospel message to the people of God. It would entail willingness to let go of old securities, to create enough community space to hold differences and harvest the collective wisdom, and to cultivate relational intelligence to celebrate our pluricultural reality. We need to be rooted in Christ in order to be audacious in mission.

In that first founding phase of the Congregation, the entire Claretian community was in a learning mode with a beginner's mind to explore ways to make Christ known, loved, praised, and proclaimed in each context. Now, at a re-founding phase, the same attitudes of openness and exploration are necessary for us to allow the General Chapter to be an event of a new Pentecost in the Congregation.

Let us commend each of us and the entire Congregation to the work of the Spirit as we approach the XXVI General Chapter. We shall not succumb to any panic of this pandemic times but prepare ourselves responsibly to celebrate the Chapter knowing that we are accompanied by the Blessed Mother and the intercession of our Founder and the Claretian martyrs.

I wish you all a very meaningful celebration of the one hundred and seventy-second anniversary of the foundation of our Congregation.



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