



Prot. PS 228/2025

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Dear brothers,

On this 176th anniversary of our Foundation, we find ourselves celebrating in the grace-filled context of the Church's Jubilee Year. It is a providential moment to contemplate our Claretian vocation as a pilgrim calling—a missionary identity that began in a humble seminary room in Vic and continues today through our lives and communities across the world.

A Flame of Hope in Unsettled Times

On July 16, 1849, amid political instability, anti-clerical sentiment, and deep ecclesial uncertainty, our Founder, St. Anthony Mary Claret, gathered five young priests to begin a new missionary venture. In that small room, a flame of faith, love, and missionary hope was lit—not a hope of easy success, but one forged in the crucible of adversity.

Such flame endured through difficult times: expulsions, suppression, persecution, and fragility in distant lands. Yet the flame never died. It was kept alive by the deep conviction that God's Word must be announced, and that no frontier—geographical, political, or cultural—can dampen a heart set on fire by the Gospel.

We hear from our elders how the early popular missions rekindled hope in the hearts of the people, echoing Claret's burning passion in the Canary Islands. These missions were not mere repetitions of the past, but fresh expressions of the same fire. Even today, whenever joy and hope no longer radiate from our missionary presence, it is a sign that we must enter the charismatic room—where the fire of the Spirit reanimates us, the pulse of our charism is restored, hope is rekindled, and the flame of our mission burns anew.

Joy and Hope: The Signs of a Pilgrim Missionary

In each Claretian, hope and joy walk together. Hope sustains the journey; joy reveals its beauty. Joy is the song that rises from a heart sustained by hope. It is the fruit of trust in the One who walks with us. The XXVI General Chapter reminded us that we are called to be a pilgrim Congregation—rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and nourished by our missionary spirituality.

This identity is a call to walk, to witness, and to live with purpose. In this light, we must ask ourselves: Do our lives—as individuals and as communities—radiate the kind of joy and hope that characterize pilgrims on the march—those who journey with trust, sing through the struggle, and carry the Gospel as light for others?

What Does It Mean to Be a Pilgrim Congregation?

In a world marked by ego-centered desires and the illusion of permanence, the pilgrim way invites us to rediscover freedom, detachment, and purpose. A pilgrim is not a wanderer without direction, nor a tourist seeking comfort. A pilgrim walks in faith, carrying the essentials, sharing the road, and moving always toward the Holy. As we deepen our understanding of being a *Pilgrim Congregation*, I invite you to reflect on the following traits of a Claretian pilgrim—a missionary disciple on the road with Christ:

1) Eyes fixed on the horizon of God's promise

The Claretian pilgrim walks with eyes set on the sanctuary that beckons—the Reign of God. This eschatological hope draws us forward and sustains our journey, even when the path is obscure or uphill. We are drawn not by nostalgia, but by the future God is already shaping in history.

2) Embracing the struggle of the road

Pilgrimage is not a comfort walk. The missionary embraces trials—rain and sun, valleys, and steep climbs—as part of the journey. Hardship is not a sign of failure but of fidelity to the One who walked before us with the Cross on his shoulders.

3) Living with radical detachment

Pilgrims do not build permanent dwellings. The Claretian knows that all is gift and passage. Security lies not in possessions or positions, but in the One who walks with us. We are rooted in Christ, not in comforts or control.

4) Brotherhood and sisterhood along the way

Pilgrims do not journey alone. The road teaches us solidarity, mutual care, shared burdens, and the grace of walking at the pace of the other. Community is both a place of grace and a school of conversion.

5) Walking in the Spirit's rhythm

The Holy Spirit is the quiet strength in our steps—the Consoler who rekindles desire when fatigue sets in, the Wind who whispers direction, the Fire who keeps us burning with love.

6) Carrying only what matters

To journey far, one must travel light. The pilgrim heart lets go of grudges, excessive attachments, and illusions of self-sufficiency. We carry only what fuels love, hope, and availability.

7) Pilgrimage as transformation

This is not just movement through space, but a journey of inner conversion. Every Claretian pilgrimage is both *missio ad gentes* and *missio ad intra*—a call to go forth and a summons to be changed.

8) Presence in the here and now

A true pilgrim is attentive to the place of the feet. We are sent not only to destinations but to inhabit the present moment spiritually, ethically, and prophetically responding to the cries of the people and the groans of creation.

9) A missionary body on the move

Our Congregation is not anchored in nationalism, ideology, or self-preservation. We are sent, like Abraham, into the unknown—radically available to God's mission, moved by the needs of the poor, and guided by the Word that burns in our hearts.

Walking together with Gospel passion

Let us walk as pilgrims—not longing for past certainties, nor paralyzed by the unknown future—but open to the surprises of the Spirit. The road may be long, but it is holy. And when we walk it together, the fire of our charism is rekindled, and the world sees not just preachers or activists, but men of God, witnesses to hope and joy.

On this Foundation Day, may the spirit of Vic stir within us again. Let our missionary life, wherever we are sent, become a signpost of communion, courage, and Gospel joy.

Happy Foundation Day, dear brothers. Let us walk on rooted in Christ, joyful in hope, and audacious in mission.

With fraternal affection,

Fr. Mathew Vattamattam, CMF
Superior General

Sri Lanka, July 16, 2025

