

**XXVII GENERAL CHAPTER
RESOURCES FOR PHASE 2.2:**

**LISTENING TO THE CLAMOUR
OF REALITY**



**One Mission, One in Mission:
*Mystical and Prophetic Missionaries
on a Synodal Journey***

Claretian Missionaries - General Government

“One Mission, One in Mission: Mystical and Prophetic
Missionaries on a Synodal Journey”

*Methodological Guide for the preparation of the XXVII General
Chapter*

Rome, 2026

I PERSONAL REFLECTION

THE CHALLENGE OF AN AWAKENED MISSIONARY SPIRITUALITY: CULTIVATING A MYSTICISM OF OPEN EYES

As we delve into the dynamic of ‘listening in order to discern’, we recognise that it is impossible to remain indifferent to the cries of humanity and of creation. The Second Vatican Council reminds us that ‘in order to fulfil this mission, it is the Church’s permanent duty to scrutinise the signs of the times thoroughly and interpret them in the light of the Gospel’ (GS 4). History shows that periods of great change are also times of great mystics who perceive God in new ways. Therefore, there is no room for fruitless lamentation over ‘bad times’ or over having been pushed to the margins; it is precisely on the fringes and in the deserts that the boldest visions of the future are born.

To respond to this call to discernment with a truly prophetic spirit, we must first learn to look; our missionary charism demands that we avoid faith from becoming an individualistic refuge or an abstract doctrine detached from reality. On the contrary, we need to cultivate a ‘mysticism of open eyes’ (in the words of the theologian Johann Baptist Metz) that opens up all our senses to a growing acceptance of and commitment to concrete history, discovering even in the depths of misery and oppression a presence of inalienable dignity and life. Only in

this way will we take on board the hopes and sorrows of the world, powerfully illuminating our path towards the General Chapter.

1. What does a 'mysticism of open eyes' consist of?

Faced with the danger of an understanding of spirituality that associates union with God with introversion, isolation or the act of 'closing one's eyes' to escape the world, Christian mysticism offers an alternative: it is not a faceless or sightless experience, but an experience of spiritual solidarity deeply rooted in history. Its centre lies at the very heart of the Gospel, in the passage from Matthew 25, where the definitive encounter with the Lord hinges on our ability to open our eyes to our suffering brother or sister: *'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me'* (Mt 25:35–36). It therefore arises directly from a questioning of the sharp dualism between the history of faith and personal history, or between the profession of faith and the concrete experience of reality. We can understand this mystical experience through the following fundamental principles:

- **The primacy of compassion over legalism:** Jesus' gaze was not directed first towards scrutinising human sins or guilt, but towards being moved by their suffering. The mysticism of open eyes is a practice of compassion, understood as an empathetic perception that shares in the pain of others and submits to the authority of those who suffer.

- **A mysticism of justice:** prophetic praxis is political not because it seeks state power, but because it brings the affirmation ‘God is love’ into the public sphere of our historical experiences, assuming concrete responsibility for justice. *Deus caritas est*, ‘God is love’, as Benedict XVI’s first major encyclical reminded us. True. But it is precisely this truth that becomes an ‘experience that disrupts’ our own narcissism and preconceived certainties when we come face to face with the misery of the other.

In this sense, Sacred Scripture reminds us that in the Bible there is a second name for God which finds an echo and confirmation in the New Testament message, and which, therefore, must not be forgotten by Christians either: *Deus et justitia est*, ‘God is (also) justice’. As Jeremiah prophesies: ‘This is the name by which they shall call him: “Yahweh, our righteousness”’ (Jer 23:6). Thus, for the Christian faith, justice is not merely a political or social issue, but a strictly theological one: a fundamental certainty of the faith concerning God and his Christ.

- **Resistance against cultural amnesia:** Faced with a postmodern society that promotes the forgetting of victims in order to construct an illusory happiness, evangelical mysticism stands as a rebellion of memory (*memoria passionis*). In this context, a contemplative gaze urges us to lift the veils of reality to discover God’s active presence. This Christian contemplation is, by definition, mystical and incarnate: a profound experience of encountering God in the real world; a presence far deeper and more alive than the stone statues on cathedral façades. In this way, the remembrance of suffering becomes the purest expression

of the love of which Jesus spoke, where passion for God and compassion for humanity are inextricably linked.

2. What insights does this contemplative perspective offer us for hearing the cry of reality?

- 1. Sharpen your vision and heighten you focus:** The danger we face today is not just a lack of information, but the visual disturbances caused by overexposure to media images, which ultimately desensitise us. We cannot resign ourselves to interpreting reality through these 'seductive images' that intrude upon our privacy and seek to take control of our decisions. On the contrary, the mystical missionary seeks, with all their senses open, the ultimate foundation of a reality that is multifaceted. Listening to the cry of the world demands that we pause, for looking properly takes time and relieves the stress of our missionary haste. As Teilhard de Chardin reminded us, the challenge is 'to see or to perish'. Just as in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30–37), we are invited to look in such a way as to discover the people we tend to exclude from our everyday field of vision, for that is where God's presence amongst us first becomes visible.
- 2. Breaking down our clichés and preconceived images:** The biblical commandment 'You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness' (Ex 20:4) translates into a prohibition against viewing reality through stereotypes or abstract categories that nullify the real person. In this 'culture of the image', our destiny is not to consume stereotypes, but to be authentic images of God (Gen 1:26) for one another. To hear the cry of the world and of creation, we must strip ourselves of the defensive projections that

lead us to view the stranger, the poor or creation itself as a danger or a mere manipulable statistic.

3. **Recognising the transcultural authority of suffering:** Before any rational, moral or ideological agreement, the suffering face of the innocent or of wounded creation imposes upon us an unquestionable authority. Heeding this cry is not an act of self-willed heroism, but an earthly glimpse of God's closeness in his Christ, who identified fully with the least of his brothers and sisters.

3. How does the cry of reality resonate in our own spiritual missionary experience?

This question lies at the heart of our examination of conscience in the run-up to the General Chapter. We must be vigilant against the danger of a complacent 'bourgeois religion', which uses faith as an anaesthetic to avoid being exposed to the wounds of history. An authentic missionary spirituality demands that we ask ourselves honestly: Does our prayer—both personal and communal—include the lament, the sorrow and the cry of the world, or is it merely a refuge of individual peace? Do we allow ourselves to be 'interrupted' in our pastoral plans by the emergencies of the marginalised?

Cultivating the mysticism of open eyes demands that we move beyond merely 'knowing' theoretically about the world's crises to allowing ourselves to be 'seen and challenged' by the real faces of those who have no voice. Only by meeting the pain of humanity and creation with our gaze can we gauge the true depth of our hope, knowing that God's promise is never an

abstract salvation, but a definitive justice that radically commits us here and now.

II

COMMUNITY RETREAT

‘HEARING THE CRY OF THE POOR AND OF THE EARTH’

Biblical text for reflection: Exodus 3:1–12

Retreat theme: *‘I have seen the affliction of my people... and I have heard their cry’*

We ask for grace: Lord, grant us open eyes to recognise your presence in reality; attentive ears to hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth; and a compassionate heart like yours, capable of being moved and responding with a truly prophetic spirit.

1. Biblical theme: the God who sees, hears, knows and comes down to set us free (Exodus 3:1–12)

The Exodus is the ‘Good News’ of the Old Testament. The encounter with the burning bush takes place in the solitude of the desert, in a place that was not a sanctuary, interrupting Moses’ routine through the unexpected revelation of God calling him by name. Moses is going about his daily life, tending his flock on the edge of the desert, when an unexpected event shatters his normal life: a bush that burns but is not consumed. As he approaches, God halts his steps with a sacred command: *‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is*

holy ground' (v. 5). Taking off one's sandals is the fundamental gesture of vulnerability, reverence and self-emptying; it means setting aside one's own certainties, defences and preconceptions in order to tread the ground of reality as God sees it.

Immediately afterwards, God reveals his true identity through his senses and his involvement in history: *'I have seen the affliction of my people... I have heard their cry... I know their sufferings and I have come down to deliver them'* (vv. 7–8). God is not an impassive spectator of human tragedies. The God of Israel suffers with his people, takes up their cries and commits himself to their liberation. However, divine action does not supplant human responsibility. God's 'coming down' becomes a 'sending' of the person: *'And now, go, I am sending you'* (v. 10). Faced with Moses' natural fear and resistance (*'Who am I to go?'*), the only assurance God offers is neither a political strategy nor a display of force, but a promise of absolute presence: *'I will be with you'* (v. 12). Biblical faith is born of listening, nourished by a shared experience, matures through discernment and is confirmed in the missionary response. This is also the journey we will undertake during this retreat.

Today, the Lord continues to see the suffering of his people in the many faces of poverty, exclusion, forced migration, various forms of violence and the deterioration of our common home. Listening to his voice means allowing ourselves to be moved by the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, for it is

there that God continues to reveal himself, calling and sending those who wish to collaborate in his work of liberation.

Listening to the Word and to reality:

- What routines, comforts or pastoral structures have we become accustomed to? What is the Lord asking us to leave behind ('to take off our sandals') in order to see reality through his eyes?
- As we contemplate the sufferings of our people and the cry of the poor and of the earth, do we hear in them the voice of God calling and sending us, or do fear, resignation or our own 'who am I?' questions prevail within us?

2. Narrative key: the fabric of our life stories within the reality we live

Faith and vocation do not occur in a theoretical vacuum, but within the fabric of our life stories and through direct contact with the lives of communities. Just as Moses carried with him the memory of his origins, the wounds of his flight and the years of silence in the desert, every member of the community comes to this retreat with a story rich in encounters, struggles, faces and specific names. In the Book of Exodus, the oppression in Egypt depicts an extreme historical situation of misery, forced labour and the threat of extinction. However, the text reveals that God manifests himself and always allows himself to be encountered through the 'sacrament of those who suffer', in contact with the 'crucified people' (cf. *Evangelii gaudium* 198; *Fratelli tutti* 68–75). As a missionary community, the stories of the people in our neighbourhoods, pastoral centres and on the

peripheries are not mere anecdotes; they are the living fabric in which the mission is embodied.

This insight invites us to recall, with gratitude and awareness, the journey we have made, drawing on the life experiences that have shaped us. Listening to reality means allowing ourselves to be moved by stories of flesh and blood: the stories of families struggling to make ends meet, of young people without opportunities, or of the elderly living in solitude. But even in the midst of tragedy, God weaves threads of hope through concrete acts of compassion and providential female figures – such as the midwives, Moses’ sister and Pharaoh’s daughter – who are reflected today in the resilience, dignity and unshakeable faith of the simplest among us. When we share these experiences, our communal memory becomes a theological space where we discover that the wounds and joys of the people are the very place where the Lord continues to meet our gaze.

Sharing life and mission:

- What face, story or specific situation that we have accompanied during this time has become a true ‘burning bush’, where God has come out to meet us?
- As we share in the life of our community and of the people to whom we are sent, what sorrows, hopes and challenges do we discover that the Lord is inviting us to take on together?

3. Appreciative approach: discerning the signs of the Kingdom through an expanded listening

In accordance with the methodological guidelines for the preparation of the General Chapter, community discernment is neither a list of problems nor a session of collective lament. It is an exercise in looking with the eyes of faith to clearly identify the signs of the Kingdom of God that are already present and active in reality. The bush in the desert was ablaze, yet miraculously it was not consumed; in the same way, amidst the most difficult and barren contexts of our world, the Holy Spirit continues to generate life by kindling fires of hope, justice, fraternity and care for our common home.

In order to carry out this discernment authentically, the Chapter's guide sets out an essential synodal requirement for us: to widen the space of our tent and open up the table of listening. We cannot discern properly whilst confined to our own community circles. We are called to actively include in this conversation the laity, other men and women religious, and, as a matter of priority, those whose voices are often marginalised or ignored in society and in the Church. It is precisely the eyes and voices of these peripheries that purify our pastoral criteria, rescue us from self-referentiality and enable us to grasp where the Spirit is at work and what the latent challenges are that demand a truly evangelical and shared response from us.

Discerning the signs of the Kingdom:

- As we listen to the laity and to those living on the peripheries of our mission, what signs of the Kingdom do we discover that are already taking root and which we may not have recognised before?

- In the light of this listening and the journey towards the General Chapter, what are the most urgent calls of the Spirit that our community cannot fail to heed?

4. Key to transformation: the prophetic response to which the Spirit urges us

The ultimate goal of every experience of encounter with God and of communal listening is conversion and transformative action. God does not reveal his name or show his signs to Moses in order to leave him in static contemplation on the mountain, but to set him on the path towards a praxis of liberation. Discerning the signs of the Kingdom must translate into concrete choices that shape our missionary future in the run-up to the General Chapter. It is the Holy Spirit who continually unsettles us, opens up new paths and impels us to offer prophetic responses consistent with the Gospel in the here and now of history.

This transformative challenge demands that we move decisively from reflection to action, embracing the dynamism of the Exodus: *to go forth and to lead others forth*. This mandate calls on us to rouse the community from its inertia and comfort zones in order to thoroughly review our structures, lifestyles and pastoral presences. The aim is to ascertain whether these spaces truly function as channels that communicate God's liberation or whether, on the contrary, they have become sluggish and indifferent to the suffering of the world, preventing us from embodying a new social model based on the divine heart.

Responding to the cry of reality with a genuine prophetic spirit involves taking the risk of initiating processes of change, broadening our shared responsibility with the laity, denouncing the logic of oppression in our time, and upholding firm commitments in favour of life and human dignity. This prophetic praxis must be embraced with the maturity to recognise that the path is not without difficulties or apparent human failures – such as that of Moses, who died on Mount Nebo before entering the Promised Land – but with the absolute certainty that, in the long run, God’s plan always triumphs because he walks with us.

Responding with a prophetic spirit:

- Following this journey of listening and discernment, to what personal and community conversion is the Spirit calling us today so that we may live out our missionary vocation with greater fidelity?
- What concrete commitment do we wish to undertake as a community to respond with courage and hope to the challenges of our time and to contribute to the journey of the General Chapter?

III

CONVERSATION IN THE SPIRIT

Drawing on our personal reflection and what we have meditated on and prayed about during this retreat, each of us prepares our contribution to the conversation in the Spirit. We recall the basic attitudes of discernment and place ourselves in a space of prayer and deep reverence, humbling ourselves before our shared reality. To begin this space of synodal listening, it helps us to invoke the Spirit of the Lord with the following prayer:

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit,

that it may help us to read Scripture with the same insight with which you read it to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. By the light of the Word written in the Bible, you helped them to discover God's presence in the bewildering events of your condemnation and death. Thus, the cross, which seemed to be the end of all hope, was revealed to them as a source of life and resurrection.

Create within us the silence to hear your voice in creation and in Scripture, in events and in people, especially in the poor and those who suffer. May your Word guide us, so that we too, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, may experience

the power of your resurrection and bear witness to others that you are alive amongst us as a source of brotherhood, justice and peace.

We ask this of you, Jesus, Son of Mary, who have revealed the Father to us and sent us the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Drawing on all that has been meditated upon and prayed for, each participant prepares – preferably in writing – their initial contribution to the conversation in the Spirit. To guide and focus this reflection, we share the following questions, which will serve as a basis for our community discernment. It is important to regard them as a guide to help us discover where the Spirit is leading us, rather than as a list of questions to be answered one by one.

1. In what aspects of our current reality do we perceive the Holy Spirit at work, fostering the growth of the Kingdom of God?
2. What forces or situations seem to resist or hinder the coming of the Kingdom?
3. What cries or needs of the world is God inviting us to listen to more attentively?
4. In what ways are we called to collaborate with God in the transformation of the world as missionaries?

A summary of the community discernment will be submitted via the relevant form by **10 November 2026**.