



Prot. SG 160/2026

MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL

Dear brothers,

As we celebrate the 177th anniversary of the foundation of our beloved Congregation, I invite each one of you to make a spiritual pilgrimage to a simple room in the seminary of Vic. There, on July 16, 1849, Saint Anthony Mary Claret gathered with five young priests to begin a missionary adventure that none of them could have imagined would one day reach the ends of the earth.

Let us enter that room in silence. Let us contemplate the heart of our Founder. What was burning within him? What gave him the courage to begin with so little? Claret himself gives us the answer. He recognized that the Lord had given his companions "the same spirit that motivated him" (Aut. 489). Ten years later, recalling that unforgettable day, he would write again that the Congregation was born from "a few priests gathered together, animated by the same spirit" (*Letter to the Apostolic Nuncio Lorenzo Barili, 29 July 1859*). It was the work of the Holy Spirit, who united hearts in one missionary fire.

Claret wanted this new family to bear a name that revealed its deepest identity: Missionary Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Aut. 488). Before being a structure, or an apostolic body, we are sons. The Heart of Mary is the home where our missionary identity is formed. Under her maternal guidance we learn to conform ourselves to her Son, Jesus Christ, the One sent by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the poor. To be sons of the Heart of Mary is to allow her to shape in us the heart of the Missionary until Christ becomes the centre of our thoughts, our affections, our relationships, and our mission.

The first community understood this well. Claret gathered them to form a community of evangelizers. Among the first meditations he offered them was Psalm 23, especially the words: "Your rod and your staff comfort me." He invited them to discover their strength in two inseparable gifts: the Cross of Christ and the maternal care of Mary. From these two sources they drew the courage to persevere through difficulties, misunderstanding, poverty, and immense missionary labours.

Today, after 177 years, the external circumstances have changed, but the Spirit remains the same. We too are called to breathe the same missionary Spirit that sustained our Founder and generations of Claretians who faithfully carried the Gospel across continents, often in situations of hardship and sacrifice. Claret rejoiced that his first companions persevered and bore abundant fruit in the Church (Aut. 490). Their perseverance was not the fruit of human determination alone but of remaining rooted in the Spirit who had called them.

This anniversary invites us to ask ourselves: Are we still breathing the same Spirit? A body from which life has departed becomes a corpse. Likewise, a Congregation that ceases to be animated by the fire of the Holy Spirit risks becoming merely an institution rather than a living missionary family. A tree with shallow roots cannot withstand the storm. Without deep roots in our missionary charism, we too cannot persevere through the trials and uncertainties of our time.

The same is true of each one of us. A missionary who gradually loses the living spirit of his vocation may continue to perform many activities, but he risks becoming an efficient functionary rather than a joyful witness of the Gospel. Ministry can become a profession instead of a mission; responsibilities can become burdens rather than expressions of love; community can become simply a place of residence rather than a fraternity of missionary disciples. One may remain busy without being fruitful, active without being inwardly alive. What keeps a missionary alive is not first of all the number of works he accomplishes, but the fire of the Holy Spirit burning within him. Only those who continually renew the gift they have received can communicate life to others.

Our Constitutions remind us that the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, and that this same Spirit builds our communion and strengthens our missionary commitment (cf. CC 10, 46). Whenever we return to the sources of our vocation—prayer, community life, the Word of God, the Eucharist, missionary availability, and filial trust in the Heart of Mary—the flame is rekindled.

This year's celebration is also marked by a significant event in our Congregational life. On July 16, 2026, at the request of the Provincial Government of *Sanctus Paulus*, the community of Vic-Sallent becomes a General House of the Congregation. Its mission will be to coordinate the various services offered there for the benefit of the whole Congregation and the Claretian Family and, above all, to strengthen these places as centres of spiritual renewal and deeper immersion in our charism.

I warmly invite every Claretian to feel responsible for these sanctuaries of our origins and to collaborate so that they may remain living wells from which present and future generations continue to draw inspiration, missionary zeal, and renewed fidelity to our vocation. May these holy places continue to help us breathe the same Spirit that animated our Founder and the first community.

On this occasion, I also wish to express our deepest gratitude to the former Province of Catalunya and to the present Province of *Sanctus Paulus*. From the earliest days of the Congregation, and especially during particularly difficult periods of our history, they have generously cared for, preserved, and promoted these places so intimately linked to our Founder and our charism. Thanks to their fidelity, dedication, and sacrifice, this precious spiritual and missionary heritage has been safeguarded and handed on to us. The entire Congregation owes them a profound debt of gratitude.

Dear brothers, 177 years ago the Holy Spirit gathered six missionaries in a small room in Vic. Today that same Spirit continues to gather nearly three thousand missionaries serving in seventy-four countries across the world. The mission is the same. The Gospel is the same. The Heart of Mary is the same. The question before each of us is whether we will allow ourselves to be animated by the same Spirit.

May the Heart of Mary continue to gather us, form us, and send us. May she keep alive in us the missionary fire that burned in the heart of Saint Anthony Mary Claret on that blessed morning of 16 July 1849, so that generations to come may also say of us what Claret said of his first companions: that the Lord had given us the same Spirit.

Happy Foundation Day!

In the Heart of Mary,



Fr. Mathew Vattamattam, CMF
Superior General



Panama, July 16, 2026