

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF GOLDEN JUBILEE OF CLARETIAN PRESENCE IN INDIA

The shepherds of the Lord in the Church in India, dear brother Claretians, brothers and sisters,

Fifty years back when a middle aged German missionary, late Fr. Franz Dirnberger, came to India with a few newly ordained young Indians to open the mission in India, nobody must have thought of such a growth of the mission in India in the past 50 years. There were antecedents to the opening of the mission: the friendship between an Indian student Alexander Cherukarakunnel and a German Claretian Rudolf Mainca, the hospitality received by the bishop of Palai, Mar Sebastian Vayalil, in the Claretian house when he went to Germany for the Eucharistic Congress in Munich (1960), his contact with Claretians in Rome when he went to Rome for the preparation for Vatican II (1961), selection of seminarians for Claretians from his own seminary who were sent to Germany (1961). We have still the first Claretians with us, Fr. Joseph Madhavath, Mathew Njayarkulam, Kuriakose Thekkilakattil, George Vanchipurackal, Cyriac Njayarkulam and one of the pioneers, Fr. George Nedumpalakunnel, was called to the home of the Father. I rejoice for the 16 ordinations in India this year of whom three are ordained here today. Three of them are assigned to the province of Central America. Missionaries from India are now present in over 18 other countries.

I like to share a few of my sentiments and reflections on this occasion:

1. An affirmation of our faith: When I glance through the gift of vocations and the dedication of the missionaries from India in different peripheries and platforms of missionary commitment, I can only repeat what St. Claret said of his missionary community in Cuba, "This is the finger of God". It is the work of God and not a matter for us humans to take pride in.

2. Gratitude for our vocation: When the Lord works many beautiful things through us, it is an affirmation of his faithful love and fulfilment of promises, in spite of our limitations and failures. God's love in us provokes generous response from us in the measure we cooperate with His grace. I am grateful to the Lord not so much for the many institutions that we have, but the good that they do to thousands of people especially those most in need of our service. I am grateful to my brothers who dare to venture to the peripheries present in every platform of missionary service with creative fidelity to our charism. I am grateful for all the friends, collaborators, benefactors, all of you who form part of this charismatic family in different ways.

3. Deep sentiments of humility: I feel myself small and humble in front of the greatness and goodness of the Lord as I recall our journey in the last 50 years. This goodness and greatness is shared through so many people who mediated it, who have been patient with us in those moments of our impertinence, rudeness and arrogance. We have not always been up to what we are called to be: witnesses and messengers of the joy of the Gospel. Jubilee is a time to take a balcony view of what is going on in us and among us and return to the foundational spirit with renewed enthusiasm and commitment. Biblical meaning of Jubilee is to return to the original design of the Lord for his people.

4. Embracing the presence with responsibility: We have graces and shadows to reckon with as we celebrate this Golden Jubilee. We want to be a congregation going forth to the peripheries, a congregation which walks with and accompanies the people of God. As a congregation we want to make our own in our individual lives and in our communities the core values of responsibility, accountability and transparency to become more credible. It is a necessity and a collective task to

make the Kingdom of God an experiential reality among us. In the midst of social, cultural and personal impeding factors to grow in these values, we need the grace of the Lord as honest and timely feedback from each other to grow towards integrity of life and mission.

5. **Dreaming with God for a radiant future.** As missionaries we dream God's dreams for our future. There are a good number Indian Claretians in their fifties. I invite my brothers in India to renew the freshness of our charism and dream big and dream together as Pope Francis repeatedly tells the people. He would say, "Don't be parked cars, but dream freely and make good decisions. Take risks, even if it means making mistakes. Don't go through life anesthetized or approach the world like tourists". This jubilee years should be a time of recapturing the foundational spirit and give it fresh expressions. I like to offer three images to help the process.

1) Be connected to the control tower. As we grow in numbers and more communities, it is all the more important to get connected to the control tower of our missionary life: our spiritual life and Christ at the center. We need holy Claretians, not just experts in different fields. At a given time there are about 9, 700 planes in the air carrying 1,3 million people. They are safe as long as they are in communication with the control tower and follow its directions. It is dangerous to get out of its track and be on its own. We shall me men who adore the Lord in the Spirit. It is also a special contribution to the universal Congregation from this land of spirituality.

2) Install effective antivirus to safeguard our vocation. We take care of our computers and iPhones well and keep them from hackers by installing antivirus. In this jubilee year, we should identify the viruses that tend to paralyse our missionary vitality and install effective antivirus. Pope Francis speaks of spiritual worldliness, clericalism, power abuse and lethargy, pastoral individualism etc. We need to install programs in us that keep the fire in us to burn.

3) Keep the missionary antenna in a receptive mode. We are in the midst of the Changes and there is no use glorifying the old good days. We need to be alert to the opportunities present amidst the changes. Authentic innovation and creativity in all that we do comes from a spirit tuned to the holy Spirit.

The best future is what we can co-create with the Holy Spirit as partners of God's work for the Church and the Society. I wish the Indian Claretians such a future that radiates love and joy of the Lord.

Heart of Mary is something very much in the core of our charism. "tenderness of God's love present in the heart of Mary is a gift to her sons too.

I wish that the jubilee year is a time to live the dream of our founder with joy.

With these words, I am happy to declare the opening of the golden Jubilee of Claretian presence in India

Mathew Vattamattam CMF
Superior General