



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO CLARETIAN GENERAL CHAPTER

*To the Superior General and Capitular Fathers
of the Missionary Sons
of the Immaculate Heart of Mary*

1. I am very pleased to have this meeting with you at the end of your 22nd General Chapter, in which you examined your role in the Church's evangelizing mission, looking to the future with great hope, in order to live your charism for the good of the ecclesial communities and humanity.

First, I affectionately greet Fr Aquilino Bocos, who has been re-elected Superior General, the new Councillors and the religious who represent all the congregation's provinces currently active in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. Through you I would like to convey my appreciation and esteem to the other religious who are praying for the successful and fruitful outcome of the Chapter's work.

2. Your congregation, more than 100 years old, was born from the inspiration of St Anthony Mary Claret, who, after traveling through Catalonia for many years preaching popular missions, was appointed Archbishop of Santiago de Cuba, a ministry to which he dedicated himself without reserve for the salvation of souls. On his return to Spain, he had to face great suffering for the Church's welfare until his death in exile at Fontfroide, France, in 1870. Nonetheless his life was always marked by Paul's exhortation: "The love of Christ impels us" (2 Cor 5:14).

The Church greatly esteems the service of preaching the Word which you carry out in the mission *ad gentes*, among ordinary people and the marginalized; in forming new evangelizers, both religious and lay, in promoting religious life; in educational work and in the renewal of Christian communities; in encouraging a dialogue of faith with those who are seeking God.

In this way you try to be faithful to your founder and father, who, feeling impelled to give himself entirely to others, suggests that you use all possible means at your disposal — parish ministry,

publications, popular missions, the preaching of spiritual exercises and retreats — *to proclaim the Gospel to all peoples* (cf. *Const. CMF*, nn. 6 and 48).

Thus, with a spirit of dedication to God, to the Church and to mankind, you fulfil your vocation by bearing loving witness to Christ through the *constant proclamation of the Good News* and *sincere, practical solidarity*, especially with the very poor, the sick, the elderly and the alienated.

3. In recent years, closeness to Claret's spiritual experience as a missionary has led you to put God's Word at the heart of your personal and community life. Like Mary, you want to welcome this saving Word into your heart, to cherish it and to communicate it to others. Of course, dear missionaries, this living and effective Word (cf. Heb 4:12) will strengthen you in your vocation, console you and give you hope in your difficulties and sufferings (cf. Rom 15:4); at the same time, it will make your pastoral labours fruitful. In the face of the problems of your ministry, remember what the founder said to you: *"It will not be you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father and Mother who will be speaking in you"* (*Aut.* 687).

4. It is a source of special satisfaction to note that on the threshold of the third millennium your Chapter has proposed to deepen the prophetic dimension of your *service to the Word*. Thus, while you reflect on the orientations and guidelines of previous Chapters, and focus on the figure of Jesus, anointed and sent out by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the poor (cf. Lk 4:18; *Aut.* 687), you have wished to respond to the call I addressed to all consecrated persons in my Apostolic Exhortation *Vita consecrata* (cf. nn. 84-95). What people expect of the Church in this period of profound social and cultural change is that the clear and timely words of those who are sent will be accompanied by the integrity of life of the "man of God". When sorrow, loneliness and rejection beset the human heart, people expect from consecrated persons a new and radiant example of love through a chastity that enlarges the heart, a poverty that tears down barriers, and an obedience that builds communion in the community, in the Church and in the world. In this way the prophetic attitude will bring hope to everyone because God will continue to visit his people through you (cf. Lk 7:16).

You are also called to be — in communion with the Bishops of each locality — "the Gospel leaven and evangelizers of the cultures of the third millennium and the social ordering of peoples" (*Homily on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*, 2 February 1992, n. 5; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 5 February 1992, p. 2). This is why you must foster deep intimacy with Christ through prayer, diligent listening to his Word and the Eucharist. Promote continuing formation with study and discernment of the challenges of the present time, and ensure that your heart is more and more generous, in order to reach out to your neighbour who needs love and hope.

Your example and dedication must also be an invitation and encouragement to others, especially young people, who, despite the current shortage of vocations in some areas, want to join the fraternal missionary community which you are called to create, to follow Jesus this way and to be

sent out to preach (cf. Mk 3:14). Your brothers, the 51 Blessed Martyrs of Barbastro, like so many other martyrs, "in this century ... have borne witness to Christ the Lord with the gift of their own lives" (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 86). For this reason, I pray the Lord that the blood they shed will nurture the seed of many missionary vocations for your congregation and that they can rely on good and holy educators.

5. I entrust your chapter and the entire congregation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Christ and the Church. May her motherly heart be for everyone a school of interior devotion to Jesus, of listening to his Word, and of heartfelt love for all people. You must continue to find inspiration in her heart, in order to proclaim the Lord's mercy to the world and to love him as she loved him. May her intercession also support you in the various apostolic tasks to which you are committed. With these warm sentiments, I affectionately impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to all the Claretian Missionaries, Sons of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

From the Vatican, 22 September 1997.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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